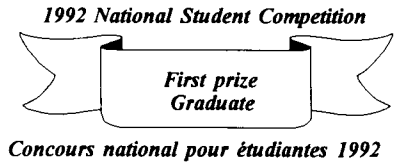


Rationality and the Search for Empowerment



Laura Janara
Dalhousie University

ABSTRACT

Modern rationality, despite its treatment as an atemporal category that universalizes the human experience and that orients us collectively toward the discovery of "the truth," is an historic human construct that begs critical assessment. Of primary interest here is the fact that modernity's tendency toward dichotomous interpretations of the world conflates rationality with certain human traits and absolutely opposes it to others. The result is not only a bifurcated human experience but also an epistemology that arbitrarily grants knowing authority to some while denying others this privileged status. For these reasons, modern rationality must be understood for its philosophical and political implications.

RÉSUMÉ

La rationalité moderne, malgré son traitement comme une catégorie atemporelle qui universalise l'expérience humaine et nous oriente collectivement vers la découverte de la «vérité», est une construction mentale historique des humains qui nécessite une évaluation critique. Le plus intéressant est le fait que la tendance moderne envers des interprétations dichotomiques du monde confond la rationalité et certaines caractéristiques humaines et oppose catégoriquement la rationalité à d'autres caractéristiques. Le résultat est non seulement une expérience humaine bifurquée mais aussi une épistémologie qui attribue arbitrairement l'autorité de la connaissance à certains et refuse ce statut privilégié à d'autres. La rationalité moderne doit donc être comprise en raison de ses répercussions philosophiques et politiques.

"Know who's playing the music before you dance"

*Black poet Nikki Giovanni
on white philosophy*

RATIONALITY HAS EMERGED IN THE MODERN world not only as a human tool for the assessment of "truth," but also as a human asset which figures largely in our assessment of one another's character.¹ Rationality, modernity claims, is the human trait that transcends our differences and universalizes the human experience. However, a closer look at the terms of modern rationality reveals that its universality is a myth. Only specific types of individuals fully measure up to its terms and benefit from the status of the "rational in-

dividual, thereby disadvantaging the greater part of humanity. The modern occupation with the Cartesian ego, and the effects of which social contractarianism's public and private have entrenched and expanded, are at the root of the oppressive terms of modern rationality. Despite Cartesianism's and liberalism's claim to the universal individual, their dichotomous terms conflate rationality with specific human attributes and oppose it to others, thereby granting some individuals more epistemic authority than others. Thus it is on both philo-

sophical and political grounds that rationality must be critiqued, and for which its terms must be revisited in the modern project of empowerment.

Rationality's Autonomous Individual and the Public/Private Separation

The concept of rationality has not been static since antiquity; it has a particular modern expression. As Genevieve Lloyd demonstrates, rationality through time has been associated with shifting norms of masculinity. For instance, some early philosophers, including Philo, Augustine and Aquinas, conceptualized rationality as a single paradigm of rational excellence for all, believing men to be more able than women to attain such perfection. The Enlightenment and thinkers such as Rousseau entrenched the idea that men and women are essentially different, capable only of attaining different and complementary orders of perfection. Thus rationality became a paradigm for men, while women, relegated to a private sphere of nurturing and affectivity, were permitted no appropriate relation to rational projects.²

The story of modern rationality finds its beginnings most clearly with Cartesian individualism, and the attendant sharp polarization of mind and body. Descartes's reconceptualization of reason from a means of persuasion to a consistent individual's instrument for the discovery of truth lent it a quality of transcendence, impartiality, and universality. This rationality, Descartes believed, was a force for democracy.

Descartes saw his method as opening the way to a new egalitarianism in knowledge. In a letter written shortly after the publication of the *Discourse on Method*, he commented that his thoughts on method seemed to him appropriate to put in a

book where he wished that "even women" might understand something.... Descartes' egalitarian intentions come out also in his insistence on writing the *Discourse on Method* in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, the learned language of the schools. The work, he stressed, should appeal to those who avail themselves only of their natural reason in its purity. The point was political as well as practical.... The accessibility of the new method even to women was thus a powerful symbol of the transformation which it marked in the relationship between method and autonomous, individual reasoning.³

With the entry of the autonomous individual, Cartesian thought introduced a new epistemological framework grounded in the universality of knowing through reason. However, Descartes's treatment of reason as a highly unified and restricted mental activity fully distinct from corporeal life had the opposite effect than that foreseen. Because women were already historically and philosophically associated with bodily life, the separation of reason and corporeality reinforced and further denigrated their status as non-rational beings.

This separation of male and female authority was further entrenched with the advent of contractarian philosophy, and its myth of society's creation. Civil society was defined as a universal realm that includes all individuals, each of whom has contracted to legitimate the state's authority. At the root of modern thought, though, is contract theories' explicit separation and opposition of the civil public and the familial private. As Carole Pateman argues:

Only half the story appears in commentaries on the classic texts or in contemporary Rawlsian arguments, because modern political theory is so thoroughly patriarchal that one aspect of its origins lies outside

the analytical reach of most theorists. Political theorists argue about the individual, and take it for granted that their subject matter concerns the public world, without investigating the way in which the "individual," "civil society," and "the public" have been constituted as patriarchal categories in opposition to womanly nature and the "private" sphere.⁴

Thus, while mainstream thought often heralds social contractarianism as the defeat of patriarchy, it has in fact subsumed patriarchy in the public/private split, while silencing discussion on this point by pointing to the universality of the "individual" who makes and lives the contract. Yet no genuinely free, contracting individuals would subscribe to an arrangement that meant their subordination. Thus, implicit in the social contract is women's exclusion from the category of the autonomous individual.

Liberal contractarianism's separation of the public and private, and its accompanying male/female dichotomy, reinforce and are fed by parallel oppositional dualisms. Dropped neatly along these polarized lines we find Descartes's mind/body and a consequent autonomy/dependence dualism; the impartiality/partiality inherent in universalist rational thought; modern science's subject/object split that follows close on the heels of Cartesianism; and the reason/emotion dichotomy that grows out of all of the accompanying dualisms. That is, Cartesianism and contractarianism have tied together the public, maleness, mind, autonomy, impartiality, subject and reason, and valued these characteristics over the private, femaleness, corporeality, locality, object and emotion, which are similarly associated with one another. The political and philosophical problem here is not that dichotomy is itself essentially oppressive, but rather that in presenting these divisions as factual or natural,

and then by privileging one side of the dualism over the other, oppressive conditions arise.⁵ Private is devalued as "not-public"; emotion, passion and affectivity depreciate as "not-reason," partiality is derogatorily deemed "not-universal," and so forth. Moira Gatens's assessment of dichotomy is instructive.

Take the mind/body distinction as an example: it presents itself as a self-evident distinction, there is nothing to suggest that mind and body are given unequal value and each seems as if it is defined inter-dependently. However, a close examination of the way these terms function in, say, the philosophy of Descartes, shows that mind is given a positive, and body a negative, value. What appears to be a distinction between A (mind) and B (body), in fact, takes the form of A (mind) and Not-A (body).⁶

"Rationality" plays in this hierarchical system of dualities paradigmatically, serving as a general assessment of peoples' status. So much is expressed in the words, "His decision is rational," or, "She is behaving irrationally," in much the same way that "be a man" and "don't be such a woman" capture a whole series of meanings. Gatens offers a theoretical framework for this phenomenon.

[A] dichotomy may function to divide a continuous field of differences (A, B, C, D) into an exclusive opposition with one term being singled out to define all the rest: A defines the entire field of Not-A. A is here defined in positive terms, as possessing x, y, z properties whereas its "opposite" is negatively defined. Not-A becomes defined by the fact that it *lacks* the properties x, y, z rather than being defined in its own right.⁷

Thus, "being rational" (A) means being impartial, mindful or intellectual, autonomous, the

subject, and so forth, while being emotional (B), partial (C), bodily (D) and so forth are summarily deemed Not-Rational (Not-A). Lloyd has shown, for example, that while modern thought may not explicitly find women "irrational," it defines rationality in opposition to the womanly.⁸ The subsequent examination of several of the dominant dichotomies of modern society will reveal the political impact of categorization that finds one either in accordance with or in opposition to autonomous rationality. The philosophical inappropriateness of polarizing categories that are either not essentially oppositional in nature, or are false categories of human life, will simultaneously be brought to light.

Mind/Body

Given the Cartesian separation of mind and body, an association with the bodily excludes one from the status of a rational knower. The private sphere of modern society so ties certain people with the corporeal, constructing them in opposition to the authority of the autonomous, rational mind of the public. This world of bodies is typically characterized as involving parent-child relations, relations between the sexes, and human reproduction.⁹ Thus women, the aged, the young, the ill and so forth, who have historic ties to these roles, are socially defined for their corporeality and contrary to the realm of rationality.

However, the mind/body dichotomy is more insidious than this. The private realm is also the conceptual dumping ground of all bodies that deviate from the white, male corporeal norm. Paradoxically, the public mind *does* have a bodily form. Embodying the rubric of the public and the rational mind is the trim, conservatively dressed, neither old nor young, white male. This figure is the norm, and is thus rendered irrelevant in society's assessment of bodies. The newspapers do not

say "White adult man robs bank." Contrary bodily figures, however, are highly relevant, used to define the identity of the individual. Newspapers *do* say "black man..." or "elderly woman..." or "handicapped girl..." or "hunchback robs bank." These bodies count for their difference, and are polarized from the standard of measure, the neutral body that houses the rational mind. One is either mind or body, but not both. Categorized in opposition to the mind of autonomous reason and all its status are people of colour, women, children, the differently able, the aged, the obese, the "ugly," and any other categories of "bodies" that deviate from the chosen norm.

The separation of mind from body additionally denies the rational knowledge born of acquaintance with one's body. Thus, the bodily knowledge of white males goes unacknowledged as something inherent to humanity, but thereby operates as a privileged knowledge which no one else can access. The corporeal knowledge of Others, on the other hand, including women's knowledge of reproduction, is denigrated as mythology, witchcraft or "wives' tales," and denied a rational status.

Thus we see women excluded from rationality through their bodies. The division of public and private which construes women with the bodily care of children and adults, with food, clothing and so on, reinforces and is reinforced by women's corporeal identity. A similar phenomenon is found with the aged. Simone de Beauvoir's study of the aged contrasts many cultures to expose the manner in which Western society robs the elderly of knowing authority.¹⁰ Similarly, Blacks have been historically viewed as less intelligent than whites, defined predominantly for uncommon physical and sexual capacities. Differently able people similarly continue the struggle to be regarded as knowing beings, rather than as bodies first.

Autonomy/Dependence

Descartes's rational mind is very much autonomous, with the correct order of reasoning determined by the natural operations of the mind alone.¹¹ Indeed, the Cartesian practice of sitting alone in meditation is the epitome of atomistic existence. Contractarians explicitly dichotomized this principle in separating the contracting life of the self-contained individual from the family realm of mutuality. Hobbes's individual who contracts into society, and Rawls's disembodied individual behind the veil of ignorance, both act out of an atomized self-interest dissociated from a social context. Modernity thus distinguishes interconnectedness from autonomy, and opposes it to the rubric of rationality. As a result of this dichotomy, individuals whose existence is evidently defined by dependent or even interdependent relations are denied the authority that comes with autonomous rationality.

It is white privileged men who have historically been, and been able to become, the most autonomous, relatively speaking. Rawls's stripped-down individual who impartially shaped society behind the veil of ignorance cannot be Black, or female, or poor, or sick. This individual can be decontextualized to stand separate from racial, gender, class and other questions of emancipation only if he is of a privileged group. Thus the modern ideal of autonomy transcends the contextual problems of human life, which, by definition, afflict more dependent people. As Lorraine Code points out, people whose socially and politically constructed lack of autonomy denies them full moral agency renders them subject to paternalistic control.¹² This ideal of autonomy thus works to keep less autonomous peoples oppressed. Black women, for example, must explicitly fight the ideal in attempts to empower themselves.

By being accountable to others, African-American women develop more fully human, less objectified selves. Sonia Sanchez points to this version of self by stating, "we must move past always focusing on the 'personal self' because there's a larger self. There's a 'self' of black people." Rather than defining self in opposition to others, the connectedness among individuals provides Black women deeper, more meaningful self-definitions.¹³

The autonomy/dependency split disrespects the dependents for their natural human condition, leaving them with a lack of authority and thereby no means to attain the valued autonomy. This ideal is further destructive for oppressed groups by encouraging a fragmented community.

Denouncing the philosophical appropriateness of the autonomy/dependence polarity, Annette Baier suggests that Cartesian individuals can be nothing but interdependent "second persons" in their communication with one another. Lorraine Code discusses second personhood:

It is true ... that Descartes does not consider language *essential* to thought. But behind this Cartesian disbelief lies not just a distrust of language, but a failure to notice how much that very distrust depends on language itself. Indeed, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that it is just because his knowledge of languages (i.e., French and Latin) is "invisible to ... Descartes" that he overlooks the extent to which his radical doubting leaves undoubted those very languages whose structures order "both thought and the world expressed in a set of meanings." ... The theoretical mode is dependent on habits and skills acquired in the speaking (embodied) mode, in a tradition that Descartes could have absorbed only as a second person, a person who conversed with and was taught by others.¹⁴

People are essentially social creatures that live through language and community. Consequently, the ideal of autonomy not only devalues but ignores the real interdependence that people face daily, that should be at the fore of political and philosophical debate. Therefore, the supposedly real autonomy/dependence dichotomy tied to the public/private realms is false as well as grounded in oppressive ideals, privileging and subordinating particular groups on its terms.

Impartiality/Locality

Cartesianism's autonomous mind and the universal individual of contractarian perspectives have sustained a myth of an impartial human standpoint that is the backbone of modern science and ethics. Iris Marion Young's analysis of the impartiality of modern rationality describes its transcendent quality.

As a characteristic of reason, impartiality means something different from the pragmatic attitude of being fair, considering other people's needs and desires as well as one's own. Impartiality names a point of view of reason that stands apart from any interests and desires. Not to be partial means being able to see the whole, how all the particular perspectives and interests in a given moral situation relate to one another in a way that, because of its partiality, each perspective cannot see itself. The impartial moral reasoner thus stands outside of and above the situation about which he or she reasons, with no stake in it, or is supposed to adopt an attitude toward a situation as though he or she were outside and above it.¹⁵

Young draws on Theodor Adorno's "logic of identity" to characterize rationality's reduction of the objects in question in efforts to attain a universal, common perspective.¹⁶

The logic of identity consists in an unrelenting urge to think things together, in a unity, to formulate a representation of the whole, a totality. This desire itself is at least as old as Parmenides, and the logic of identity begins with the ancient philosophical notion of universals. Through the notion of an essence, thought brings concrete particulars into unity. As long as qualitative difference defines essence, however, the pure program of identifying thought remains incomplete. Concrete particulars are brought into unity under the universal form, but the forms themselves cannot be reduced to unity.

The problem with the logic of identity is that through it thought seeks to have everything under control, to eliminate all uncertainty and unpredictability, to idealize the bodily fact of sensuous immersion in a world that outruns the subject, to eliminate otherness.¹⁷

The *cognito* with its attendant autonomous individualism is an expression of pure transcendence, from which modernity strives to understand all in a unified system with itself.¹⁸ Modern rationality thus seeks to eliminate particulars and human difference to fulfil its quest for an impartial stance.

The effect of this process is to set up a hierarchical dichotomy of universality and locality that values the former over the latter. The political problem is that impartiality reduces differences between people that should remain meaningful in rational deliberation. For example, the impartiality of modern reason that guides both science and ethics demand that I *ignore* matters of race, class, gender and age when deliberating upon a human problem, as though they were not there.

Because researchers have widely differing values, experiences, and emotions, genuine

science is thought to be unattainable *unless all human characteristics except rationality* are eliminated from the research process. ...scientists aim to distance themselves from the values, vested interests, and emotions generated by their class, race, sex, or unique situation. By decontextualizing themselves, they allegedly become detached observers and manipulators of nature.... Moreover, this researcher decontextualization is paralleled by comparable efforts to remove the objects of study from *their* contexts. The result of this entire process is often the separation of information from meaning.¹⁹

Thinking about people as interchangeable, reduced beings of sameness in order to achieve a universal perspective is to deny that individual difference and location make a political difference. The outcome of such impartiality is the dismissal and thereby further entrenchment of the political difference that does exist from group to group.

Moreover, the attempt to set aside values and local experience, and to rely fully on reason, is to assume that rationality's modern terms are themselves unerringly impartial. Philosophically, impartiality/partiality is an inappropriate distinction to draw in human life since we all stand locally in relation to others. The idea that we *can* transcend our difference is just as problematic as the idea that we should. As Robert Paul Wolff says of Kant's universality, "despite his overriding concern for moral matters, Kant seems never to have asked himself the fundamental questions, 'What is it for one man to stand in a real relation to another man?'"²⁰ Or to a woman, an aboriginal girl, or a poor Black man? Baier's critique of purported human autonomy equally denounces our capacity to attain a transcen-

ental rationality from which to judge society impartially.

The desire to achieve an impartial rationality is met in practice by a local perspective masquerading as a universal perspective. Falling along gender, class, age, ethnic and racial lines, this dominant standpoint belongs to white, privileged, neither old nor young, men — with their vision constructing the dominant theories of rationality and justice. Indeed, we see that the world's small contingent of white, heterosexual, adult, propertied men are never labelled an "interest group," while women of colour (the largest group in the world), as well as other communities, consistently are. Thus it is by defining this dominant group's position as "impartial" that we privilege it as rational, and denounce all Other perspectives as opposing in their partiality, which simultaneously construes them with the non-rational.

Subject/Object

Autonomous, impartial rationality is the hallmark of modern science, characterized by the subject's distanced study of an object. As a consequence of the hierarchical, dichotomous thought that informs social life as well as science, and because of the social valorization of scientific principles, this subject/object dichotomy is also found in everyday life.

The subject-object relation that the autonomy of reason credo underwrites is at once its most salient and its most politically significant epistemological consequence. The relation pivots on two assumptions: that there is a sharp split between subject and object and that it is a primary purpose of cognitive activity to produce the ability to control, manipulate, and predict the behavior of its objects....

The subject is removed from, detached from, positions himself at a distance from the object; and knows the object as other than himself.... *Understanding* the object of inquiry, where it figures at all among epistemic concerns, is of minimal significance. In fact, a subject's demonstrated ability to manipulate, predict, and control the behavior of his objects of knowledge is commonly regarded as the evidence par excellence that he knows them.²¹

The subject/object play in everyday life sustains the hierarchies of sexism, racism, classism and other systemic forms of oppression. It either acknowledges or dismisses the subjective essence of individuals on the basis of their race, class, gender, age and so on, identifying white privileged man as "subject" and the marginalized as "object." For example, racism and sexism refuse to recognize the person in question as a subject of her existence with whom one can identify. Patricia Collins reflects upon the treatment received by Black women domestic workers, whose status as non-subjects is established by employers who call them "girls," or by carrying on conversations with others in front of the worker as though she were non-existent.²² Such denial of subjectivity is also evident for the aged.

The crippling and undermining potential of a failure to know is illustrated in May Sarton's story of Caroline Spencer, an elderly, intermittently confused patient in a nursing home, who is reduced by her "keepers" to the sum of her moments of confusion. They ignore all manifestations of her lucid, creative, and self-aware cognitive agency. Treating her as merely a senile patient, positioned in a routine and a set of expectations that make of her a simple category, they can forget that she is the subject of her own experiences.²³

Similarly, women are consistently identified in visual terms, experienced by men as objects.

Everyday dialogue reveals that men's expressed identity is grounded in internal traits such as intellect and character, while women's identity is tied in external physical traits. "He is an interesting businessman with a lot of integrity." "She is a beautiful businesswoman who charms every client she encounters." Men see; women are seen.

The subject/object dichotomy thus reveals who has the power of defining, and who is being defined. Revealing vision to be modernity's privileged sense,²⁴ members of marginalized groups are identified visually by eyes other than their own, even amongst themselves. Their visible age, gender, race and ethnicity are the terms in which they are conceptualized and held at a distance. Through this subject/object split, then, the dominant white male group becomes the "I" of everyone — of philosophy, science, media and colloquial conversation. This *is* the standpoint of society, from which all others are observed, assessed, and held captive in their lacking authority as rational subjects. This philosophical denial of all individuals as subjects of their own experience is reiterated in the political marginalization of the non-subjects. Seen from afar, these objects are out there to be manipulated and controlled, not respected and interacted with as rational subjects with equal human authority.

Reason/Emotion

The most explicit category of "not-rational" is that of emotion, conceptualized oppositionally to reason itself. Women's relegation to the private sphere immediately defines them as "passionate" beings; their role in human reproduction is perhaps the starting point for this assignment. As the Oxford Dictionary says, "woman" is the "the feminine emotions" and "a way of accounting for man's inexplicable [i.e., irrational] conduct"; and "womanly"

means “of woman or her feelings.”²⁵ Black men are also emotionally stereotyped as uncontrollably sexual creatures against which white women must be protected by the white male legal and penal system. Black women’s alleged emotional, passionate nature has been used to justify their sexual exploitation as “Jezebels,” relegation to the role of nurturing “mammy,”²⁶ and denigration as those without a capacity for sound judgment.²⁷ White middle-class men, on the other side of the dichotomy, are notoriously alienated from their emotions. Some go so far as to retreat into the woods *en masse*, naked, to beat on drums and smoke long pipes in efforts to access their emotive selves.

Marilyn Frye’s “A Note on Anger”²⁸ accounts for how differently men’s and women’s anger is assessed. While men’s anger is received as rational and deserving response, women’s anger, especially public anger, is denounced as “hysterical.”²⁹ Thus the reason/emotion dichotomy not only encourages some people to be emotively expressive and others to suppress their emotions,³⁰ it also results in *assessments* of emotion that are contingent upon the identity of the individual. With maleness conflated with rationality, men’s emotions are subsumed under the umbrella of rationality. Women, their femaleness construed with emotive nurturing, are deemed passionate (as the objects of the subject’s passion), and thereby *opposed* to reason. Thus the reason/emotion dichotomy fabricates an oppositional nature between rationality and emotion by changing its terms to *who* the individual is.

Such a polarization denies the fact that all humans are at least in part rationally informed by their emotions. As they did in traditions preceding the Enlightenment, philosophers are again increasingly attending to the role that emotion plays in rational judgment. For example, Patricia Greenspan speaks to the debate

that explores not simply *if* emotions are connected to reason, but *how*.

[M]y own view depends on not relegating passion to a separate status or sphere, with reason’s commands interpreted as deliverances from on high, but treating it instead, one might say, as a somewhat independent member of the reason family. The link to judgment via evaluation is crucial to this alternative since it gives us a new way of cutting into the conventional emotion/reason contrast. Instead of treating emotion as opposed to reason, judgmentalism, the view I have argued against, may be seen as attempting to do away with the contrast by analyzing emotions as modifications of judgment, assumed to be reason’s basic instrument. But this is accomplished at the cost of ascribing to emotions no role in practical reasoning *besides* that of judgment. The alternative view I have defended here analyzes emotions as sharing a common content with evaluative judgments and thus a rational (justificatory) role in the generation of action.³¹

Alison Jaggar embeds this point in the modern social context.

Within the context of western culture, ... people have often been encouraged to control or even suppress their emotions. Consequently, it is not unusual for people to be unaware of their emotional state or to deny it to themselves and others. This lack of awareness, especially combined with a neopositivist understanding of emotion that construes it just as a feeling of which one is aware, lends plausibility to the myth of *dispassionate investigation*. But the lack of awareness of emotions certainly *does not mean that emotions are not present* subconsciously or unconsciously or that subterranean emotions do not exert a *continuing influence* on people’s articulated values and observations, thoughts, and actions.³²

The dispassionate ethicist, the scientist, the universal rational mind of the public are excused from being accountable for their emotions by the dichotomous claim that their rationality excludes emotionality. The private Others, however, are conversely tied inescapably to their emotions and thus denied the authority that comes with reason, while remaining at the mercy of the unexamined emotions of the group in power. The modern conception of emotions as acultural "gut responses" deepens the extent to which emotions, unaccounted for, hold the oppressed hostage. The fact that emotions are in part socially constructed to perpetuate society's structures of domination is kept beyond the scope of rational critique by the reason/emotion divide. Our socialized emotional ties to homophobia, racism, classism and contempt for women thus remain highly impervious to change.³³

Reconceptualizing: Some Considerations

While this critique of rationality has revealed its oppressive and philosophically troubled foundation, this is not to say that humanity should abandon its rational capacities. Rather, it is to say that the individual's identity as a rational being must be recast in ways that are philosophically more defensible and politically liberating. In efforts to reconceptualize the terms of modern rationality, then, the dangers of hierarchical dichotomy are more relevant than ever. Valorizing the denigrated side of the dichotomy threatens an essentialism that can be used to justify the segregation of women, people of colour, the aged, the poor, the sick and so on, from mainstream civic life. An alternative danger lays in legitimizing the values of the status quo by encouraging the marginalized to "make it" on modernity's terms. The answer must involve some play with each of these dangers, exploring the fruits of both

paths without buying wholesale into one or the other. The underlying purpose must be to reconstitute rationality such that it is no longer a paradigm of hierarchical dichotomy, to reject this underlying ideology itself.

Allan Gibbard's examination of rationality as the acceptance of norms that permit it frames this project of reconceptualization.

The main thing to be explained is not what a norm is, but what "accepting a norm" is — or, more precisely, what it is for something to be permitted or required by the norms a person "accepts." ...

Take next some schematic illustrations. Delilah, suppose, is pondering whether various of Samson's acts, beliefs, and feelings are rational. What is it for her to come to an opinion? It is to come to accept norms. ... Nothing I have said here, I stress, speaks to whether Samson's acts, beliefs, and emotions really *were* rational. ... My own analysis ... is a hypothesis about what it is to *think* or *believe* something rational.... It follows that if we want to decide what really *is* rational, we shall have to settle what norms to accept ourselves — for that is what it is to form an opinion as the rationality of something.³⁴

Gibbard's argument, without sliding fully into postmodern relativity, echoes the Foucaultian idea of community standards and rules which individuals must meet and follow. Indeed, underlying this paper's critique of "rationality" is the assertion that its terms are largely constructed by a certain sociopolitico-economic group, and maintained by many if not most. An individual's authority is determined according to her fulfilment of these norms, with her oppression sustained by her incapacity to gain authority, regardless of the fact that she may play by the rules. Relieving the oppressive terms of this rationality thus demands a shift in these "rules."

According, then, to this paper's critique of modern rationality, reconceptualizations must aim to explode the dichotomous thinking that surrounds and supports it. This is a tall order, with no self-evident starting point. Modern society is an apparent seamless series of dichotomies that feed into and are fed by one another in a system of mutual justification. Just as the impartiality/locality split supports and is supported by the autonomy/dependence split, so is this supportive of and supported by the reason/emotion dualism, and all of which feed on and into the public/private division of social life. Yet for the same reason that this system has no single starting point, it does not need one. Breaking down any of the dichotomies contributes to a breakdown in the others, which then feed back in to further alter the chosen starting point. Therefore, the question is not where, but how to begin.

Changing the rules of the paradigm of rationality can be either of a substantive or procedural format. Respecting the purpose of the project — to establish a more inclusive and democratic epistemological framework — the revision must be one of procedure so that the substantive questions can be continually debated and answered anew through the social activity of the revised process. Then, much in the same way that the dichotomies reciprocally determine one another, individual agency can inform and be informed by changing epistemological terms. Foucault's analysis of power and discipline in prison life is helpful here. As he says:

The question is often posed as to how, before and after the Revolution, a new foundation was given to the right to punish. And no doubt the answer is to be found in the theory of the contract. But it is perhaps more important to ask the reverse question: how were people made to accept the power to punish, or quite

simply, when punished, tolerate being so?³⁵

Responding to Foucault, Lorraine Code points out that this reciprocity leaves scope for human agency.

It is clear, for example, that the panoptic regime of a disciplinary society works best — is most successful in producing “docile bodies” — when members of the society are complicit, self-surveillant. Social-institutional discipline produces subjective self-discipline; subjective conformity confirms and consolidates social regimes. On this reciprocity the continuous, smooth capillary circulation of power depends. Yet it is this very reciprocity that, to quote de Lauretis, “leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micro-political and everyday practices.” Subjects can refuse to reciprocate, to speak from within hegemonic discourse....³⁶

Refusals to reciprocate according to modern epistemic norms are evident in political consciousness movements, in the outlaw emotions of which Alison Jaggar speaks,³⁷ in Black women's determined self-definition expressed in blues songs.³⁸ The starting point for a new epistemology is the gathering of partial community where, together, the refusal to reiterate the hegemonic discourse develops into the determination to share a new subjective discourse. The validation process of community leads to subcultures, which may feed into the dominant culture, subversively sparking epistemological and political change. This paper's critique of modern rationality is itself an example of such challenge to dominant norms, with my ideas and perspectives being validated and developed in a particular community, from which I will carry them into different communities.

However, whose challenges to the dominant epistemology should be trusted? This question can best be answered by a reliance again on an open process, which must be constructed to give a constant voice to all communities, to keep questions of power, prejudice and bias bubbling to the surface for examination. The continuing interplay of local standpoints, rather than submission to the reductivism of transcendent ideals, is the most democratic means to establish the most contextually fair social outcomes. Such an emphasis on process also undercuts the essentialist/constructivist dichotomy by allowing individuals and communities to continually redefine and shape *themselves*.

The Academy, which finds itself at the heart of mainstream authoritative knowledge, must seek ways to bring this interplay of communities within its parameters. Its role in the production and dissemination of knowledge brings with it an acute responsibility in initiating epistemic change in line with democratic principles. The Academy must begin acknowledging the nature of the knowledge system that it defines and perpetuates, and open up a critical dialogue about that system. Given the struggle within the discipline of philosophy alone to recast epistemological study into the question of "whose knowledge?" a general academic recognition of the *need* for change will be hard won. Such a recognition in itself demands a restructuring of mainstream values that puts ethics on an equal footing with the power of rationality.

This process of epistemological dialogue and change is a process that asks privileged groups to relinquish their power over others. As such, the standpoint approach that seeks to use a marginalized group's lives as a starting point for knowledge inquiry would *prima facie* sour the dominant group's patience with the

project. Asking white male students and faculty to entertain the idea of life from the standpoint of Third World women is simply too large an initial leap. Alternatively, Collins's and bell hooks's theory of privilege and oppression as multiple interlocking systems within a greater matrix of hierarchy and domination would likely be less threatening to the uninitiated. This approach's ideological focus which recognizes that *all* people fill *multiple* roles of *both* domination and oppression better casts all individuals as having similar human goals of emancipation, creating new room for dialogue.

The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity....

Placing African-American women and other excluded groups in the center of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system. ... Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed.³⁹

Hooks names modern epistemology a "politic of domination" which:

is a belief in domination, and a belief in the notions of superior and inferior, which are components of all those systems [of oppression]. For me it's like a house, they share the foundation, but the foundation is the ideological belief around which notions of domination are constructed.⁴⁰

By making sense of different kinds of oppression by ideologically tying them together, this new perspective emphasizes individual ac-

countability to a world that is *theirs*, a world which can be changed through human agency.

The use of narrative to communicate the political and philosophical relevance of partial perspective should be expanded in academia. Such partiality would begin to demonstrate that human knowledge is a social construct, as well as reground people in human context from where they can permit themselves to see the world from a local perspective. With the recognition of all cognitive activity as local activity and human experience as second personhood, narrative can be discovered as a rich epistemological resource.⁴¹ Literature can help crack open this world of individual and group partiality, revealing the relevance of human difference, of emotion to rational decision-making, and of individual responsibility for one's world. Increased academic involvement with communities must also be prioritized to stimulate dialogue and new understanding of the oppression that occurs on the cultural level. Deliberately encouraging and making space for specific community voices on campus, through literature, or from the greater community, can begin to shed light on and give validity to alternative subjugated knowledges and their conceptual differences. On the institutional level, universities are a conservative site of knowledge construction, as well as a place for challenging authority, albeit typically more administrative than academic. Still, society's rising interest in and commitment to feminist and Black thought is probably strongest amongst academics. Thus, the academy's push for dialogue and inclusiveness can and must be pursued at the individual, community, and institutional levels, since it is at all three levels that oppression and privilege are experienced.

Conclusions

Autonomous rationality has been presented historically as the democratizing force of modern liberalism, that which grants us all equal human status and opportunity. However, as we have discovered, the autonomous terms of this rationality, its polarization from femaleness, corporeality, partiality, interdependence and emotion, and its conflation with maleness, public, impartiality and mind, renders it a category of exclusion. This force for democracy has instead proven itself to be a source of political domination. The dichotomies through which modern rationality asserts itself consist of false oppositions and traits that no human individual can or should attain. As such, the political push for a revision of rationality and its paradigm is accompanied by a philosophical quest for greater consistency and relevance to the human condition.

The marginalized groups that fall outside the authority of the rational individual cannot find empowerment through a simple subsumption into this privileged category. To be included in the brotherhood of Cartesianism and the social contract, these women, people of colour, the poor, the old and the others, would be asked to reject their bodies and selves, since this brotherhood is itself an ideology that necessarily separates itself from "otherness." As Patricia Hill Collins says, "those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries. African-American women [and other marginalized groups], by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging."⁴² Thus, the project of empowerment must create a new process that grants a consistent voice to all groups, such that political questions are constantly at the fore of social dialogue.

NOTES

1. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, ix.
2. Lloyd, 75.
3. Lloyd, 44.
4. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 33-34.
5. Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, 92.
6. Gatens, 93.
7. Gatens, 93.
8. Lloyd, 137.
9. As an example, see Gatens, 122.
10. de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, 220. For instance, the Aranda of Australia associate old age with knowledge and authority, while the aged in rest homes, nursing homes, and even towns are made to pay unjustifiably high fees for often unsatisfactory care. See 63.
11. Lloyd, 41.
12. Code, *What Can She Know?* 73.
13. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 105-106.
14. Code, 115-116.
15. Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public," in Benhabib and Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique*, 60.
16. Young, 60-61.
17. Young, 61.
18. Young, 61.
19. Collins, 205. My emphasis.
20. Code, 75.
21. Code, 139-140.
22. Collins, 69-70.
23. Code, 166-167.
24. Code, 140.
25. Fowler and Fowler, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1502-1503.
26. Collins, 71.
27. Collins, 70.
28. Frye, "A Note on Anger," *The Politics of Reality*, 84.
29. Frye, 90.
30. See Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," in Jaggar and Bordo (eds.) *Gender/Body/Knowledge*, 157.
31. Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*, 175.
32. Jaggar, 155. My emphasis.
33. Jaggar, 157.
34. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 46-47.
35. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 303.
36. Code, 297.
37. Jaggar, 160.
38. Collins, 104.
39. Collins, 225.
40. bell hooks in Collins, 226.
41. Code, 170.
42. Collins, 68.

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