

The Double Standard: Ethical Issues and Gender Discrimination in Traditional Western Ethics

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Abstract : The feminists have identified the traditional western ethical theories as basically male centered. Feminists are committed to develop a critique showing how the traditional western ethics together with traditional philosophy, irrespective of the claim for gender neutrality, all throughout remained gender-biased. This exclusion of women's experiences from the moral discourse is justified on the ground that women cannot be moral agents, since they are not rational. By way of entailment, we are thus led to the position that virtues of traditional ethics, so viewed, can nothing but rational and hence male. The ears of traditional Western ethicists have been attuned to male rather than female ethical voices. Right from the Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and even philosophers like Freud, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and many others the dualism between reason-passion or mind and body started gaining prominence. These, according to them, have either intentionally excluded women or else have used certain male moral experience as the standard for all moral experiences, thereby resulting once again in exclusion of women's experiences. Men are identified with rationality and hence contrasted with women whose sphere is believed to be that of emotion and feeling. This act of exclusion of women's experience from moral discourse has given birth to a tradition that emphasizes reason over emotion, universal over the particular, and justice over caring. That patriarchy's use of gender distinctions in the realm of Ethics has resulted in gender discriminations is an undeniable fact. Hence women's moral agency is said to have often been denied, not simply by the act of exclusion of women from moral debate or sheer ignorance of their contributions, but through philosophical claims to the effect that women lack moral reason. Traditional or mainstream ethics cannot justify its claim for universality, objectivity and gender neutrality the standards from which were drawn the legitimacy of the various moral maxims or principles of it. Right from the Platonic and Aristotelian period the dualism between reason-passion or mind and body started gaining prominence. Men are identified with rationality and hence contrasted with women whose sphere is believed to be that of emotion and feeling. Through the Association of the masculine values with reason (the feminine with irrational), was created the standard prototype of moral virtues. The feminists' critique of the traditional mainstream Ethics is based on this charge that because of its inherent gender bias, in the name of gender distinctions, Ethics has so far been justifying discriminations. In this paper, attempt would make upon the gender biased-ness of traditional ethics. But Feminists are committed to develop a critique showing how the traditional ethics together with traditional philosophy, irrespective of the claim for gender neutrality, all throughout remained gender-biased. We would try to show to what extent traditional ethics is male centered and consequentially fails to justify its claims for universality and gender neutrality.

Keywords : ethics, gender, male-centered, traditional

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