

would find us some taxis. It turned out they were undercover police officers and the taxis were brand new Mazdas with white-gloved drivers, but they did drive us back and they did collect a fare.

The next day was the opening ceremony, which was held in the Olympic Stadium in Beijing. Tickets had been issued and security was tight. Guards inspected purses and confiscated, of all things, bottles of drinking water. The ceremonies were quite impressive, with dancing and marching by many groups. Balloons and birds were released.

On Thursday, the Forum opened. There were women from all over the world, many in their own dress. Most spoke at least some English so communication wasn't too much of a problem. There were some 5,000 workshops on a site of over 30 acres. Many were set up in tents, some had classroom space, and some were in nearby hotel conference rooms. They followed thirteen themes, including economic development, women in politics, education, human rights, religion and spirituality, violence against women, the media, etc. There were also cultural events and art displays. Various groups distributed literature. There was a marketplace featuring goods from various countries, a bookstore, and a computer center for sending and receiving E-mail. It was impossible to participate in more than a sampling of the offerings.

There were workshops on grassroots efforts for clean water and equal education for girls. One woman from China told the story about how her grandmother had cut her mother's hair and dressed her as a boy to send her to school. She, herself, had benefited by having a mother who also believed in education. We heard about the trafficking in young girls that takes place in many parts of the world. We heard about child brides. We heard about how, when the Ayatollah came into power in Iran and mandated the wearing of veils, 30,000 Iranian women took to the streets and shed their veils and had to leave Iran. We heard about how the Archbishop and the Mullah got together in Nairobi, Kenya, a country where population is skyrocketing out of control and AIDS is running rampant, and burned the sex education books.

We heard some positive stories too. We heard about women having more seats

than men on the city council of Stockholm. We heard about the Swedish law allowing a year's family leave, at least a month of it to be taken by the husband. We heard about the peace activists in Japan working to clear the world of nuclear weapons.

Religion plays a very prominent role in patriarchal cultures. Often culture and religion are so intertwined that it is difficult if not impossible to tell where one stops and the other begins. Religions that began as an effort to preserve the ethnicity of a group or clan employ control of women and their sexuality to achieve this end. Judaism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are examples of these ethnic religions. Women were dominated to ensure the purity of the bloodlines. Two other major world religions, Christianity and Islam, are derived from and expand upon Judaism and retain many of its ideas and customs.

The Muslim women present at the conference were intent on explaining that their religion was "misunderstood" and that they were very happy with their freely chosen lot. It is still difficult for me to believe that a woman wrapped up in

heavy black cloth in 90° heat is "liberated." We must remember, however, that these women are indoctrinated with these ideas from early childhood.

Very few of the women at the conference seem to recognize the fundamental role that religion plays in patriarchies and the degradation of women. Many of the workshops of the Christian women were intent on changing the religion from within: defining God as mother and father, eliminating sexist language from hymns and scriptures, and advocating more power for women.

Many women were ready to embrace "New Age" ideas or return to ancient goddess religions in an attempt to circumvent patriarchy. They stressed spirituality and rituals.

The conclusions developed by the NGO groups were sent to the U.N. Conference. They will be issuing a report to world governments on ways to advance the cause of women. While nonbinding, it is, nevertheless, a good set of goals and strategies, and progress can be measured. It becomes a lever for change, and I believe we will see positive changes over the coming years.

Philosophy and Feminist Politics: A Brief Guide

Below, Ellen Klein and Barry Smith continue a debate began in FI's Spring 1995 feature, "The Many Faces of Feminism."—EDS.

Ellen Klein and Barry Smith

Philosophy" in its most uncontroversial definition is "rationally critically thinking, of a more or less systematic kind about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of knowledge), and the conduct of

life (ethics or theory of value)."¹ "Analytic Philosophy," at least broadly conceived, meets this definition exactly.

"Continental philosophy," in that aspect that has been adopted by American universities, takes its inspiration from a variety of sources, including existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. Yet both continental and analytic philosophy have common roots in the work of Brentano, Husserl, and Frege, and younger philosophers in Europe and elsewhere are increasingly turning to these common roots and to varieties of continental philosophy, which can be called

*Ellen Klein is professor of philosophy at the University of Florida and Barry Smith is professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is the author of *Feminism Under Fire* (Prometheus Books) and he is editor of *The Monist*.*

"analytic." What we wish to stress here is that, whether under the rubric of the analytic or the continental school, philosophy just is not politics.

Philosophy Is Not Politics

This does not mean that there is not an important branch of philosophy—political philosophy—that attends to the evaluation of forms of social organization, especially government, from a critical perspective. Nor does it mean that the methods of philosophical analysis and argument cannot be applied to any area of contemporary politics—from questions about the role of Supreme Court Justices to the need for laws pertaining to abortion. To say that philosophy is not politics is, most fundamentally, to reaffirm the is/ought distinction, i.e., to reaffirm that there is a distinction between the way the world *is* and the way it *ought to be*.

Philosophers may engage in political activism. But—and this is the primary lesson of the recognition that no "ought" can be derived from any mere statement of what "is"—such activism is independent of any philosophy. Philosophers may strive to change the world; but this is not their task as philosophers. It is, rather, one of analyzing proposed justifications for such change, of testing and criticizing theories of how the world might be changed, of pointing out the likely positive and negative consequences of such change, and so on.

Have feminists, analytic or continental, taken this distinction seriously? Not if Rosi Braidotti's work is any indication.²

Braidotti Again

Feminist" philosophy is at best a *contradictio in adjecto* and at worst a monstrosity along the lines of "Aryan philosophy" or "Jewish chemistry." It should not be embraced for at least two important reasons. The first is logical: philosophy and politics are, as we have argued, distinct activities. The second is pragmatic: to confuse philosophy and politics in the suggested fashion is not good for women.

Does the thesis that philosophy and politics are different mean that the philosopher must defend the existence of an Archimedean point—a completely neutral,

God's-eye view—from which to judge the epistemic or moral goodness of any particular standpoint? No. Philosophers, like all human beings, possess no perfect knowledge and they are subject, in their search for truth, to all sorts of blinkers and biases which they must seek to eliminate, in stumbling fashion, by continued mutual criticism and testing of arguments and theories. Yet this does not mean that the search for truth is itself misconceived and that some form of relativism (or of "anything goes") must be embraced.

What is really at issue, then, is relativism.

Relativism Refuted?

Clifford Goertz's claim to the effect that the alternative to relativism, absolute dogmatism, is worse than relativism itself, is a blatant caricature of non-relativistic positions. What he and Braidotti both miss is that one can be open-minded towards the beliefs of others and yet not be so *wide-minded* as to accept every belief as if it were as cogent as every other. One need not believe that every position is as right as every other in order to believe that there is a right to be had.

Furthermore, Braidotti herself is not a real relativist. In her article it is clear that there are certain beliefs, e.g., the belief that "women ought to be oppressed," that Braidotti would claim are false. Does she mean only false for her, i.e., relatively false? Or does she mean false *simpliciter*? It seems that Braidotti, to avoid cognitive dissonance, would have to give up the political goal of empowering women if she were truly to embrace the philosophical goal of maintaining relativism.

Nomadism/Relativism: Not Good for Women

Embracing relativism would mean that one could support the claim: "Women ought not be oppressed" as at best only relatively true. But then the contradictory claim, "Women ought to be oppressed," could be relatively true also. But if every claim is only relatively true, then adjudication will be in the interest of the stronger. And given that men, in most segments of society, are in power, there will then be a good chance that women will remain in a subordinate position.

Conclusions

Therefore, what looked to Braidotti to be our "hostile-patronizing-corporatist-rightwing-intolerant-fundamentalist-contemptuous-facile-unrigorous-disrespectful-ignorant-irrelevant-privileged-patetic-militant-masculinist-simplistic-bourgeois-authoritarian-universalistic-nostalgic"³ approach to philosophy was nothing more than a commitment to the distinction between feminism *qua* politics and feminism *qua* philosophy. The former we wholeheartedly support; the latter, we believe wholeheartedly, is both insupportable and ultimately harmful to women.

Notes

1. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, (ed.) Ted Honderich, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 666.

2. Rosi Braidotti, "Feminism and Modernity," *FREE INQUIRY*, Vol. 15 No. 2, Spring, 1995, pp. 23–29.

3. See Rosi Braidotti, "The Nostalgic Trip," *FREE INQUIRY*, Letters, Fall 1995.

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1995), a hoary phony that has been used time and again by freethinkers: Immediately after the phrase, "best of all possible Worlds; if there were no Religion in it!!," John Adams repudiates these words by saying, "but in this exclamation I should have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in public company—I mean hell." Though a deist, Adams found religion a socially useful institution.

John George
Professor of Political Science
and Sociology
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Okla.

Steven Morris's article was an excellent, concise presentation of the facts, particularly because it—unlike the propaganda circulated by the extreme Religious Right—gave precise citations to the views of the Founding Fathers. Now, I hope *FI* will take the next logical step, and commission an article from an expert on the Religious Right's tactics of politics (and particularly, the tactics of demagogues and authoritarians).

Howard A. Karten
Randolph, Mass.

Professor Morris claims that the Founding Fathers "rejected the divinity of Jesus and the absurdities of the Old and New Testaments." In 1854 a small group petitioned the U.S. Congress to take Christian principles out of government. The House Judiciary Committee responded on March 27, 1854:

Had the people, during the Revolution, had any suspicion of any attempt to war against Christianity that Revolution would have been strangled in its cradle. At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and the amendments the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, not any one sect . . . in this age there can be no substitute for Christianity. That was the religion of the founders of the republic and they expected it to remain the religion of their descendants. The Great vital and conservative element in our system is the belief of our people in the

pure doctrines and divine truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

According to Professor Morris "the Founding Fathers [were not] devout Christians who envisioned a Christian nation," but "were generally deists or Unitarians." I guess it was just an oversight that the House Judiciary Committee forgot that great host of deists and Unitarians.

Everette Hatcher, III
Little Rock, Ark.

Though I lay claim to being a thorough-going secular humanist, honesty demands that I point out the failure of Steven Morris to prove that "The Founding Fathers Were *Not* Christians." While many of the founders have in the past been falsely characterized as Christians, one cannot make a general case against their being Christian by singling out only seven persons, while disregarding all others without comment. Surely it would have been expected that the case would be made upon a study that included as many of the Founding Fathers as possible, leaving the conclusion unassailable. It is not nearly as important to make a case against the Christian Founders and the Christian Right as to present the whole truth, which can stand without shading.

Walter S. Boone
Terrell, N.C.

Feminist Nomadism

"Feminist nomadism" ("Feminism and Modernity," *FI*, Spring 1995) as interpreted by Rosi Braidotti is simply a modernized version of the "contentious knowledge" of medieval scholastics. That is to say, it explains nothing and accomplishes nothing except, of course, a false sense of intellectual importance on the part of those sufficiently sophomoric to indulge in it. On the contrary, lasting change in society such that feminism must attain can only come about through practical action guided by sound theoretical knowledge. In short, it will come about through the ways of science, not the ways

of mere metaphysical ramblings.

Moreover, Braidotti's insinuation that modern science and technology has worked against women is simply wrong—so wrong in fact that it staggers the imagination. Empirical science has challenged and eliminated many of the myths that have held women down for centuries.

Furthermore, the assertion by Ms. Braidotti that science and technology are sources of atrocity is again very wrong. What we call "crimes against humanity" were here long before the dawn of modern science. There have many human atrocities in the modern era—such as war and destruction of the environment. But none of these maladies stem from scientific thought. They may stem from greed or naked power, but not from the civic values of freedom, toleration, and respect that give science rise.

John L. Indo
Houston, Tex.

Professor Rosi Braidotti claims to be defending "... a feminist, postmodernist, anti-relativist standpoint" that she calls "nomadic subjectivity." In that same issue were critiques of the article by Barry Smith and Ellen R. Klein. Now, in the Fall 1995 *FI*, the professor complains that the criticism was based on a "simplistic reading of poststructuralist philosophy. . . ." Then she explains, "Poststructuralism is about the deconstruction of essentialized notions of the subject." Well, I'm certainly glad she cleared *that* up.

Braidotti must grasp the idea that "nomadic subjectivity" is her thesis and it is up to her to make it understandable to others. Postmodern philosophers claim that the author cannot convey her meaning to the reader but that the reader provides her (or his) own interpretation. As a result those philosophers write undecipherable jargon then complain when someone produces an interpretation that they don't like, claiming that "that isn't what I mean at all!"

I went back to re-read both the original article and the criticisms and the professor's response and I discovered that I still couldn't finish the original article. It is a

mishmash of disconnected, stereotyped phrases, a sort of literary "musak," with no structure or central theme that is discernible. Or discernible only with prodigious effort and the outcome is not worth that effort.

David J. Simmons
Ridgecrest, Calif.

More on Opus Dei

I learned indirectly of your Winter 1994/95 issue concerning Opus Dei ("Opus Dei and Other Secret Societies"). It occurred to me that you might do well to ask whether—at least as reflected in these articles—the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism is not itself a "smaller closed society," especially when seen in contrast to the Roman Catholic church. Timothy Madigan asserts that "one of the central tenets of humanism is the freedom to inquire," but your section on Opus Dei reflects a closed attitude toward any information provided by the institution itself, or by the Catholic church, of which it is a part.

Hoping to call your attention to the need for further inquiry (and, I would add, for rectification), I will point out several egregious errors found in your presentation. First, Opus Dei came into being in 1928, and it has grown with the knowledge and support of the authorities of the Catholic church. Its telephone number is listed in directories around the country. To refer to it as a "secret society" is ludicrous.

Opus Dei's statutes (a published document available to anyone) make clear that the Prelature's aims are strictly religious. A hallmark of the founder, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, was his insistent emphasis on personal freedom and on the defense of pluralism. He warned others earnestly of the danger of totalitarianism (in its many different guises) when it was unfashionable to do so in Spain.

Years later, when offered congratulations on the appointment of several members of Opus Dei to Franco's cabinet by a Roman prelate, he replied firmly that no congratulations were in order, and that he was not interested in the apparent worldly success of the members of Opus Dei, and much less in their political orientation. He

only wanted them to act always in accord with the highest moral standards, whatever their occupation.

Blessed Josemaría did not write exclusively for members of Opus Dei; in fact, many people, even non-Christians, have admired the high ideals he writes about. One such book, *The Way*, has appeared in many languages. I do not think any person has asked to be admitted to Opus Dei without having read this book, and even meditated upon it. If you read it yourself—although you may disagree with it—I am certain you will find highly improbable the thought that someone could come to Opus Dei and not be challenged. What's more, no one coming to Opus Dei will find it to be a stepping stone toward worldly influence.

I would conclude this brief response by quoting a phrase from *The Way*:

Let us be slow to judge. Each one sees things from his or her own point of view and with his own mind, with all its limitations, through eyes that are often dimmed and clouded by passion. Moreover, some people have an outlook that is so subjective and so unhealthy that they make a few random strokes and assure us that these represent our portrait, our conduct. Of what little worth are the judgments of men!"

Although you may reject the concluding phrase, I add it anyway: "Don't judge without sifting your judgment in prayer."

Your series of articles does no credit to any presumed objectivity, rationality, or ethical spirit in your publication.

William Schmitt
Communications Director
Prelate of Opus Dei
New Rochelle, N.Y.

Mario Mendez-Acosta, author of "Opus Dei: A Threat to Liberty" (FI, Winter 1994/95), replies:

Nowhere in his letter does William Schmitt try to answer, explain, or refute some of the testimonies of hundreds of people from within and outside Opus Dei that describe this organization as an authoritarian and manipulative cult. Nowhere, for instance, does he deny that Opus Dei endorses physical self-torture for all its members.

He just claims that all these persons lie and that the group is open, tolerant, and concerned only with religious matters. This just isn't so.

Schmitt misrepresents the issue by pointing out that Opus Dei's address may easily be found in the phone book, or that today its statutes are supposedly available to anyone. It wasn't this way for many years. The fact is, as witnessed by many of its estranged members, that Opus Dei's only real concern is obtaining power, both political and over people's lives. In order to secure this aim, it uses veiled threats or inspires fear in the hearts of those that dare to say no to the power of a cult that tries to steal their lives away.

Against the authoritarian and self deprecatory maxims of Escrivá's book *The Road*, a Catalan Catholic priest, Josep Dalmau, has written an authentic humanistic rebuttal: his Counterpoints to 'The Road' of the Opus Dei, where each of Escrivá's maxims is rewritten with generosity and concern for human dignity. Dalmau answers maxim no. 451, about judgment, with his own phrase:

We cannot do more than what we are capable of doing. Our reasoning judges things and the conduct of men. It has been created for that purpose. Let us judge, then, without hypocrisy, but always with a measure of transiency. Our judgements are subjective, but since we don't have others, they are the best we have. It's more worthwhile to risk our opinion than to withhold it forever in suspense. Up to a point to err is a normal thing; only a simpleton makes no judgement of any kind, even if it's only a provisional one.

Cults abhor criticism. They never acknowledge it in any measure; they always consider it as an unfair and uncalled-for attack. Maybe Schmitt should heed Escrivá's maxim no. 596, of *The Road*: "Don't be pained in that they point out your shortcomings. It's the offense against God and the destruction you may cause that should hurt you."

To which Dalmau comments:

It isn't good to disguise your shortcomings or to hide your qualities. If people know you as you really are, they will never despise you, they will truly appreciate you as they want to be held in good esteem, in spite of everything else.