

# FEMINIST METAPHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY

## Abstract

Over the past few decades, feminist philosophy has become recognised as a philosophical sub-discipline in its own right. Among the ‘core’ areas of philosophy, metaphysics has nonetheless until relatively recently remained largely dismissive of it. Metaphysics typically investigates the basic structure of reality and its nature. It examines reality’s putative building blocks and inherent structure supposedly ‘out there’ with the view to uncovering and elucidating that structure. For this task, feminist insights appear simply irrelevant. Moreover, the value-neutrality of metaphysics seems *prima facie* incompatible with feminism’s explicitly normative stance in that feminist philosophy involves advocacy: speaking on behalf of some group on political grounds. The prospects of feminist metaphysics thus look grim.

Nonetheless, feminist philosophers have in recent years increasingly taken up explicitly metaphysical investigations. The basic ideas behind such investigations can be summed up as follows: feminist metaphysics is about negotiating the natural and going beyond the fundamental. In so doing, feminist investigations have expanded the *scope* of metaphysics. Further, feminist philosophers typically bring new *methodological* insights to bear on traditional ways of doing philosophy. With this in mind, the article considers the following questions: when thinking about philosophical methodology, how does feminist metaphysics fare relative to ‘mainstream’ metaphysics? More specifically, is feminism’s political advocacy inconsistent with apparent objectivity that some prominent contemporary versions of metaphysics are committed to?

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, feminist philosophy has become recognised as a philosophical sub-discipline in its own right. Feminist philosophers aim both to critique patriarchal social structures by utilising mainstream philosophical tools, and to shape mainstream philosophy with the help of feminist political insights. It is typically distinctive in being framed around specific concepts and background beliefs, which are sensitive to gender justice.

Although feminist philosophers have advanced influential arguments in ethics, aesthetics, epistemology and political philosophy, metaphysics (as a ‘core’ area of philosophy) has until recent years remained largely dismissive of feminist insights.<sup>1</sup> First, at least according to some prominent mainstream versions, metaphysics investigates the basic structure of reality (what really or fundamentally *exists*) and its nature (what *kinds* of entities exist). The task is to uncover and elucidate reality’s putative building blocks or basic structure that is carved in ‘nature’s joints’. But for this task, feminist insights appear simply irrelevant insofar as feminist philosophers do not typically concern themselves with nature’s joints (more on this shortly). Second, metaphysics seems to be a paradigm value-neutral endeavour, which makes it *prima facie* incompatible with feminism’s explicitly normative stance and emphasis on how gender makes a difference to philosophical inquiry. After all, feminist philosophy involves (what we might call) advocacy: Public support for or recommendation of a cause or policy (according to the OED). Advocacy usually involves speaking on behalf of some group, and this is precisely what feminist philosophers are seemingly doing in order to advance gender justice. Metaphysics, however, is politically neutral: objective facts speak for themselves, and there is some way the world is that does not depend on political advocacy. Bluntly put: metaphysics aims at the truth, while feminist philosophy is seemingly guided by political ideology that interferes with the pursuit of truth.

Nonetheless, analytic feminist philosophers have in recent years increasingly taken up metaphysical investigations, which the first ever collection on the topic – *Feminist Metaphysics* edited by Charlotte Witt (2011a) – attests to. The basic ideas behind feminist metaphysics can be summed up as follows: it is about negotiating the natural (Haslanger 2000a) and going beyond the fundamental (Barnes 2014). Feminist metaphysics places prime importance on examining “to what extent the central concepts and categories of metaphysics, in terms of which we make sense of our reality, could be value laden in ways that are particularly gendered” (Haslanger and Sveinsdóttir 2011: 1). Feminist investigations have expanded the scope of metaphysics in holding that metaphysical tools can help

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is hard to find an outright dismissal of feminist metaphysics in press, one hears it sometimes disparaged in conversation. And some feminist philosophers have been deeply suspicious of the value of metaphysics. For more on the unhappy relationship between feminism and metaphysics, see Battersby (1998).

advance debates on topics outside of traditional metaphysical inquiry (e.g. on the nature of gender, sex, and sexuality). Feminist philosophers have also discussed common metaphysical topics like properties, relations, the self, nature, essence, and identity from a feminist perspective (Alcoff 2006, Antony 1998, Heinämaa 2011, Meyers 1997, Sveinsdóttir 2011, 2013, Warnke 2008, Witt 1993, 1995, 2011c). Moreover, feminist philosophers typically bring new methodological insights to bear on traditional ways of doing philosophy. Feminist metaphysicians too have recently begun interrogating the methods of metaphysics and they have raised questions about what metaphysics as a discipline is in the business of doing (Barnes 2014, Haslanger 2012, Mikkola 2015, forthcoming).

In discussing such methodological issues, Elizabeth Barnes (2014) argues that some prevalent conceptions of metaphysics rule out feminist metaphysics from the start and render it impossible. This is bad news for self-proclaimed feminist metaphysicians in suggesting that we are simply confused and mistaken about the *metaphysical* status of our work. With this worry in mind, I will consider here the following: when thinking about philosophical methodology, how does feminist metaphysics fare relative to ‘mainstream’ metaphysics? More specifically, is feminism’s political advocacy inconsistent with apparent objectivity that prominent contemporary versions of metaphysics are committed to? I will first outline briefly how feminist metaphysics has expanded the subject matter of metaphysics. I will then go on to discuss the more methodological questions. (For a more detailed outline of topics in feminist metaphysics, I recommend Haslanger and Sveinsdóttir 2011.)

## **2. Negotiating the Natural**

Feminist metaphysics is unapologetically normative: oppressive social relations are sometimes justified in that they mirror “our human natures” and feminist metaphysics (in part) aims to demonstrate how certain putatively natural properties and relations are in fact socially motivated and constructed (e.g. Antony 1998, Haslanger 1995, 2000a, 2000b, 2003). To illustrate, consider feminist work on gender (cf. Mikkola 2016). Ordinary speakers take ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ to be coextensive: women and men are human females and males, respectively, where the former is just another way to talk about the latter. Feminists typically disagree and many have endorsed a sex/ gender distinction. Its standard formulation holds that ‘sex’ denotes a biological classification of human females and males

on the basis of chromosomes, sex organs, hormones, or other anatomical features. By contrast, ‘gender’ denotes a social classification of women and men, which depends on factors like social roles, positions, behaviour and self-ascription. The main motivation for making the distinction was to counter biological determinism: the view that one’s sex determines one’s social roles and cultural traits. Historical examples demonstrate how social, cultural and psychological differences were taken to be manifestations of some underlying ‘real’ or ‘natural’ differences between women and men; and these differences were used to justify a range of oppressive social conditions. For example: it would be inappropriate to grant women political rights, if they are ‘by nature’ unsuited to have those rights; and doing so would also be futile since women (due to their supposed nature) would simply be uninterested in exercising them. In response, feminists have argued that many putatively natural differences have social origins. In short, manifest gender differences are socially constructed, not carved in nature’s joints. One task of feminist metaphysics, then, is to show how apparently given ‘facts’ about properties, relations, and dualisms in no sense capture the way things really are (cf. Haslanger and Sveinsdóttir 2011). Feminist metaphysics aims to debunk supposed natural facts in order to uncover their social nature (Haslanger 2003) and to show that classifications central to feminist concerns are in fact *constitutively constructed* (Haslanger 1995): e.g. in defining womanhood we must make reference to social factors, not anatomy. Of course, which social factors fix gender is an on-going debate within feminist philosophy (cf. Bach 2012, Frye 1996, 2011, Haslanger 2000b, Mikkola 2009, 2011, Stoljar 1995, 2011, Sveinsdóttir 2011, Young 1997, Witt 2011b).

The metaphysics of gender – what gender is – demonstrates the centrality of the notion of social construction in feminist work. There are, however, many ways in which we can understand this notion and feminist metaphysicians have done painstaking work in recent years to elucidate it (cf. Haslanger 1995, Diaz-Leon 2015; see also Mallon 2007). Consider another example from feminist discussions to illustrate further how something can be socially constructed. Many people, including many feminists, have taken sex ascriptions to be solely a matter of biology with no social or cultural dimension. It is commonplace to think that there are only two sexes and that biological sex classifications are utterly unproblematic. By contrast, feminist philosophers and biologists have disputed this and argued that sex classification is not a non-evaluative matter. In order to make sense

of this, it is helpful to distinguish object- and idea-construction (Haslanger 2003): ideological forces and material social conditions can be said to construct certain kinds of objects (e.g. sexed bodies) and certain kinds of ideas (e.g. sex concepts). Take the object-construction of sexed bodies. Surgical interventions offer the most explicit demonstration of how sex can be ‘made’ by us. But there are other, subtler ways such construction takes place. Secondary sex characteristics are affected by material social practices. In some societies, females’ lower social status has resulted in them receiving less to eat and the lack of nutrition (among other factors) has had the effect of making women relatively smaller in size (Jaggar 1983). Uniformity in muscular shape, size and strength within sex categories is not straightforwardly caused by genes and hormones, but depends heavily on nutrition and exercise opportunities. Were such opportunities equalised, it is thought that bodily dimorphism would diminish (Fausto-Sterling 1993, 2000). These examples suggest that sex-specific features like body shape and size thought not to be affected by social and cultural factors are, in fact, causally constructed (cf. Haslanger 1995): social forces and beliefs (e.g. about food and exercise) have causal efficacy in shaping the way we are *qua* females and males. Furthermore, causal construction of sex takes place against the backdrop of what is attributed to us by others as exemplars of supposedly dimorphic sex categories. In this sense, sex is also discursively constructed (cf. Haslanger 1995). Social influences and beliefs send implicit and explicit messages about what is expected of us as females and males. For instance, girls and women are attributed relative bodily weakness due to which they are not often expected to do weight-lifting sports. They may thus be discouraged from doing such sports, which is likely to make them relatively weaker and smaller in size. This appears to render the original attribution of bodily weakness appropriate, when in fact we are shaped in ways that make us fit prior expectations and attributions.

Certain conceptual schemes and ideas underwrite sex construction. Feminist work further examines the idea-construction of sex concepts (cf. Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015, Butler 1990, 1993, Stone 2007: Chapter 1). The concept of *sex* is said to be socially produced in the sense that what *counts as* sex depends on what we take to be socially meaningful in particular contexts. What properties we take to be definitive of sex results in different systems of classification and there may be no conceptual-scheme independent way to settle the issue. In this case, our sex classificatory scheme

is (what Haslanger [1995:100] calls) a strong pragmatic construction: social factors wholly determine our use of the scheme and the scheme fails to represent accurately any independent ‘facts of the matter’.<sup>2</sup> This is reminiscent of Hilary Putnam’s (1981, 1996) ‘internal realism’ and his example of counting objects. A common-sense realist and “a mereologist” encounter entities  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ . How many objects are there? For the former, there are just three. But for the latter, there are (at least) seven: in addition to those mentioned, there are the mereological sums of  $x+y$ ,  $y+z$ ,  $x+z$  and  $x+y+z$ . But how many objects are there *really* and which conceptual scheme is *the true* one? For Putnam, these questions cannot be answered. Doing so would require an impossible ‘God’s Eye’ perspective on reality from which we look ‘in’ while standing outside. And so, to think that there is some scheme independent way of counting objects is an illusion. The situation with sex as a strong pragmatic construction is parallel. The ordinary conception has it that there are only two sex categories (male and female). This conception, however, fails to accommodate intersexes and trans\* people. ‘Our’ conceptions of sex vary relative to what we think of as significant and salient for the task at hand, and there is no obvious way to settle what sex amounts to that is ‘carved in nature’s joints’. In fact, interests and prior beliefs make a huge difference to our choice of conceptual schemes. Feminist metaphysics thus aims to make explicit how putatively natural classifications are actually social by unmasking politically and morally suspect interests and biases that ground various classificatory systems. Sally Haslanger calls this form of social constructionism ‘critical social realism’, which aims to reveal real “differences that are socially constituted but not recognized, or fully recognized, to be so ... [where] calling attention to this will ... provide critical leverage in challenging how we think and act” (2012: 197).

### 3. Going Beyond the Fundamental

The above showed how feminists have extended the scope of metaphysics. However, their work ill fits what some take to be the central task and methodology of metaphysics. On prevalent contemporary views, metaphysics is in the business of elucidating the *fundamental* structure of reality. For instance,

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<sup>2</sup> Note that for Haslanger sex is not a strong pragmatic construction, although she introduces this form of social construction. This view of sex can be found, e.g. in Butler 1990, 1993.

Theodore Sider writes that metaphysics is about “figuring out the right categories [carved in reality’s joints] for describing the world” (2011: 1). As he sees it: “The joint-carving notions are fundamental notions; a fact is fundamental when it is stated in joint-carving terms. A central task of metaphysics has always been to discern the ultimate or fundamental [structure of] reality underlying the appearances” (2011: vii). On this view, metaphysics aims to elucidate reality’s fundamental structure while positing the fewest number of kinds of entities.

The prevalent way of doing contemporary metaphysics is not via conceptual analysis, but via quasi-scientific methods. This takes different ontological positions to be competing hypotheses about reality’s fundamental structure that are then assessed with a “loose battery of criteria for theory choice. Match with ordinary usage and belief sometimes plays a role in this assessment, but typically not a dominant one” (Sider 2009: 385; see also Sider 2011: 12). As I see it, this loose battery of criteria makes up the *constitutive* values of contemporary analytical metaphysics (thus guiding theory choices) and conceivably includes: being able to provide a unified (non-disjunctive), coherent, non-circular total theory of some subject matter that purports to tell us truths, where our theory is simple, parsimonious, non-ad hoc and theoretically rigorous – akin to and continuous with science. Subsequently, some deny the existence of tables, chairs and other middle-sized goods: only fundamental particles arranged table- and chairwise exist since only they are needed for adequate explanations and it is unparsimonious to posit the existence of derivative entities (e.g. van Inwagen 1990, Merricks 2001). ‘Serious and deep’ metaphysics should involve substantive disputes and questions, instead of superficial and verbal ones. “Is the Pope a bachelor?” is a merely conceptual question; by contrast, “Is there lithium on Mars?” is a substantive one (Sider 2011). And whether a question is substantive depends on “the extent to which its terms carve at the joints; that is, that the question concerns the world’s fundamental structure” (Sider 2011: 6). The importance of substantive questions allegedly hinges on epistemic value. As Sider puts it, it is “*better* to think and speak in joint-carving terms” (2011: 61). This is because the goal of inquiry requires that we grasp the world ‘in its own terms’, which means to carve the world at its joints. Thus, “[w]ielders of non-joint-carving concepts are worse inquirers” (Sider 2011: 61). Such inquirers are apparently *missing out* on some important knowledge. Not all non-substantive debates are worthless: they may be metaphysically

shallow, but conceptually deep in revealing something important about our conceptual schemes (Sider 2011: 70). Still metaphysics proper is about deep, substantive questions that afford valuable truths.

This way of demarcating the task of metaphysics has problematic results for feminist investigations. First, feminist metaphysics is *not* about fundamentality and it does not consider gender or sex to be fundamental – their natures are not carved in reality's joints. Disputes about what gender amounts to seem to be upfront non-substantive and outside of metaphysics proper. As Barnes (2014) has recently discussed, if metaphysics is about the fundamental and feminist metaphysics is about the non-fundamental, the latter is simply impossible. This is bad news: feminist metaphysicians turn out to be confused in taking debates about gender and sex to be substantive when they are just conventional, terminological disputes. For Barnes, this is deeply unsatisfying since Sider's approach excludes feminist metaphysics by straightforward definitional fiat (she argues that the same is true of Schaffer (2009) and Dorr (2005)). The focus on fundamentality, then, results in an odd parochialism about the task of metaphysics that Barnes strongly objects to.

Second, feminist metaphysics appears to be problematic given its meta-philosophical commitments too. Earlier I noted certain seemingly discipline-defining constitutive values of metaphysics (like seeking to elucidate the fundamental as parsimoniously as possible). Such theoretically constitutive values can be distinguished from what Helen Longino (1994) calls 'contextual values' of a practice: the political and moral values embedded in the social context of an inquiry. Now, even though metaphysicians may be frank about some meta-metaphysical value commitments (say) relative to the existence of universalia, ordinary objects or facts, bringing in contextual values is usually not viewed as an acceptable move when thinking about metaphysical theory choice. The apparent impossibility of feminist metaphysics may then be further explained with the help of this distinction: feminist metaphysics hinges on some politically motivated contextual values; but since these are inadmissible when making metaphysical theory choices, there is no reason to take feminist insights seriously. So, what seemingly sets feminist metaphysics apart from 'metaphysics proper' are: the subject matter (fundamental vs. non-fundamental, substantive vs. merely conceptual questions) and methodology (quasi-scientific vs. normative inquiry, constitutive vs.



contextual values). With these in mind, I will consider next these latter methodological issues.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Feminist Meta-Metaphysics

As noted above, the putative conflict between feminism and metaphysics pertains to a conflict between (political) advocacy and (metaphysical) objectivity. This relates to the idea that there are different sorts of values at play in theory choices: constitutive values are admissible when making ontological theory choices while contextual values are not. We can find a similar juxtaposition in scientific theory choices. To elucidate, consider Elizabeth Anderson's (1995) critique of value neutral science. Mainstream philosophy of science typically accepts that some epistemic or cognitive values have a legitimate role to play in theory choice. These acceptable values are internal to science, like accuracy, consistency, fruitfulness, breadth of scope and simplicity. Political, moral and practical values that come 'from outside' and from the broader social contexts are typically not acceptable. Or, they may legitimately affect the contexts of discovery and practical application, but not the context of theory justification.

By contrast, Anderson holds that contextual values are also admissible as criteria for scientific theory choice. Value-neutral models falsely presuppose that political or moral considerations compete with evidence and facts. And so, they presume that "[t]o the extent that moral values and social influences shape theory choice, they *displace* attention to evidence and valid reasoning and hence *interfere* with the discovery of truth" (Anderson 1995: 33). Value-neutral accounts assume that the goal of scientific inquiry is to tell us truths. So, it follows that value judgements play no proper role in scientific theory choice: they provide no evidence for some claim being true and so, cannot figure in the context of theory justification. *Contra* the bare accumulation of truths, however, Anderson notes that theoretical inquiry "aims at some *organized* body of truths that can lay claim to *significance*" – theoretical inquiry aims at elucidating an organised body of significant truths (Anderson 1995: 37). If the goals of our inquiry go beyond the mere accumulation of truths though, we will have "multiple grounds for criticizing, justifying, and choosing theories besides truth" (Anderson 1995: 53). The door

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<sup>3</sup> I won't consider here the issue of fundamentality; I do so elsewhere (see Mikkola 2015).

is thus opened for moral, social and political values to enter the context of justification because now theory choices must be made relative to a broader set of aims: what counts as significant? What renders the organisation good and adequate? After all, significance is not merely a function of truth as there are many ‘worthless’ truths. I may wish to map in an accurate, consistent and simple manner the patterns of my daily eye movements, but what would be the point of this inquiry? It would tell us truths all right, but ones that do not matter. This demonstrates that significance relates to our inquiry’s background interests through the way we frame our central questions. These interests are (at least partly) drawn from the social context of inquiry and thus they have practical content.

This yields a dual justificatory burden and pushes us towards a cooperative model of justification, where normative and evidential considerations interact. Anderson calls this the ‘justice model of theory choice and method justification’: it involves doing justice to both the epistemic and ethical demands of our investigation, which makes theory choice a function of an *interaction* between normative and evidential considerations. Since scientific inquiry on this model will have multiple goals (and not just that of truth-trackingness), contextual values play an important part in theory choice. First, these values set standards of completeness and significance for a theory, where available evidence fixes whether the theory meets these standards. Second, they help account for meaningful classifications, where the available evidence tells us which entities (if any) fall under these classes. Third, the values enable us to choose the methods needed to answer the question our inquiry aims to address, where the evidence gathered in line with these methods will help us answer our initial (significant) research question. In all of these cases, the evidential and normative aspects cooperate.

Anderson’s description of putatively value-free scientific inquiry is parallel to much of contemporary ontological inquiry. Since contextual values are admissible in scientific theory choices, might the same be true of ontological theory choice? I think so, and hold that contextual values are admissible when making ontological theory choices (I argue for this view in more detail in my 2015). The value-neutral picture tends to separate pure and applied ontology. The former aims to elucidate the fundamental components (properties and relations) of reality. Thus, as noted above, some deny the existence of tables, chairs, other middle-sized goods – only fundamental particles arranged table- or chair-wise exist. The social realm is strikingly missing from such first-order ontology: either it does

not exist or is secondary to the proper business of ontology – and so much worse for the social realm! Social properties, objects, and relations are relegated to the realm of applied ontology based on how the significant ontological questions are framed. But (following Anderson) we can legitimately ask: why these significant questions and why the above list of constitutive values? One might wonder whether a theory that does not affirm the existence of tables, chairs, social institutions and social agents is in fact a good and an adequate one, especially if we take seriously Anderson's dual justificatory burden. Given our practical concerns and interests, we might in fact have good reasons to reject some ontological theories, and we may need to revise what we hold to be ontologically relevant and significant. After all, we must do justice to the subject matter of our investigation in order for our analysis to be (in some sense) accurate and even truth-tracking. Thus, one might hold that doing justice to the structure of reality requires more than a focus on 'small' micro-particles; we should also keep in mind the 'big' macro-world of tables, chairs and social institutions. Furthermore, we might hold that since doing justice is partly a function of contextual and practical values and metaphysics presumably wants to do justice to its subject matter, we ought not sharply to separate pure and applied ontology.

What would be the upshot for feminist metaphysics? For one thing, such 'applied' social ontology would be part of metaphysics proper, rather than being merely a part of social philosophy, if contextual values are admissible when making ontological theory choices. Feminist metaphysics examines what there is by focusing on some particular areas of reality (e.g. gender or sex). So, social ontological questions are at least *metaphysical*. But are they *metaphysics*? Well, this depends on what metaphysics is in the business of doing. And this (bluntly put) depends on what metaphysicians are doing. There is no agent-independent conception of metaphysics 'out there' – rather, practitioners shape the discipline of metaphysics. Thus, there is certainly much room (and need) for self-critical questions about metaphysics as a discipline, which brings in practitioners' interests, values and prior commitments. This *prima facie* opens the door for legitimately including contextual values in ontological theory choices and for bringing in feminist insights to provide helpful advocacy when asking such self-critical meta-metaphysical questions.

## 5. Significance of Metaphysics for Feminism

Now, one might wonder what difference does it make whether feminist metaphysical questions are part of metaphysics ‘proper’. After all, other areas of philosophy ask metaphysical questions, but there is no need therefore to include them in metaphysics. For instance, metaethics examines (among other things) the *nature* of the good and the right. These examinations deal with fairly straightforward metaphysical issues in moral philosophy, but metaethicists do not subsequently wish to be considered metaphysicians. Bluntly put: not all metaphysical questions belong to metaphysics – nor should they. It might then seem that feminist philosophers can continue raising their discipline relevant metaphysical questions without these questions needing to count as metaphysics.

There are some important differences with the feminist and metaethics cases though. The first pertains to the state of the profession. Noting feminist metaphysics as one’s area of philosophical expertise can still be met with much scepticism, scorn and at times outright ridicule. Many in the profession have deeply flawed and highly caricaturised views about what feminist metaphysics is about. This makes the professional situation for feminist metaphysicians precarious. And while most feminist metaphysicians are female, it contributes to general patterns that make being a woman in philosophy at times an unpleasant affair. By contrast, being a metaethicist does not make one an object of derision. Metaethics is a bona fide philosophical sub-area, whether it gets counted as metaphysics or not. Since the situation for feminist metaphysics is different, being seen as part of metaphysics proper is important: it would give feminist metaphysical work clout and stature, motivate philosophers to actually find out what goes on in feminist metaphysics, and hopefully make for a friendlier and more inviting professional situation for female philosophers interested in metaphysical questions.

Another difference pertains to what feminist metaphysics and metaethics aim to achieve. Questions about the nature of the good and the right (for instance) aim to clarify something that is morally relevant. Those philosophers engaged in highly theoretical questions in moral philosophy are not questioning the discipline of metaphysics: their *metaphysical* questions do not bear on what *metaphysics* as a discipline is in the business of doing. This is simply irrelevant for the sub-area of metaethics. The goals of feminist metaphysics – and feminist philosophy more generally – are different though. As outlined above, feminist metaphysicians have not only brought in new topics to

metaphysics, but they have also questioned what metaphysics amounts to. Simply put: metaethicists do not inquire about the nature of the good and the right and then ask what this tells us about metaphysics. But feminist metaphysicians are increasingly doing just that. They ask: what is the nature of gender, sex, or sexuality, and what does this tell us about metaphysics as a discipline? In thinking about the task and methods of metaphysics, feminists are engaging in a central metaphysical debate that ‘mainstream’ metaphysicians also engage in and on which they disagree. So in this sense, feminist metaphysics partakes in some perfectly ordinary metaphysical debates, but they do so from a particular perspective that is sensitive to gender justice.

Moreover, taking a particular perspective in metaphysical debates is not per se illegitimate. If it were, we would have to claim that a number of ‘mainstream’ metaphysical investigations are not really metaphysics either (like metaphysical investigations advanced from anti-realist or pragmatist perspectives). But critics do not generally claim that (say) Hilary Putnam’s internal realism is not metaphysics proper, although Putnam too engages in a metaphysical investigation that advances from a certain meta-philosophical perspective with particular background commitments and assumptions. So, if the problem with feminist metaphysics is not that it is ‘perspectival’, the problem must lie specifically in the *feminist* perspective from which metaphysical questions are advanced. However, as I suggested above, if we accept that contextual values are admissible in our ontological theory choices, I see no reason to think that a feminist perspective as such is inadmissible or that investigations from this perspective eo ipso fall outside of metaphysics proper. In fact, if we wish to do our theoretical subject matter justice in the manner Anderson suggests, feminist political advocacy may sometimes help us see what *really* is the case when examining some parts of reality. And (I contend) this is significant not just for feminist philosophy, but for metaphysics too.

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