For surely it is not likely either that fire or earth or any such element should be the reason why things manifest goodness and beauty both in their being and in their coming to be, or that those thinkers should have supposed it was.

(Met. 984b10-14)

Metaphysical and scientific theories are paradigms of objectivity. A metaphysical theory explains the basic constituents and structure of reality, and scientific theories explain the world, and predict its events. And, it is widely assumed that in order to be objective, true to reality or nature, metaphysics and science must be value-free or devoid of normativity. Yet, as feminist theorists, among others, have pointed out, the histories of metaphysics and science are rife with examples of theories that are infused with normative and political dimensions like gender.¹ Normative concepts like gender can appear in the language of a theory, in its assumptions or, more blatantly, in its core concepts. Feminists have argued that gender appears in all these ways in Aristotle’s metaphysical theory of hylomorphism and his scientific theory of reproduction.²

Most feminist philosophers of science think that the values that appear in theory originate on the subjective side, in the theorizer.³ They are the values of the scientist himself, projected and glorified in the name of science and objectivity. Hence, much feminist attention has been given to debunking the
image of the disinterested scientist, and in detailing the covert political
norms that guide modern scientific research. Objectivity itself, the pre-
eminent norm of modern scientific practice, is seen by some feminists in
psychological terms, as a projection of the self-image of the scientis,t or
alternatively, by others, as representing the aspirations of a class
(bourgeois), gender (male) and historical period (post-Galilean science). 4

Feminist developments of the thesis that objectivity, the cardinal norm
of modern science, is androcentric has been varied. Borrowing Sandra
Harding’s terminology we can distinguish feminist empiricists, feminist
standpoint theorists, and feminist postmodernists. Feminist postmodernists
take the moral of the story to be that enlightenment thought, including
modern science and its norm of objectivity, are hopelessly implicated in
patriarchy, and should be rejected, period. In contrast, both feminist
empiricists and standpoint theorists think that feminist criticism will allow
for an elimination of androcentric bias in science, and an emergence of
genuine objectivity. Paradoxically enough, it is argued that it is precisely
because of their explicit political concerns that feminists have been able to
decrease distorted research results:

Scientific knowledge-seeking is supposed to be value-neutral, objective, dispassionate,
disinterested, and so forth. It is supposed to be protected from political interests, goals, and
desires (such as feminist ones) by the norms of science. In particular, science’s “method” is
supposed to protect the results of research from the social values of researchers. And yet it is
obvious to all that many claims which clearly have been generated through research guided
by feminist concerns nevertheless appear more plausible (better supported, more reliable,
less false, more likely to be confirmed by evidence, etc.) than the beliefs they replace. 5

Whether the political dimension of metaphysical or scientific theories
renders them entirely suspect, makes them candidates for rehabilitation, or
might bring them closer to the truth, is a matter of debate among feminist
philosophers of science. What all parties to the debate share in common is
the assumption that the values that pervade and shape purportedly value-
nuetral theory originate on the side of the theorizer. 6 Their task has been to
show how feminist values, in contrast to masculinist or racist values, can
help eliminate bias and achieve a genuinely value-neutral theory (feminist
empiricism), or can help develop an enriched notion of objectivity which is
compatible with, and indeed requires, the politically correct values of the
feminist inquirer (feminist standpoint theory). 7

What is never questioned in this debate is the assumption that the norms
in a scientific or metaphysical theory originate entirely in the scientist or his
culture (race, class etc) and not in nature itself. This is because feminist
philosophers of science generally work within the problematic of modern
science in which nature is quantitative, devoid of quality and value. 8 Given
this view of nature, the only available source of norms in a theory is the
theorizer. Where else could they come from? However, this view of nature