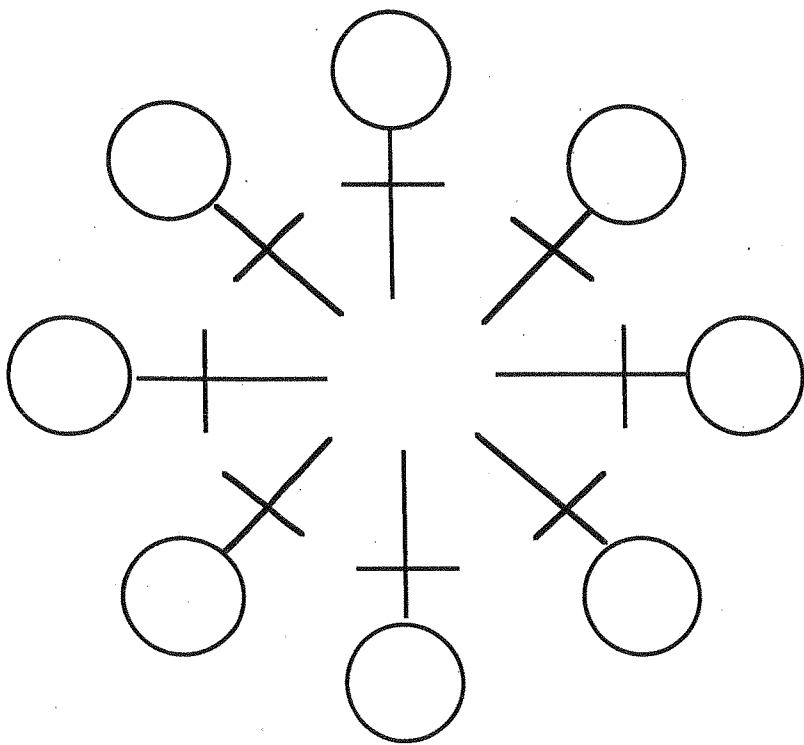


## Conceptual Errors Across the Curriculum: Towards a Transformation of the Tradition

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CONCEPTUAL ERRORS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:  
TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITION

Elizabeth K. Minnich\*

Introduction

When feminist scholars began to work within as well as across the disciplines, it seemed that we were faced with two kinds of problems: (1) We had to locate the errors of fact, interpretation, methodology, and theory within each discipline consequent upon the omission of women, and (2) We had to break the boundaries between the disciplines that prevented us from focusing on the subject, "women," in whatever ways might prove most fruitful. Such work is still and will continue to be essential to the critique of the dominant tradition (which is so entrenched that we must be ever vigilant about its effects within our own thinking as well as that of others), and also to the enrichment of the field of feminist scholarship (which can too easily slide into prematurely set tracks without such critique to continuously open up new areas for thought).

However, we can now state our basic tasks with regard to the task of critique differently. At some point, we realized that it was misleading to continue to think in terms of omission when we thought of women and the dominant tradition. The meaning system that persists in curricula in twentieth century North America is directly related to the exclusion of women from education. The distinction matters: One can omit people, or a subject matter, in a way that can be easily

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corrected simply by including what was left out. But women were consciously, purposefully excluded by the small, elite group of men who developed the dominant educational system, and the meaning system it carries forward, i.e. those men believed it right and proper to do so. And that means that the reasons they thought it right and proper to exclude women informed the system of education and the works taught in that system.

Secondly, they excluded the female half of the human race and the majority of men as well. They believed that there were men who were ruled by reason, and so were suited to rule themselves and others, and then there were women and "inferior" men who could not reason and so needed to be ruled (cf. Aristotle).<sup>1</sup> That does not mean that we can and should lump all women and the excluded men together in one category, since women of all groups have always been considered differently from the men in those groups, but it does mean that at the root of the dominant educational system there is a tangle of conceptual errors that we must all work to undo in order to get on with the critical work of finding our differences as well as our samenesses.

Within each field as across fields, that one tangle of errors expresses itself in different forms--but at base it is the same. It can be simply expressed: At the beginning of the formalization of the dominant Euro-American meaning system into educational structures and contents, a small group of privileged men defined themselves as the best, the norm, and the inclusive idea of and for humankind. Even more simply, we can say that the few not only defined themselves as the inclusive type, but as the norm, and as the best. When they thought about what it meant to be human, they thought about themselves

directly, and about the rest of humankind as beings from whom, against whom, they could and should distinguish themselves. To be a man was to be manly, i.e. not like a woman, and not like a slave, and not like a "barbarian", and not like a man who worked with his hands. We can now say that race, class and gender were used, then, to exclude people from the formalized education that was to express and perpetuate the meaning system within which the few were to rule.

Werner Jaeger (1939), whose book, PAIDEIA: THE IDEALS OF GREEK CULTURE used to be very influential, wrote: "The formative influence of the community on its members is most constantly active in its deliberate endeavour to educate each new generation of individuals so as to make them in its own image . . . Therefore, education in any human community . . . is the direct expression of its active awareness of a standard." (p. xiv) He continues, "(Such education) starts from the ideal, not from the individual. Above man as a member of the horde, and man as a supposedly independent personality, stands man as an ideal . . . the universally valid model of humanity which all individuals are bound to imitate." (p. xxiv)<sup>2</sup>

Note the idea of the singular "man" as a member of the vulgar horde, as a personality, as an ideal, as a model, and as a model of and for everyone that is "universally valid." "Man" is a confusing term, and was way back then: It is very difficult for one sort of thing to be simultaneously a member of a group, an inclusive term for what the group has in common, and not only a model for itself and things like it but for ALL. Thus, the very categories used to exclude people are mystified, hidden, and prepared to be treated as natural facts revealing aberrations from the universalized yet highly

particular norm and ideal rather than political realities expressing enforced power differentials.

That is the error we<sup>3</sup> have found underlying all the disciplines we have studied (including those in the social sciences and sciences, which will be drawn on for examples in this overview, despite the fact that those areas are not treated in this paper, to demonstrate the scope of the error). The old Greek elite male complex of errors simultaneously makes all other humans invisible--you need not notice our absence when "man" and "mankind" are written about, because the language used is, if not universalized, generalized--and inferior, as judged against the universal ideal, and deviant or exceptional or otherwise to be considered only in a special category, a sub-set. When we look for ourselves in the scholarship taught and practiced in our schools, that is how we find ourselves, as an absence, and/or as inferiors, and/or as a sub-set of the real thing, the real subject matter. And that is how we have been in every field, across all disciplines. Unless we carry out the critique designed to uncover such errors, interdisciplinary scholarship about women is as liable to such errors as intradisciplinary scholarship. The first, and most basic, and continuing task we face is, then, to find these root errors in and across the disciplines as we have learned them.

There are four ways in which these errors are most commonly expressed: (1) as errors of faulty generalization; (2) as errors of circular reasoning; (3) as faulty theoretical constructs, or paradigms; (4) and as errors in claims for the status of knowledge built on these errors.

## CONCEPTUAL ERRORS OF THE TRADITION

I. Faulty Generalization

Faulty generalization occurs in all fields, although the language we have to talk about it differs. In the social sciences, it is most familiarly called generalization, or abstraction, from an inadequate sample. In literature, we might talk about a narrowness of focus, or a lack of depth in treatment, or a failure of imagination that keeps a character, say, or a situation, from speaking of and to the human condition in any general sense. In philosophy, an incomplete analysis of a concept may result in claims for universality, or generality, that are unfounded because the full meaning of the concept has not been disclosed.

In every field in the presently dominant tradition, we find that one kind of human stands as "the human," as "man-the-inclusive-term," and hence that generalizations, imaginative creations, philosophical analyses, historical interpretations, psychological tests and their significance within those fields tend, in fact, to cover only that one kind of human--while claiming to cover us all.

The classic Broverman study<sup>4</sup> can stand as emblematic for this problem. In this study, 100 psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and psychologists were asked to describe a "normal" man, a "normal" woman, and a "normal" human. The "normal" man and the "normal" human turned out to be the same; the "normal" woman was different. That means that a woman can be either a "normal" human and an "abnormal" woman, or a "normal" woman and an "abnormal" human--not both. Man is what human IS; woman is a deviant. The psychological practitioners who responded to the study give us evidence that their

training, which was in psychology, not "man's psychology," taught them about men, while claiming to teach them about humans. That is faulty generalization.

The Kohlberg-Gilligan debate is another instance of uncovered faulty generalization. Kohlberg wrote, not about the moral development of a certain kind of boy, but about "moral development." From the norm, and then the ideal, of that "moral development" pattern, any group that performed differently on the test will be judged, again, deviant, or lesser, not just different. That same apprehension has been caught, brilliantly and defiantly in the title of a book: ALL THE WOMEN ARE WHITE, ALL THE BLACKS ARE MEN, BUT SOME OF US ARE BRAVE.<sup>6</sup>

Whenever differences between groups show up consistently characterized as deviant or inferior, one has to suspect the error of faulty generalization--unless the original sample and all generalizations from findings are clearly labelled with their prefixes, e.g. "moral development in twentieth century privileged white boys in New England prep schools." But when all the prefixes are in place, faulty generalization is far less likely to take place. The problem is, precisely, that when scholars have studied the defining group, the few privileged White heterosexual males (often college sophomores, it should be noted), they have not included prefixes. They have written up their results as if they could be generalized for all. They rarely forget the prefixes when they study,

say, Black girls in Spanish Harlem; they almost always forget them when they study white college sophomores.

In the materials we read as teachers and as scholars, white is not used as a prefix; class is only sometimes mentioned except for "lower class" or "blue collar" groups; male is not a prefix; Euro-American is not a prefix; heterosexual is not a prefix; even New England is rarely a prefix as, say, Southern is. We can tell quickly how far a group is from the unprefixing defining center by how many prefixes that group carries in scholarship: There are poets, and then there are Black Third World women poets. Race, class, gender, ethnicity, regionalism are used as categories for those who do not fit the category--the inclusive term, the norm and ideal--not as analytical concepts that reveal power constructs affecting all of us. It is startling and very important to try to use prefixes now for all works and groups and individuals so that no one group remains in the privileged position of appearing to have no gender, no race, no class.

In high schools in America, for many years students read John Knowles' A SEPARATE PEACE, Mark Twain's HUCKLEBERRY FINN, J.D. Salinger's CATCHER IN THE RYE as stories of "growing up." Stories about White girls were not included; stories of Black children, female and male, were not included. When she studied the lives of girls and women in America, the historian Gerda Lerner<sup>7</sup> found that she could not use the categories of the history she had been taught. The phases of life for females were different. For example, she found that, while adolescence was for young males a time to test out independence, it tended to be a time of loss of freedom for young females.

Only one kind of human was supposed to be able to speak to and for all of us, to give all of us the deep existentially grounding experience of encountering ourselves, our lives, our feelings, our dramas externalized and re-created imaginatively for us on a more universal plane. Toni Morrison's *THE BLUEST EYE* is still taught mostly in "Black Literature" courses in a few colleges, not with the stories of growing up our children are assigned in an effort to show them the relevance of literature to their own lives. The lives of the few are valorized; the lives of all others are particularized, and so assumed to speak only of and to one group.

In the field of Art History, we find that art from cultures, and people, not considered productive of "art" by the few European men who created the discipline still tend to be labelled as kinds of art. The vast majority of the slides in Art History courses show artworks from the Greco-Roman-European tradition that excluded women as artists while using women as models, and considered the military scene inherently more artistic than the still life, i.e. found the elusive quality of art in some sorts of lives, some sorts of activities and objects more than others. Students learn a little about other kinds of art from exotic cultures, and may learn something about fabric art, decorative art and other more "feminine" creations, but the art that is unprefixated, the art from which generalizations about "Art" are drawn, has been defined within the male-dominated, class-ridden, culturally-narrow tradition.

It is faulty generalization to take notions of "art" from canvas paintings (and a few sculptures, and frescoes, etc.) as if the sample were adequate. Too often, art from other cultures and other peoples, in other media and forms, is discussed only as a peculiar kind, and

sub-set, of Art-Itself. It is also discussed as an occasion for discovery for "real" artists, e.g. African and Japanese art as they were "discovered" by "major artists" such as Picasso. In this role, "primitive" art and artists are treated sometimes as if they provided a kind of context or raw material from which significant art can be drawn (no one says "stolen," or "appropriated").

This is in some ways analogous to the treatment of domestic work in early studies of the economy as that which has no significance or merit or interest in itself (or only as a highly specialized subject of study) but exists only insofar as it is related to or provides for "real" productive labor. "Women's work" then appears as part of the context for male works, if context is considered at all, as, for example, the domestic work of poor Black and Asian and Irish and Hispanic women has too often been ignored or seen only as part of the enabling context for the "real" work of White middle class women in the official work force.

In philosophy, which usually goes on at such a level of abstraction that its faulty generalizations are less visible than, say, psychology, the error still persists. Philosophy, which is supposed to mean "love of wisdom," and to teach students to think through particulars to the meaning behind and informing them, to think critically, to be responsible for their thoughts and judgements and hence for their actions, is, in fact, for the most part a subject composed of a list of specific texts and problems from one, and only one, tradition. Students finding materials from the Yoruba culture in a philosophy class, for example, quickly label them "anthropological," or even "primitive."<sup>8</sup> The notions of "rationality" developed from one

tradition can hardly be adequate to expressions of the use of the human faculty of reason world-wide, yet philosophy courses rarely expand beyond that one tradition--except to add a special sub-section on the exotic others.

Even within the dominant tradition of philosophy taught in our schools there is evidence that the philosophers we teach had restricted notions of "reason." Students who branch out beyond the usual texts, written in general and even universal terms as if all human reasoning had been considered, can find many, many examples of the male-centered tradition, the cultural and class biases of the Great Philosophers. Consider Kant, who wrote in *THE CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* as if it were reason itself he analyzed. In the pre-critical, *OBSERVATIONS ON THE FEELING OF THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME*,<sup>9</sup> we found him speaking of other men, and of women, in ways that make it quite evident he had considered and rejected modes of reasoning that were alien to his notions--he reasoned about Reason from a limited sample.

Kant writes about the Arab man, "He is hospitable, generous, and truthful; yet his narrative and history and on the whole his feelings are always interwoven with some wonderful thing. His inflamed imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images . . ." (p. 109) And of women, Kant writes, "The virtue of a woman is a beautiful virtue. That of the male sex should be a noble virtue. Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly; and virtuous actions mean to them such as are morally beautiful . . . woman is intolerant of all commands and morose constraint. They do something only because it pleases them . . . I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles." (p. 81)

The point is not to collect absurdities uttered even by the great male philosophers, but to note that it is the mind that believed them so firmly that gave us the Critiques. Any future claims he might make to universality must be rejected on the evidence of his own prior elimination of human modes of thought that did not meet his pre-Critical standards: He did not abstract from all uses of reason to get to his beginning thoughts about Reason, he abstracted only from some.

Whether the claim to generality or universality comes from social scientists, from philosophers, from historians, from those who work with human creativity and imagination, we need to remember that most of the scholarship, most of the Great Works, we were taught, teach and read has at its center faulty generalization. We cannot, then, add women and the missing men to our fields when the very definition of those fields is likely to be inadequate because it was too narrow, and has continued being too narrow while hiding it by omitting prefixes. To add women to scholarship about Man is to tack on a sub-set, at best a sophisticated specialty in which women's deviations from the unprefixed norm are analyzed.

To be able to learn about women, we need to be able to think about women in terms not generalized from men, but from women. To be able to think about humans, we have to be able to generalize from a great deal of knowledge about women as about men--and we are nowhere near that point yet. Simply put, we cannot add anything to that which has been defined as the whole. Knowledge that does not fit within that whole cannot be additive--consider the fact that we cannot simply add the idea that the world is round to the conviction that the world is flat.

## II. Circularity

The error of circular reasoning is directly related to the error of faulty generalization, of course, since all four of the errors under discussion spring from the same tangled root error. Circular reasoning occurs when interpretations, principles, conclusions, generalizations, standards for judgment of all sorts are derived from the limited sample, from the defining few, and then used to justify the special standing of that very group. For example, when standards for what is significant, or even great, art are derived from the narrow category of works considered "art" by the originators of the field of Art History and then are used to "prove" why and how those works simply are the best, the model for "art," we are in the presence of circular reasoning. When notions of rationality are derived from a specific and exclusive tradition of what constitutes reason, and then used to prove why other modes of reasoning are not reasonable, we are in the presence of circularity. When norms for moral development are derived only from White boys and then are used to prove that moral development takes place most normatively among those very White boys, that is circular.

In all fields, we find somewhere the intellectual equivalent of redheads defining red hair as a necessary possession of humans, and then using their definition to prove that it is true that only redheads are properly human. Consider for example the long-standing notion that "work" is what takes place in the paid public sphere, so that "women's work" takes on a different meaning (rather like a calling, or an expression of some "natural" propensity, like the "work" of the Queen Bee).

Such circular statements are not always visible, of course: The originating notions, in their exclusivity, have usually been so far abstracted from in the course of generations of work and scholarship that they no longer show in any concrete fashion. In fact, it is in the least evident, the most unquestionable moments of thought within a field that we find the principles that are most likely to be operating in a circular fashion--to be serving to justify what is already included, and so to justify continuing exclusions. As Michael Patton writes about the supposedly neutral quality, "objectivity," "In effect, identifying objectivity as the major virtue of the dominant paradigm is an ideological statement the function of which is to legitimize, preserve, and protect the dominance of a single . . . methodology."<sup>10</sup> That which is "objective" may, of course, be simply that which is so deeply familiar, so unnecessary even to state anymore, that it appears to be simply fact, simply truth--with no admixture of history or human intention. That which is so simply assumed to be given is precisely what we need to question most radically.

As feminist scholars have begun working on the dominant mode of western science, they have encountered precisely such assumptions. That western science began with metaphors that make it evident how "masculine" a mode of thought its male founders wanted it to be is not considered relevant. The founding of a field is of interest, we are told, only to specialists, yet it is in those founding assumptions, metaphors, exclusions and inclusions that we find the direct expression of what has since been so abstracted that we cannot see it--even as it dominates all thinking.

That Bacon<sup>11</sup> wrote about modern science as a process of torturing Nature to make her reveal her secrets is, of course, very important: a whole new relation of man to Nature, of man to knowledge, of man to the gods was being announced, and we live with it still today. Yet it is laboratory science that dissects reality to make it reveal its secrets so that man can steal its power and use it for his own purposes that we are to take as the very epitomy of "objectivity," of "disinterested" knowledge, of "pure" quests for "facts." To cite the rules of this version of science as justification for this version of science is circular reasoning--and locks outside the circle all the other relevant questions that need to be asked, such as, Why should we assume this to be the most value-neutral field of all when it is the most dependent on corporate, military and government funding? Why should we assume this to be the most disinterested quest for knowledge when its history makes it evident that power politics and the scramble for funds (on which it is increasingly more utterly dependent, way beyond the dependence of any other field) have influenced it as all fields have been influenced - only more so? Why should we assume that it is only truth that is being protected in science when its own rules of operation are called on as justification (in circular fashion) when it is the most white male dominated of all fields?

Circular reasoning not only makes justifying principles out of original definitions, and metaphors, but also closes out questions and challenges that place fields within their history, their social, economic and political context. That is, it operates not only within fields, but between fields--and between academic fields and the worlds they purport to reflect, analyze, illuminate. In the quest for

certainty, or validity, and/or status within dominant definitions of fields, scholars are likely to seek to narrow, not expand, the boundaries of their inquiries, thus tightening the circles already functioning.

The very tools of analysis of fields that ought to be less circular, because they are less fully abstracted than science or philosophy (for the two prime examples of abstract fields), still carry circularity within them. As Joan Kelly has noted, women's history has made ". . . problematical three of the basic concerns of historical thought: (1) periodization, (2) the categories of social analysis, and (3) theories of social change."<sup>12</sup> As some subject matters were defined central to history, and others were excluded, certain questions were asked, and others were not. Tools of analysis, from theories to particular methodological devices, appear neutral--appear to be, simply, tools. But tools are designed for a particular purpose and, lo and behold, it is that purpose they serve. If we look for the great periods of history in the doings of a certain class and race of men, we will find them; if we then mark history (unprefixed) by those periods, we will continue to find most significant in them the doings of those very men. Women, as Joan Kelly discovered, did not in fact have a Renaissance--and the Renaissance that men had in Europe looks quite different when viewed from the perspective of other countries and peoples.<sup>13</sup> Again, circularity closes out the possibility of considering the broader context of what is studied--and then justifies that exclusion by reference to the definitions and shaping tools of the field.

Circularity, in short, comes also from the kinds of questions we ask, which, once a scholarly tradition is established, tend to become both hidden and enshrined within particular answers that were once found to just those questions. To ask questions about the original questions is to break outside of the circle, to open scholarship up--but is likely to be met with charges of irrelevance, triviality, or inappropriateness. Simply to question the answers to those original questions, as some scholarship on women does, is to stay within the circle, and to risk paralyzing the necessary quest for new and fresh questions.

### III. Peculiar theoretical constructs, and inadequate paradigms

We are at present in an intellectual age in which the analysis of the construction of knowledge is receiving a lot of attention by influential thinkers such as Kuhn, the critical theorists such as Habermas, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and those developing the method of deconstruction--and by feminist scholars working in and outside of those conversations. Such people are reminding us in different as well as overlapping ways that knowledge is a human construct--and the final error to be discussed will return to that issue. Here, the error is a more specific, but deeply related, one: It is the creation of ideal types, models, metaphors, normative notions that make no claim to be generalizations from any real sample at the same time they are used in similar ways as such generalizations.

For example, in philosophy appeal is not infrequently made to "the rational man." Perhaps particularly in ethics, we encounter this creature. He is supposed to think, and we are supposed to be able to

think when we put ourselves in his shoes, as any reasonable person thinks. There is no claim here that philosophers have conducted empirical studies to find out how people actually think; rather, the claim derives from notions of rationality itself (or so it is claimed, or assumed). Philosophers may then say something like this: "Whether or not we can adduce irrefutable arguments to establish that first principles such as non-contradiction must hold, we do know that the rational man recognizes that one can make no sense without honoring them."

There are, however, cultural traditions in which the principle of non-contradiction, at least in the form referred to above, simply does not hold sway. In India, Jain logic, for example, has twelve points and no law of excluded middle. It accommodates a whole range of possibilities, from "it is" to "it isn't," with "it more is than isn't" and similar subtle shades of difference between them--and with a clear statement that error emerges not from any one position, or the opposition between any positions, but from the assumption that one knows before one has been through the whole wheel of possibilities.

The story of the blind people and the elephant is a Jain story: The elephant that felt to one like a rope; to one like a tree trunk; to one like a barrel; to one like a fan; to one like a tube is all of those things. Together, the blind people knew the elephant; one by one, they were partly right, and only wrong if they thought they were wholly right. It is probably worth mentioning that Jain logic developed in the part of India from which Gandhi came.<sup>14</sup>

In short, there are other logics in the world than the one assumed by the "rational man," and they can indeed inform ways of

making decisions, thinking clearly and critically, and acting responsibility on reasoned principles whether the "rational man"--who turns out to look remarkably like an Oxbridge Don upon close examination--understands them or not.

The history of those disciplines that have been confronted with the need, or have been animated by the desire, to deal with works from other cultures as with works from women of all sorts, reveals a large range of such constructs. To be a "hero," to be "an individual," to "win" or to "lose," to have or not have a "plot," to "work," even to "be a woman" or "to be a man" cannot safely be assumed to have meaning within the dominant tradition that will be adequate to the study and expressions of those who were excluded as the tradition was developing. And yet, often they are assumed to have that kind of universal status.

Another example is "economic man." He isn't used in the same ways he once was in the nascent field of economics, but it is not clear that he has entirely disappeared. "Economic man" was supposed to make decisions on certain bases, "all things being equal" (which is never actually the case, of course--these constructs do not claim to be empirically based or even to be linked to human lived realities).. Whether he made decisions based on his own self-interest, or his desire to get the most for the least, or to maximize his profit or benefits in general, he made decisions recognizable within the theoretical constructs of economics. Those who made decisions on different grounds caused the theory trouble--if they were, in fact, covered. Feminists studying women and work, historians and economists, for example, tell us among other things that women have often made economic decisions necessary for their survival as women,

decisions that were necessitated, that is, by their gender in a gender-determined world.

Alice Kessler Harris<sup>15</sup> documents women deciding to work in sales positions in early department stores despite the fact that those positions in factories that were open to women sometimes carried much higher (if still very low) wages. On the face of it, that seems irrational, certainly by "rational" economic reasoning of the sort known to "economic man." However, if we take gender into account, and if we then come to know something about women's realities, it is completely rational: A woman who can improve her economic position most effectively (if not securely) by marrying up, because opportunities for women to rise in their own work are lacking, is being sensible when she takes a job that gives her a more "ladylike" role and more chance of meeting men who make more than she. Furthermore, women, perhaps particularly Black women and poor immigrant women, have had to make job decisions that take into account the real possibility of sexual harassment even when their options were severely limited already.

What appears anomalous in women's behavior in many fields in fact makes sense when we use gender as a basic analytic tool, and so free ourselves from the constructs that create the apparent anomaly. Obviously, such gender-driven considerations can be accommodated to a degree by, say, an interest-maximization model, since "interest" can be expanded to take them into account. The question is how adequately such models can be expanded until/unless the full scope of the analytic and not just the descriptive power of gender, in its intricate intertwining with race, class, ethnicity has been explored.

When women, or any of the prefixed men, appear anomalous in any field, we are probably in the presence of such peculiar theoretical constructs. Consider the example of the I.Q. test, the very name of which has come to be used as the equivalent of the term, "intelligence," however often we are reminded that "I.Q. is what the I.Q. test tests," or the more sweeping and hence more dangerous statement, "Intelligence is what the intelligence test tests." Here we have the conflation of a supposedly empirically-based notion and a peculiar theoretical construct, that of "intelligence." If that were not the case, we would never have had the peculiar controversy about whether Black people, who once tended as a group to score lower than White people on the I.Q. test, are or are not less intelligent. Societal notions of what constitutes and reveals "intelligence," whatever that is, lie behind such tests and re-emerge when results are used, and those notions are not empirical (empirical studies start with assumptions that are not themselves empirical).

Another large area in which we labor within a set of peculiar theoretical constructs is in the prevailing notions of what constitutes the liberal arts. Courses that emphasize doing tend to have a hard time being accepted as proper to the liberal arts; courses that are theoretical do not. History of Art is firmly within the liberal arts, as is the study of literature already written, published and familiar to the literary canon. Studio art is not usually considered a liberal art, and creative writing is often excluded as well. Behind these functioning definitions is a whole paradigm, a shaping notion of what the "higher" learning liberal arts are supposed to impart is. It is a paradigm that derives from the Greeks, the same

ones referred to at the beginning. In that view, those who do are lower sorts of human exercising lower sorts of capabilities, including lower sorts of thinking, than those who think.

In the old Pythagorean image in which the Olympic games are taken to express the major kinds of lives, and of people in those lives, there are those who come to sell things at the games (the lowest sort); those who come to compete; and those who come to watch. Those who come to watch are considered the highest. To be engaged in that which is an end in itself is, in this tradition, taken to be more properly (i.e. ideally) human than to work toward an end, to be engaged in means. But who had the luxury of pursuing learning as an end unto itself? Who, in fact, had the luxury of considering themselves to be ends in themselves--who, but those whose needs were taken care of by others, who were means for the end of the "free" life of the gentleman suited for the liberal arts?

In the great Medieval Universities of Europe, the liberal arts were defined in contradistinction to the servile arts--the higher liberal arts were for gentlemen who would never have to work for a living, while the servile arts were for those who would work. Neither arts were for any women, or for lower class men.

Today, when we evaluate courses for inclusion in liberal arts, we operate with the same hierarchy, as if we still believe that those who think are utterly different from those who do, as if there is no worthy thinking in doing, and no doing properly related to all thinking. We still privilege that which appears to be an end to itself--out of the context of the means on which that end necessarily depends.

Kohlberg's scale of moral development as countered by Carol Gilligan reveals the old hierarchy, the paradigm of the dominant educational and cultural system, as well.<sup>16</sup> To decide by a universalizeable principle is higher, better, more mature than to decide by an ethic of responsibility and care, we are told. Why? One assumes because it is better to decide without reference to concrete others, concrete results and consequences of the sort the real world of action consists in--because it is better to have reference to a realm of "pure" thought rather than a world of real action and specific individuals. This is the old hierarchy once again.

Counter instances can sometimes prevail against generalizations from an inadequate sample, as the discovery of black swans in Australia led to "white" being dropped as one of the defining characteristics of swans--and as the admission that there are and always have been superb female mathematicians sometimes succeeds in undoing cultural definitions of masculinity as indicating superiority in the use of number. Questioning the original questions can sometimes undo circularity. Kelly's re-studying of European history has brought the whole structure of periodization of history into scholarly consciousness,<sup>17</sup> as Angela Davis's work on Black women in the community of slaves has re-defined the key questions for the study of slavery.<sup>18</sup> But where we encounter peculiar theoretical concepts and paradigms, no counter argument from facts prevails and no questioning of the original question does, either, precisely because at that level reality, and/or deeply entrenched value hierarchies, have been assumed, not studied.

Most falsely exclusive generalizations, and most circular arguments, reveal their cultural, political, social roots when met with counter facts and new questions, of course. Still, it is important to know what kind of claim a central scholarly tool is making, if only because we can save a lot of time and effort by knowing which tools cannot be disproven because they are not and never were based on facts--adequately surveyed or not.

#### IV. Falsification of the Status of Knowledge

This set of errors is directly related to the one discussed above, only it goes deeper. We are in its presence when scholars within a field confuse the subject matter as constituted by the particular history of their field with the subject matter itself. For example, when historians confuse the past as it has been recorded, interpreted, and studied by historians with the past itself, this error has been committed. By that view, until very recently indeed women and most men had very little or no history--and hence, no past. That is a ludicrous notion, of course, but it has operated all the same, as indicated by the idea that Women's History is a separate subject from unprefix History, and is one that has little to contribute to the real subject. When philosophers study the texts, and specific issues, of those already called "philosophers," they, too, confuse their subject matter with their field. That many will say that their subject matter is thinking itself, and that the specific texts (and issues raised by them) that they use are selected simply because they best introduce students to thinking, doesn't change that they are begging the question by falling into circularity.

What defined the field turns out to be the best representative of it, and hence it seems all right to define the field in terms of those best representatives--and then we are back where we started, taking the field as it has been taught to be the subject matter itself.

All fields have in fact gone through many different revolutions as well as evolutions in what is taken to be the field itself, as Kuhn has shown in the sciences.<sup>19</sup> It is common today to say that one's field has a history, and that that history has shaped what is taken to be central to, even constitutive of, that field, but it is relatively uncommon to accept that position when what one has been taught and has taught is questioned. If that were not the case, transforming the curriculum in the light of new knowledge about those who have for so long been excluded would have been if not easy, at least immediately interesting to us all. But it is hard to recognize as philosophy, as art something that emerges from entirely different sorts of activities than we were taught lead to art, as history something that concerns activities that seem utterly insignificant by the criteria we learned for significance.

Unless we remember that knowledge is a human construct and so reflects the interests, intentions, and assumed meaning systems of its creators, we tend to consider analyses of its derivation at best peripheral to it, and to try to protect it from being "reduced" to its history rather than welcoming the illuminating insights into its deepest assumptions and structures history can provide. Furthermore, unless we remember that the disciplines we were all taught are also professions, we will overlook a critical aspect of the history and sociology of the knowledge we learned and pass on to our students.

Science has been a profession for centuries now, and a highly exclusive one. Careers have been made and broken in science, and considerations of truth or falsity have by no means always been central in that process. The same is true in all academic fields: They are professions in which some people have prevailed at the cost of others, and not always on merit. Prejudice has played a role, and prevailing social values and interests; funding has played a role, and the availability of research positions in universities; internal politics has played a role, along with rank ambition. Noble impulses have also been present, of course, as have dedicated scholars and writers and artists, and unpopular views and works have, at times, returned to prevail. But we are falsifying what we teach students when we do not introduce them to our fields as professions, and those professions as part of a broader history because, in so doing, we hide from them the human realities, the drama, of the creation of what is accepted as knowledge.

That would be serious enough, but when what we present them excludes the majority of humankind in all the ways we know it does and then do not give them any way to understand those exclusions, we leave them with one of two options: They can simply be unaware of the exclusions, and so perpetuate the errors discussed above, or they can be aware of the exclusions and assume they indicate a complete lack of achievement, of significance on the part of those excluded. Only by opening up the drama of the creation of the knowledge we are still passing on to them can we help them to understand what they are receiving, its strengths and its failures, which are not the strengths and failures of those it excludes. Being unaware of victimization and

blaming the victim are the two social and political equivalents of what happens when we present knowledge out of its context.

### CONCLUSION

When we recognize that we have generalized too far from too few, we open ourselves to diversity, cease turning difference into deviance or otherness, stop confusing equality with sameness, and learn to think more subtly about a far richer subject matter.

When we recognize that we have too often used definitions, key concepts, standards, and methods in a circular and self-justifying way, we are open to the challenge to immerse ourselves in new material, to suspend judgment for awhile while we learn to hear new voices and so become able to think better about many more of us.

When we give up theoretical constructs that idealize the few and paradigms that hold us in the past, we can begin to see what may be helpful in our quest to order, to focus, the vast array of new knowledge now available to us.

And when we give up the notion that what we teach stands free of its history, we can return to the quest for knowledge the human drama that informed it in the past so that it is evident that we are responsible for what and how we know.

As we work on the critique that continues to be a part of the new scholarship on women, we become able to find these basic errors, and to move toward overcoming them. As we clear the ground, we find ourselves able to ask questions and seek answers that were hidden before, or rendered marginal and "uninteresting"--and fascinating, central questions they are. For example, in all these years, male

dominance has been explained away as "natural" if it was considered at all. But where it came from, how it has been effected and expressed and symbolized and perpetuated and challenged, is surely one of the central questions the drama of human history and culture poses.

Again, once we have actually noticed that women are not only not covered by the "generic" universalized, idealized "Man" but are excluded from consideration on the deepest, defining levels of knowledge, we become able to notice that we all live our lives as women and as men, and that that is one of the most central aspects of our lives, not one of the most trivial. We begin to understand the importance of gender as an analytical concept, one that is at least as basic as class and as race, for how we experience our class, our race, our ethnicity, our whole culture is shaped for us by our gender, just as our experience of gender is shaped by those other human constructs. Certainly, we can finally put gender into the arena of such human constructs available for study, and available to change, when we stop writing off this one aspect of what it means to be human as "natural." And when gender is available, as it is now, as an analytical concept central to all thought about our human world, we can think about men as men as well. We couldn't do so very well when those who controlled the public meaning system were claiming both exclusivity and inclusiveness for Man, anymore than we could think very well about diversity when we tended to value singular universals--Man, Mankind--so highly.

And when we include women in our thinking about what it means to be human, it becomes clear how curiously and dangerously falsified some of the most dramatic efforts at wisdom have been. The dominant

tradition has at its core a realization that "man is mortal." Mortality has been one of the defining characteristics of what it means to be human, and sages and poets and saints have long pondered what that means. Among other things it means, we have been told by those included in the dominant Euro-American White male tradition, is that we die alone, that mortality creates for humans a radical individuality. But those who consider it proper to think about women when they think about humankind know that we are not only creatures of mortality, but also of natality. We are creatures who die; we are also creatures who are born. And we are not born alone. When we remember birth as one of the basic human experiences, rather than considering it something secret, something "merely natural," something that belongs in the private sphere with women, we become able to think of humans as fundamentally in relation rather than fundamentally alone. A culture that does not think about women risks being a culture obsessed with death, and that is a risk the dominant culture in this country has run for too long.

It is from those defined as on the margin, as trivial, or deviant, or Other that the clearest view of the center is obtained. The few that defined themselves as the inclusive term, the norm and the ideal committed errors we know in our marrow to be errors as they distort and falsify our own lives. As we continue our works, our scholarship, our lives, we need to remain sensitive to those feelings of violation: Often, it is our feelings that tell us when our minds, operating within the languages that have excluded us, are about to betray us. And that, too, is an apprehension that helps us correct the errors at the base of the dominant tradition. Feelings are not

alien to rationality, as body is not alien to mind. The same hierarchical paradigm we have discussed is behind the notion that they are (mind = the ruling few who are ends in themselves and qualified to rule body = women and, in a different way, working men who need to be ruled), and we need no longer accept it.

The errors are simple, obvious, and almost all-pervasive, but we are not without recourse. When we trust ourselves; when we study those who have been excluded not as object but as subjects; when we test the tools we have been given for scholarship for their adequacy to our new subjects rather than vice versa; when we learn to adopt the perspective of those most marginalized for its sheer revelatory power of the mystified particularity of those who have claimed to be universal as well as a source of some of the richest insights into the central reality of race, class, gender, ethnicity; when we remain alert to all the ways the basic error and the (at least) four derivatives from them we have been exploring shape the world and the thinking around us, we can become ex-patriates. The errors are not necessary; not by nature, not by requirement of rationality, not by anything. They were committed by particular people in particular times, and they can be undone by a kind of critical thinking that is directly related to action because it reveals the world and its power structures within the most supposedly neutral, disinterested and "merely" academic forms of knowing, and knowledge.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard McKeon, ed., "Politics" in Sixteen Basic Words of Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 1127, pp. 1252-1253.

<sup>2</sup>Werner Jaeger, Paideia, Volume I, translated by Gilbert Higlet. (New York: Galaxy/Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>This paper has grown out of work I have been doing supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation to write a book on the implications of Feminist Scholarship for the humanities (co-authored with Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley Center for Research on Women). The paper further revised will serve as an overview for the book along with another by Dr. McIntosh.

<sup>4</sup>Inge K. Broverman et al., "Sex-role stereotypes and clinical judgements of mental health," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 34 (1970): 1-7.

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive Developmental Approach" in T. Lickon, ed. Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research and Social Issues, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976) and Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies. (Old Westburg, New York: Feminist Press, 1982).

<sup>7</sup>Gerda Lerner, The Female Experience: An American Documentary, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1977).

<sup>8</sup>They did so in a class I taught at Queens College, CUNY, 1985.

<sup>9</sup>Immanuel Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

<sup>10</sup>Michael Patton, Alternative Evaluation Research Paradigm (Grand Forks, North Dakota: University of North Dakota Press, 1975), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is considered the "Father of Modern Science." The New Atlantis (any edition).

<sup>12</sup>Joan Kelly, Women History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>"Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in Kelly, Women, History and Theory, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>D. Mackenzie Brown, The White Umbrella: Indian Political Thought From Manu to Gandhi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup>Out of Work A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) See chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>16</sup>Gilligan, In a Different Voice.

<sup>17</sup>Kelly, Women, History and Theory.

<sup>18</sup>Angela Davis, "The Black Women's Role in the Community of Slaves" Black Scholar, 3 (December, 1971). Also see her Women, Race, and Class (New York: Random House, 1981).

<sup>19</sup>Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).