

Logic, Feminism, and Feminist Logic / Logic, Feminism, and Being a Feminist in Logic

Dr. Sara L. Uckelman
Durham University
s.l.uckelman@durham.ac.uk
@SaraLUckelman

Logica 2023
21 June 2023

My questions

- Who is logic for? Who gets to be/count as a logician? Who is excluded?
- What are ways in which “logic” or “reason” or “rationality” (especially claims of “being reasonable” or “being rational”) weaponized in modern western society? Who does this weapon tend to be used against?
- If we are currently living in a society that is under the “rule of reason”, what would an alternative to this rule look like? Could reason/rationality/logic still play a role?

Women and Logic

That women are not logical is one of the recognized conventions of social life [1, p. 206].

Women and Logic

That women are not logical is one of the recognized conventions of social life [1, p. 206].

Hale's questions:

- 1 What underpins this convention
- 2 What is meant by the convention

Where the convention comes from

Hale's attempt to answer (1) via Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*:

- A necessary part of the logical faculty is memory
 - ▶ You need to remember what A you started out with to use it later on in a proof.
 - ▶ You need memory for any sort of generalisation across time.
- According to Weininger, “the absolute woman has no memory” [1, p. 206].
- So women lack one of the necessary components of the logic faculty.

What the convention means

Depends on what we mean by “logic” [1, p. 212]:

- the logic of the schools
- the logic of argument
- the logic of consistency
- the consistency between theory and practice

What the convention means

Depends on what we mean by “logic” [1, p. 212]:

- the logic of the schools
- the logic of argument
- the logic of consistency
- the consistency between theory and practice

If it means consistency between theory and practice or “consistency [. . .] with whatever plan, good or bad, happens to be under discussion” [1, pp. 216–217], “we shall often find that these intuitions of women are often logical enough” [1, p. 211].

“Women’s logic” or no logic at all?

Hale begrudgingly allows women logic, albeit of a specific, narrow, rarified type—women’s logic.

“Women’s logic” or no logic at all?

Hale begrudgingly allows women logic, albeit of a specific, narrow, rarified type—women’s logic.

Fastforward almost 80 years:

More recent authors, with explicitly feminist leanings, reject the suitability of logic for women entirely:

Logic. . . is not a feminine subject. . . logic is, after all, a masculine subject [2, p. 2])

Nye: Logician \rightarrow \neg Feminist

Nye excludes *a priori* the possibility of being both a feminist and a logician:
logic is the creation of defensive male subjects who have lost touch with their lived experience [2, p. 4].

...

an invention of men, that is something men do and say [2, p. 5].

...

if a feminist reader is to remain reader and not turn logician at the last moment [2, p. 175, emphasis added].

Feminist philosophy/philosophers more generally

- “Men are mind/thinking/rationality, women are body/emotion/irrationality”
- “Women have brought the body into philosophy!”
- “What women in philosophy do”
- “areas that women work on in philosophy” = “feminist philosophy”
- “rationality = masculinity” and “irrationality = femininity”

Feminist philosophy/philosophers more generally

- “Men are mind/thinking/rationality, women are body/emotion/irrationality”
- “Women have brought the body into philosophy!”
- “What women in philosophy do”
- “areas that women work on in philosophy” = “feminist philosophy”
- “rationality = masculinity” and “irrationality = femininity”

If this is what “being a woman in philosophy is,” then either what I do isn’t philosophy or I am not a woman.

Logic as a tool of oppression

But let's take Nye's claim that logic is a tool of oppression/tool of the patriarchy seriously. If it is:

- how is it?
 - ▶ A demarcation of who gets to count

- how can we mitigate this?

Logic as a tool of oppression

But let's take Nye's claim that logic is a tool of oppression/tool of the patriarchy seriously. If it is:

- how is it?
 - ▶ A demarcation of who gets to count
 - ▶ "For Kant, it is not only women who are excluded from reason by their possession of a gallantly presented but clearly inferiorised 'beautiful understanding', but also workers, and blacks" [3, p. 436].
- how can we mitigate this?

Rejection vs. revision

Plumwood (1993) rejects Nye's broad brush characterization of logic:

Why does it make a case for abandoning logic, as opposed to critically reconstructing it and making much more limited claims for it? [3, p. 438].

What should we revise?

Plumwood highlights a tension between:

- Logic's status as a neutral tool and
- It's non-neutral position on the inclusion and exclusion of different people.

Although logic is usually assumed to be a paradigm of neutrality, the work of feminist philosophers has suggested that even logic has been shaped by these relations of domination, a claim I will help to support here [3, p. 437].

...

[we can] really insist that all uses of language be grounded in personal experience, the testimony of the witness, and 'the normality of human interchange that logic refuses' [3, p. 439].

Against classical negation

The 'naturalness' of classical logic is the 'naturalness' of domination, of concepts of otherness framed in terms of the perspective of the master [3, p. 454].

Classical negation is a tool of oppression because of its dualistic nature: it carves up the world into X 's and non- X 's.

It is one thing to be an X , but it is many things to be a non- X . It is one thing to be a man; but to be a non-man is to be a woman, or an enby, or any of many other things. The X /non- X binary erases all the differences in the non- X category, defining its members in terms of what they are not rather than in what they are.

Against classical negation

The 'naturalness' of classical logic is the 'naturalness' of domination, of concepts of otherness framed in terms of the perspective of the master [3, p. 454].

Classical negation is a tool of oppression because of its dualistic nature: it carves up the world into X 's and non- X 's.

It is one thing to be an X , but it is many things to be a non- X . It is one thing to be a man; but to be a non-man is to be a woman, or an enby, or any of many other things. The X /non- X binary erases all the differences in the non- X category, defining its members in terms of what they are not rather than in what they are.

Ergo, (Plumwood argues) we should reject classical negation and opt for something relevant.

Feminist logic

(Because I said “feminist logic” in my original title, so I feel obliged to say something about this. . .)

- Logical pluralism
- Plumwood’s arguments against classical negation in favor of relevance negation
- Epistemic logics incorporating standpoint epistemology
- new special issue on Plumwood of the *Australasian Journal of PHilosophy*
- forthcoming volume, *Feminist Philosophy and Formal Logic*, eds. Cook & Yap
- 4-valued FDE as providing the logical space for “man”/“woman”/“both”/“neither”.

Feminist logic

(Because I said “feminist logic” in my original title, so I feel obliged to say something about this. . .)

- Logical pluralism
- Plumwood’s arguments against classical negation in favor of relevance negation
- Epistemic logics incorporating standpoint epistemology
- new special issue on Plumwood of the *Australasian Journal of PHilosophy*
- forthcoming volume, *Feminist Philosophy and Formal Logic*, eds. Cook & Yap
- 4-valued FDE as providing the logical space for “man”/“woman”/“both”/“neither”. (But why stop there?)

How do I know I'm not mistaken?

- Nye says logic is a tool of oppression. How do I know that I am not participating in this oppression by doing logic?
- Plumwood says classical negation is oppressive because of the way it homogenizes the ways in which one can be a non- X .

Logic as a tool of liberation (1)

Plumwood agrees with Nye that logic can be used as a tool of oppression when it involves reductive negation, partitioning things into X and non- X ; it is oppressive because of the way it erases different ways of being a non- X .

Logic as a tool of liberation (1)

Plumwood agrees with Nye that logic can be used as a tool of oppression when it involves reductive negation, partitioning things into X and non- X ; it is oppressive because of the way it erases different ways of being a non- X .

But just as classical negation erases the many ways in which there can be more than one way to be a non- X , something that neither Plumwood nor Nye recognize is that in many cases, there is more than one way *to be an X* .

(Side tangent on descriptive vs. normative)

(If I am a woman, and I am in philosophy, then what I am doing is “what women in philosophy do.”)

(If I am a feminist, and I am doing logic, then what I am doing is feminist logic.)

Logic as a tool of liberation (2)

It is precisely the extent to which logic is open and available to women, including/especially those who don't necessarily perform femininity the way that feminists may want us to, that logic can provide a space of liberation.

Let's go back to our original questions

- Who is logic for? Who gets to be/count as a logician? Who is excluded?
- What are ways in which “logic” or “reason” or “rationality” (especially claims of “being reasonable” or “being rational”) weaponized in modern western society? Who does this weapon tend to be used against?
- If we are currently living in a society that is under the “rule of reason”, what would an alternative to this rule look like? Could reason/rationality/logic still play a role?

Let's go back to our original questions

- Who is logic for? Who gets to be/count as a logician? Who is excluded?
- What are ways in which “logic” or “reason” or “rationality” (especially claims of “being reasonable” or “being rational”) weaponized in modern western society? Who does this weapon tend to be used against?
- If we are currently living in a society that is under the “rule of reason”, what would an alternative to this rule look like? Could reason/rationality/logic still play a role?
- To which I'll add: **Why does any of this matter?**

Why it matters

It matters because asking these questions forces us to either decide to exclude people, or decide no one should be excluded. If we decide no one should be excluded, we have to look at our exclusionary practices.

Logic doesn't enforce any of these binaries or dichotomies or exclusions upon us. Logic has the potential to give the space to be maximally inclusionary. So the next step is: How do we make this possible?

Edward E. Hale.

Women and logic.

The North American Review, 198(693):206–217, 1913.

Andrea Nye.

Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic.

Routledge, 1990.

Val Plumwood.

The politics of reason: Towards a feminist logic.

Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 71(4):436–462, 1993.

Thanks...

Thanks...

...but also:

- Women in Logic: <https://www.womeninlogic.org/>
- Twitter: @WomeninLogic1
- Facebook (open to men as well):
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1466489953668013>
- Mailing list (open to men as well): email
women-in-logic-owner@lists.rwth-aachen.de
- Slack (open only to women): Email me for an invite