



Feminist Philosophy and The Forgetting of Feminine Being

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Abstract

Feminist philosophy represents one of the most prominent contemporary critical approaches to interrogating the epistemic structures that have consolidated patriarchal dominance and Western centrism in the formation of human consciousness. However, despite its emancipatory aspirations and its endeavour to redistribute epistemological authority, this project confronts a profound ontological problem concerning the position of the feminine within its own discourse. While feminism has laboured to liberate 'woman' as a social and historical construct, the question of feminism as a mode of being that exceeds the horizon of gendered representation has remained subject to forgetting or conceptual displacement. This problem manifests in three principal configurations. First, an anthropological death becomes apparent in the reproduction of stereotypical representations of women under the guise of transcending them. Second, ideological death emerges when feminist discourse is transformed into a closed system that loses its capacity for self-critique and reproduces mechanisms of exclusion in inverted form. Third, epistemological death is reflected in the limitations of the analytical tools employed, which are unable to encompass the existential and cultural complexity of the feminine experience. This study seeks to deconstruct these three levels through an interrogative approach that reconsiders the relationships among women, feminists, and the world. In so doing, it aims to reopen the question of feminism within an ontological horizon that moves beyond binaries of power and metaphysical oppositions and to retrieve feminism as a horizon of understanding rather than merely an object of representation.

Keywords: feminist philosophy; the forgetting of femininity; anthropological death; ideological death; epistemological death.



1. Introduction

To speak of feminist philosophy does not entail offering definitive answers or elaborating a rigid conceptual narrative; rather, it constitutes a dialogue that internalises philosophical interrogations arising from a mode of thought unsettled by the certainties of ideologies and driven by the desire for understanding rather than by axiological presuppositions. From this standpoint, the present study opens a central paradox that inquires into how an emancipatory project such as feminist philosophy might indirectly contribute to the death of the feminine. This death is not understood here as the negation of life but as the exclusion of the self from the space of meaning. Therefore, the rearticulation of questions exceeds the methodological procedure and moves towards an ontological necessity for understanding feminine beings. Interrogation in this context is not an external problematisation but an internal elicitation of the structure of feminist discourse, accompanied by an attempt to conceptualise it from within the feminist milieu itself.

The rise of modern feminist discourses, particularly poststructuralist currents, has shifted the epistemic structure around the concept of woman. However, this discourse has often lacked a sufficient ontological dimension regarding the concept of the feminine and its being. The present inquiry does not proceed from a position of hostility towards feminist discourse but rather from a position of deconstructing it within its own internal logic. Reflecting upon and debating the question of the death of the feminine in feminist philosophy is neither an intellectual luxury nor a subversion of the feminist project; rather, it is a renewed interrogation of that project from within, through examining the extent of its fidelity to feminine being as an existence not reducible to gender specificity but one that transcends it towards the horizon of universal humanity. In this sense, the feminine becomes the locus of a new philosophical disquiet, where the subjective intersects with the universal, the symbolic intersects with the material, and the existential intersects with the social in a symphony of the one and the multiple.

2. On the Meaning of the Feminine: From Naming to Being

The idea of the death of the feminine is inspired by *L'anthropologie en l'absence de l'homme*, by the Canadian anthropologist Fernand Dumont, who observed that Western anthropology, despite its preoccupation with the human being, neglected the question of the human itself (Dumont, 1981, p. 28). By analogy, the marginalisation of the feminine within feminist philosophical discourse constitutes, in essence, a form of symbolic death, whereby the feminine self is effaced from discursive and epistemic existence. This effacement, however, is not confined to exclusion from representations; rather, it extends to the very centre of the ontological foundation of the feminine self as a forgotten existence or one reconfigured according to the categories of the masculine other, which "initially emerge as finite external



forces in relation to the human being, imposing upon him a history of their own; at a second stage, the human being appropriates that history and makes his finitude its foundation" (Gill, 1987, p. 96).

Before the feminine and symbolism of its death are addressed, a precise distinction must be drawn between the two terms *woman* and *feminine*, which are frequently used interchangeably in cultural and social discourses. A woman is an entity historically framed by social structures and cultural institutions; it is thus the product of a system of social constructions, as articulated by structuralist and poststructuralist feminism (Simone de Beauvoir). In contrast, the feminine precedes all representations, languages, and framing *Dasein* (Heidegger). It approximates the duality in which the woman represents the body, whereas the feminine represents the self.

In this sense, femininity constitutes an ontological nucleus that transcends gender because it is not bound to a social function or cultural position. Rather, it embodies what Levinas terms the face of the Other of being (Levinas, 1961, pp. 186–201), a face that resists objectification or assimilation within conventional systems of classification. This renders the question of the feminine an eminently ontological one, as it does not proceed from the essence of woman as a sociocultural datum but rather from how the feminine is understood as an authentic mode of being. This distinction is necessary because the absence of the feminine signifies not merely the silencing of its social or political voice but also the silencing of its ontological presence, its reduction to the Other, where it exists only as a mirror of man and an extension of his subjectivity, as although its presence was contingent upon his. Consequently, interrogating naming itself as the feminine rather than the woman constitutes a crucial initial step towards reconstructing a philosophical discourse that listens to what has been marginalised and overlooked from the standpoint of radical ontological deconstruction.

In this context, attention may be given to the Qur’anic distinction between males and females, which bears a precise philosophical significance: “And the male is not like the female” (Qur’an 3:36). This distinction reveals an ontological awareness that precedes social representations, wherein the feminine is not defined through its roles or relations but through its existential participation in the very act of creation. The Qur’anic verse here does not speak of a social or morphological hierarchy; rather, it articulates an ontological difference, indicating that each male or female possesses its own proper logic. An echo of this understanding may also be found in the interpretations of certain contemporary philosophers of religion, such as Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Shahrur, who regarded the feminine as a possibility of being in its comprehensive form, removed from all sociological or ideological reduction.

Hence, returning to the feminine is a return to being a return to what is at once originary and excluded and a return to that which renders philosophy itself an act of unveiling what remains unspoken at the heart of what appears evident. For the human being to be conscious of itself “in an unlimited manner before all other creatures that live on the earth is to have an idea of



oneself, of one's self, by virtue of the unity of consciousness that persists despite all the changes to which one is subjected" (Kant, 1863, p. 9). From this perspective, the feminine, in essence, becomes a reflective mirror of consciousness and existence, reminding the human being of the truth of the self and of a mode of being that can be understood only by confronting what has been marginalised or rendered absent throughout life.

3. On the Meaning of the Death of the Feminine

Feminist philosophy represents one of the most significant contemporary critical approaches that has reexamined the ontological, epistemic, and ethical structures upon which the Western intellectual system was founded, from a feminine perspective or as an infusion of the feminine into the world. It is not merely an egalitarian discourse concerned with issues such as the marginalisation of women's political and social rights; rather, it seeks to "expand the scope of philosophy by revealing gendered assumptions within knowledge, existence, and practice, and to show how major philosophical concepts may be shaped through relations of power and domination" (Goldman, 2023) and, through control over the self, thought and the world.

This mode of thinking extends major postmodern philosophical transformations, particularly Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, Derrida's deconstruction, and Deleuze's critique of identity. This transformation was grounded in a critique of Western rationality, which, from their perspective, marginalised the body, emotion, and lived experience in favour of a masculine orientation centred on the *logos*. Within this context, feminist philosophy emerged to restore consideration of the self as embodied and to propose a new conception of ethics grounded in an ethics of care and gendered relationality rather than in legal rigidity and the abstract moral perspectives that dominated the history of philosophy.

The philosophical problem arises from the inquiry into the death of the feminine within feminist philosophical discourse. If woman is a social and cultural concept formed within specific historical and sociocultural conditions, then the concept of the feminine refers to the ontological origin of being that which exceeds gender identity as a social construction, while at the same time indicating the possibility of human existence in its embodiment, plurality, and relation to the world. The question of the place of the feminine within feminist discourse thus becomes a necessary inquiry because what is at stake is the liberation of being itself from authoritative determinations of identity. In this sense, the proposition of the death of the feminine approximates Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God and Foucault's declaration of the death of man (Tabib, 2025, p. 86), as its fundamental task is to liberate the feminine self from feminist discourse itself. This is pursued through deconstructing feminist discourse's critique of woman as a social construction, culminating in the killing of the feminine as the origin of being, as although the death of the feminine were, in essence, a rebirth of its existence anew.



4. Manifestations of Absence: On the Trajectories of the Ontological Erasure of the Feminine

A. Anthropological death

The concept of death in its anthropological dimension transcends the literal meaning of death or loss to become a comprehensive structural and epistemic condition, reflecting the marginalisation of the feminine within the grand narratives of humanity, whether through the material violence inflicted upon her body or through her symbolic exclusion from the field of human knowledge. With respect to physical death, material violence against the feminine is not merely an incidental event or an individual experience but part of a social structure that reinforces her position as a weak and dominated being. The general literature has portrayed women as fragile creatures, a depiction also grounded in certain religious texts, such as the hadith "Be gentle with the glass vessels." This perception of violence assumes multiple forms, including female infanticide, which is regarded as one of the earliest forms of physical annihilation faced by women throughout history and which unconsciously established patterns of service and enslavement that deprived women of their fundamental rights, such as freedom and equality, alongside other coercive practices affecting women's existence.

Margaret Mead's observation that violence against women is implicitly sanctioned in most cultures indicates that societies have not merely permitted such violence but have institutionalised it and granted it cultural and religious legitimacy, often rendering it natural. These observations accord with philosophical theories concerning the distinction between the natural and the artificial, in which such forms of violence become embedded within the social and natural order, rendering resistance to these practices a fundamental challenge for feminist philosophy, which seeks to transform this entrenched condition.

Symbolic death, however, is more complex at the level of philosophical analysis, as it concerns the absence of femininity from major epistemic narratives, whether in religious philosophies or social policies. The crisis is directly linked to an epistemic equation in which the human has predominantly been represented through a masculine perspective, with women subsumed within it.

Thus, this marginalisation resembles symbolic death within contemporary philosophy, which has treated human identity as an entity associated with the figure of man while neglecting women as subjects capable of participating in the construction of human knowledge. This has opened a philosophical inquiry into the formation of knowledge itself, as illustrated by logical positivism, which excludes the sensory and affective dimensions of knowledge, restricting it to what can be empirically verified—verifiability (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2026). Can human knowledge indeed be constructed in the absence of the feminine dimension?

Numerous philosophers have addressed the question of the feminine as an objective existence, foremost among them the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who maintained that



woman has always been defined as the Other rather than the self, expressing her well-known statement: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 267). Moreover, earlier philosophies marginalised women’s agency in the trajectories of thought and consciousness, prompting feminist philosophy to question the necessity of epistemic restructuring of the human as capable of philosophical reflection without diminishing the existence of the feminine.

This critique is grounded in the estrangement of the feminine from the register of the great philosophers, thereby opening a broad field for philosophical criticism. Why have women not appeared within the canon of major philosophers? What renders Western culture inclined to represent men rather than women as the source of philosophical thought? Several reasons may be advanced, the most prominent of which is the ideological dimension associated with relations of power and domination that have characterised patriarchal society across the ages, particularly regarding male superiority over women, beginning with hunting roles (Hamilton, 2016), in which man was the *prédateur* and derived his status accordingly. This social history has contributed to fissures within certain feminist positions, such as opposition to meat consumption and the inclination of some feminist currents to privilege the vegetal over the animal model.

If physical death is the result of material violence against the feminine, then symbolic death may be regarded as the consequence of masculine cultural and intellectual hegemony. Masculine philosophy has dominated human thought, never acknowledging feminism’s contribution to the formation of knowledge, consistently considering it subordinate or deficient. Contemporary feminist philosophy, however, has reopened new questions concerning a feminine understanding of existence and identity through the works of philosophers such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, who have demonstrated that “one of the essential features of Western societies is that relations of force, which have long found their primary expression in war, in all its forms, have gradually become concentrated within the domain of political power” (Foucault, p. 110). Thus, the symbolic death of the feminine is not confined to the absence of women from grand narratives; rather, it constitutes a deliberate strategy to exclude them from positions of power and authority within human culture.

B. Ideological death

Ideological death refers to a complex phenomenon within contemporary feminist currents that seek liberation and equality but at times contradict their fundamental aims by adopting neo-liberal individualist ideology. This contradiction is manifested in the redefinition of the feminine as an economic being whose value is measured by her consumptive worth in the labour market and society—*la chosification de la femme*.

From a philosophical perspective, ideological death may be understood as a regression from the primary objective of feminist philosophy: the liberation of women from the social,



economic, and cultural constraints that limit their existence as free subjects. When feminism falls under the sway of Western capitalism, it becomes a movement that reinforces individualism rather than advancing social justice, reflecting a failure to grasp the comprehensive dimensions of liberation. Liberation thereby becomes merely a matter of individual choice rather than a call to create a more just and inclusive society. In his critique of Western capitalism, Emmanuel Mounier referred to it as having transformed the human being into a consumer, as evidenced in commercial advertisements and large shopping centres that entice individuals to consume without a genuine need for such goods (Emmanuel, 1981, p. 124). With the continual force of media dissemination, contemporary human beings have developed an obsession with becoming an object among the objects of nature.

C. Methodological death

Methodological death here denotes a principal shift in the intellectual methodologies adopted by feminist philosophy in its approach to issues of women and equality. In this context, methodological death is manifested in feminism's slide towards a countercentrism that excludes man and elevates intuition and emotion at the expense of reason and logic as a form of exaggeration in the feminisation of the world. This slippage results in the reproduction of a new binary that leads to the same outcome that the feminist movement initially sought to transcend, namely, masculine domination.

In some of its developments, feminist philosophy has focused on the critical deconstruction of social and political structures that marginalise women. However, these critiques have not been devoid of methodological questions about how to reconstruct a feminist project that avoids the trap of deconstruction without construction. Certain feminist currents, such as radical feminism and intuitionist feminism, have fallen into the trap of countercentrism by entirely excluding men, thereby causing feminist thought to reproduce the binary between males and females. This orientation reflects, at times, a tendency toward emotion and intuition as a counterbalance to the rationality that prevails in modern philosophical thought. However, in seeking to confront masculine domination, some feminist movements have elevated nonrational values, such as intuition and emotion, in opposition to reason and logic, which characterise modern Western rationality. This process has reproduced the binary between reason and emotion/emotion and between man and woman/woman that feminism sought to overcome. Instead of establishing a participatory relationship between reason and emotion and between men and women, feminist thought fell into the trap it endeavoured to avoid.

From a methodological perspective, this transformation within feminist thought raises fundamental challenges concerning how to undertake a systematic deconstruction of the concept of gender without lapsing into a tendency that reproduces domination in an inverted form. Critical deconstruction, which initially served as a means of analysing traditional narratives of gender, has at times become a destructive process lacking a genuine alternative



capable of comprehensively and openly reconstructing the concept of gender. This orientation may neglect establishing an alternative universal foundation that transcends exclusionary thinking and opens the field to social and cultural alternatives encompassing all individuals, regardless of sex or status.

5. Conclusion

The study of the death of the feminine in feminist philosophy demonstrates that the emancipatory project, despite its noble aims and critical character, may fall into the trap of reproducing traditional binaries and dominating in new forms, whether through anthropological death, which reflects the bodily and social marginalisation of the feminine; symbolic death, which effaces it from grand epistemic narratives; ideological death, associated with its transformation into a consuming economic being; or methodological death, manifested in the limitations of analytical tools and in the inability of certain feminist currents to construct integrated epistemic alternatives. Feminist discourse thus confronts continuing challenges in liberating femininity from sociocultural and economic constraints, as well as from the effects of feminism itself, and in reconstructing human knowledge in a comprehensive manner that recognises the distinctions between women and feminism and between the body and self. The ultimate aim becomes the apprehension of the ontological dimension of femininity. Until then, the wager remains before feminist philosophy as to whether it is possible to realise the freedom of the feminine without reproducing the very forms of domination it seeks to transcend.

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