

Reading Lady Mary Shepherd

By Margaret Atherton

VIRGINIA WOOLF, IN *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*, ASKED WHY THERE WERE NO WOMEN writers before 1800.¹ If she had been thinking about philosophers instead of writers in the traditional women's areas of plays and fiction, she might have asked why there were no women philosophers at all, for I suspect that most people would find it very hard to name a woman philosopher before the present day. To help her in answering her question, she invented a fictional character, Judith Shakespeare, a sister to William Shakespeare. The conditions of Judith's life made it impossible for her to write, and so Woolf speculated that the women who would have been writers did not lead the kinds of lives that permitted them to realize their talents. Woolf's image of Judith Shakespeare is a very powerful one but her speculation is only half right. There undoubtedly were many women in the past who would have been talented writers or philosophers if their lives had been different, but Judith Shakespeare's image can also blot out our knowledge of women who, contrary to Woolf's speculation, did exist and did write. Indeed, we know now there were even women who wrote philosophy. These women were in many ways exceptional, for Woolf is quite right that most women did not live either with enough privacy or with enough income to allow them to write. Often, they were members of the aristocracy, whose position enabled them to behave eccentrically, sometimes to be able to demand privacy, and sometimes to be able to invite contacts with leading intellectuals. Quite often, these women were childless, which in an age before birth control made them exceptions to the general rule, and at a time when many women were bearing their last child in their forties, was the only thing that could have given them private time. Nevertheless, research in the last ten or fifteen years has uncovered (or often re-uncovered) the work of quite a number of these women: for example, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, the Electress Sophie, Queen Christina of Sweden, Queen Sophie Charlotte of Prussia, Anne, Lady Conway, Mary Astell, Damaris, Lady Masham, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Emilie du Chatelet, Catherine Macaulay,

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Lady Mary Shepherd, and many more. Woolf's question then comes up again in a slightly different form. Why is it that the work of these women was for so long unknown? Why do so many people even today remain ignorant of the existence of women philosophers before the present day? I am not going to answer this question directly; in fact, I suspect it has multiple answers.² Instead, I am going to present a case study from amongst all the cases of all of these women. I hope by considering the history of this woman, and, in particular, considering the way in which she was read, it will be possible to gain some insights into the ways in which women have failed to be incorporated into philosophical history. The woman I am going to discuss is Lady Mary Shepherd. Mary Shepherd actually falls outside of Woolf's target date of 1800, since she flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century, but this merely reflects my point about the greater ignorance that prevails about women in philosophy.

In 1828, a paper by Lady Mary Shepherd called "Observations by Lady Mary Shepherd on the 'First Lines on the Human Mind'" appeared in a volume called *Parriana: or, Notices of the Rev. Samuel Parr, LL.D., collected from various sources, printed and manuscript, and in part written by E. H. Barker, Esq.* It was accompanied by a rather longer paper by the author of *First Lines on the Human Mind*, John Fearn, "Reply to the Criticisms of Lady Mary Shepherd on the 'First Lines' — With Observations on her Ladyship's Views with regard to the Nature of Extension, as contained in her 'Essays on the Perception of an External Universe.'"³ Mary Shepherd was sufficiently concerned about this event that in 1832 she published an article, "Lady Mary Shepherd's Metaphysics," defending herself against Fearn's strictures in a journal called *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*.⁴ This exchange is interesting for a number of reasons. The basic issue between Fearn and Shepherd is an important one: the relationship between our mental representations and the properties of the external world that, in perception, are taken to be their cause. It is intrinsically interesting to see how this topic is being treated by two English-speaking authors in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, especially since historians of philosophy, who pay a great deal of attention to the way English-speaking authors treat this topic in the eighteenth century, have typically switched their attention to work done in Germany and to Kant and post-Kantians after the end of the eighteenth century. We can also, by taking a look at the venues in which this work was published, begin to get a sense of the way philosophy was being carried out at the beginning of the nineteenth century and to see how it was taking advantage of publishing opportunities available to the reading and writing public. This exchange is especially interesting since neither Shepherd nor Fearn were members of an increasingly professionalized university system. It reminds us that there were ample opportunities in the nineteenth century for those we would now think of as "amateurs" to bring their work before the public. And finally, the exchange is noteworthy because it consists of a public exchange of views between a man and a woman, an extremely rare event indeed until comparatively recent times. In this exchange, moreover, Shepherd is pitted, not against one of the giants of philosophy, as is more often than not the case when we read the work of women philosophers before the present day, but against a man who might well be

supposed to be less talented than herself. All of these considerations provide a series of contexts within which to examine this exchange.

Let me begin by saying a little something about the two protagonists, and indeed it is not possible to say much more than a little about either, since neither one is very well known today. John Fearn (1768–1837), however, merits an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. From it we learn that he was a retired naval officer, who devoted himself upon retirement to philosophy. He produced a considerable number of philosophical works,⁵ of which the *DNB* has no very high opinion, telling us that “he discussed most of the more important questions of metaphysics, but without showing any very clear apprehension of the points in dispute.” Although Shepherd is mentioned only at the end of an article in the *DNB* about her father-in-law, Sir Samuel Shepherd,⁶ some few facts about her have emerged.⁷ She was born December 31, 1777, the second daughter of Neil Primrose, Earl of Rosebery, at her family’s estate outside Dalmeny, Midlothian. This seems to place Shepherd in Scotland, just outside Edinburgh at a time when Edinburgh’s intellectual and to some extent social life was dominated by the philosopher Dugald Stewart, and it is very tempting to assume that Shepherd’s philosophical interests were spawned during a Scottish upbringing. The subject matter of her work encourages such a speculation, but against it must be placed the fact that Shepherd’s family, the Primroses, appeared to have lived for much of the time in England and it is undeniable that Shepherd’s married life was spent in England. In 1808, she married an English barrister, Henry John Shepherd, and died in London in 1847, at the age of 70. Some time during this long life she wrote at least two philosophical treatises: *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*, published in 1824, and *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, published in 1827. Thus, these works appeared in print well into her married life, but her daughter’s memoir, cited by Jennifer McRobert, tells us that they were composed much earlier, and only published with the encouragement of Shepherd’s husband. It is clear both from the exchange with Fearn, which took place after the publication of her books, and by a letter to Shepherd from Richard Whately written in 1831, that Shepherd continued her philosophical interests after the publication of her second book. Shepherd does not seem to have been entirely without reputation in her own time. She is the subject of an article in Robert Blakey’s four-volume *History of the Philosophy of the Mind*, which is not only favorable in tone, but actually credits her with considerable influence among the young men of Edinburgh.⁸

Most of Shepherd’s work in one way or another revolves around the argument she lays down in *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*. The object of this work is to refute what she takes to be Hume’s position on causation in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* as well as to discuss some developments of Hume’s views by Thomas Brown and William Lawrence. Shepherd’s primary concern is to reject the view that causal beliefs are no more than habits we fall into when presented with the constant conjunction of pairs of associated events. Shepherd grounds her attack on Hume with a refutation of Hume’s claim that we can have no intuitive knowledge that every beginning must have a cause. Shepherd rephrases the issue to ask ‘whether objects called effects necessarily require causes or whether they can begin to exist without causes.’ So rephrased, Shepherd

thinks she has uncovered a contradiction. Since a beginning is a state of something, she supposes there has to be something doing or suffering the beginning. Since that something must exist in order to be the subject of the beginning, it cannot begin without existing. Therefore, she thinks she can assert as a truth of reason that a being cannot begin its existence of itself.

So armed, Shepherd finds she can also show that we do not make causal judgments based on habit or custom in the presence of repeated instances, but can make them as a result of a single trial. Since we know antecedently that beginnings have causes, we need only track down what in the situation has changed when the effect is no longer present to know that we have found what necessitates it. Thus, she says we need only shut our eyes once to learn that it is the eyes that cause sight. She proposes a realist definition of cause as the productive principle of effects, which, she says, are properly understood, not as subsequent to causes, but as coexisting with the object, as that which produces effects. "Effect" is just a name for those properties of an object which, for one reason or another, we do not take to be standing properties. In general, Shepherd tends to suppose that a rejection of realism derives from a misunderstanding of the real nature of causality.

Shepherd's second work, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe and Other Subjects Connected with the Doctrine of Causation*, is something of a mixed bag, although it contains the material which seems to have caught Fearn's notice. In by far the largest part, Shepherd puts forward her own answer to Hume's questions about the sources of our idea of a continuously existing, outward and independent world. This second work, she tells us, was originally conceived as an appendix to her first book, and consists initially and primarily of an application and illustration of her views on causality to the problem of the existence of the external world. Shepherd contends that Hume's mistakes about causal reasoning led him to overlook its presence in the process that leads to knowledge of a continuously existing, independent world. But she also maintains that the problem deserves a different solution from the one provided by Thomas Reid. Reid failed to appreciate the veracity of Berkeley's claim that a sensation can be like nothing but another sensation and was led to a question-begging reliance on natural instinct. Shepherd thinks instead that we are not able to give any content to our beliefs about an external world, but, thanks to necessary causal reasoning, we are not left, as Berkeley is, making the nonsensical claim that we eat, drink, and are clothed in ideas. Since we experience changes and variety among our sensations, we know there is a cause of these changes. The cause is not inward, in us, since the inward cause is the ever-present capacity to sense. Hence, the variety is due to outward causes, whose nature, although unknown, must be proportioned to the effects. Shepherd is putting forward a position that does not fall neatly into any of the prevailing camps. Unlike Berkeley, who seems to have become anathema by this point — both Shepherd and Fearn accuse the other of Berkeleianism — Shepherd is committed to realism with respect to the causes of our ideas, but unlike the Scottish realists, like Reid and Stewart, she does not suppose we are in a position to give content to any account of these causes. And while she does for some purposes highlight the presence of inward causes of sensation, she does not, like the transcendentalists,

suppose that any of the content of our ideas of causation derives from the nature of these inward causes. Part of the challenge in dealing with the exchange between Fearn and Shepherd lies in the realization that they were working out their own variations on the positions we are familiar with.

The ostensible subject of the debate between Shepherd and Fearn concerns the idea of extension, or taking up space, but the reason why this topic is of interest to them is because of its role in a theory of perception. Shepherd and Fearn are heirs to the philosophical tradition, initiated in the seventeenth century, that takes perception to be a causal process, originating in states of the external world characterizable as extended. By the time they arrive on the scene, many of the important notions involved in this account have been subjected to criticism. Berkeley had raised doubts about the intelligibility of describing the external world as extended, and Berkeley and especially Hume had demonstrated the difficulties in making use of the concept of cause in this context. Shepherd and Fearn, like many others at that time, are struggling to develop an account of perception that can deal with these difficulties.

The problem they are facing, in general terms, is to be able to characterize the relation between the effects in us, the ideas, and the states of the external world that cause them so that we can understand how the one can represent the other. The problem is pressing because it seems that what we are acquainted with are our own subjective inner states, but that what we claim to end up knowing about are states of the outer world. What is the justification for this? Do the terms we use—red, hard, sweet smelling—actually describe states in us or states in the outside world? Fearn and Shepherd take opposing positions on this issue, with respect to the idea of extension. Fearn believes it is because of the way we are affected that we say things are extended, whereas Shepherd thinks it is because of the way things are. She holds that whatever is true of ideas, they are not extended, while Fearn takes it that the term “extended” describes the way in which we sense: we see, for example, extended color patches.

Mary Shepherd’s initial paper, detailing her objections to Fearn’s claims, is brief, taking up no more than four pages in *Parriana*. Although she tells us she wrote it as a private communication, she refers to Fearn in the third person. In fact, the circumstances that led to Shepherd’s writing and sending her paper to Fearn remain unknown. At least a part of what she finds objectionable about Fearn’s position are the implications he draws from it, implications which he has helpfully summarized among the material supplied for *Parriana*. They are as follows:

THAT PERCEIVED EXTENSION AND FIGURE, WHEN PERCEIVED, ARE demonstrated to be STATES OR AFFECTIONS OF THE PERCEIVING MIND ITSELF, and when not perceived, are nowhere, that is HAVE NO EXISTENCE WHATEVER . . .

. . . that we have NO EVIDENCE for the assumption, or supposition, of ANY SUCH THING AS DEAD MATTER in the world; . . .

. . . that all our external perceptions are caused by the ENERGIES OF SOME EXTENDED BEING, exerted from various distances in space; WHICH BEING, must, IN KIND, be of one nature with our own sentient principle. (pp. 568–9)

Mary Shepherd's judgment on this, as summarized at the beginning of her paper, is that Fearn's reasoning is "radically unsound" because he has failed to grasp the nature of causality, and therefore has failed to distinguish that which "ought to belong to *perceived internal qualities*, the EFFECTS of *external qualities*; and the external aggregates of qualities themselves, which form the *determining causes of these on the mind*" (p. 624). She attributes this failure to Fearn's lack of adequate definitions for his terms. Fearn's results depend upon, she says, his ambiguous use of the word "extension" to describe ideas, although, according to Shepherd, this term ought properly to be restricted to external objects. Shepherd holds that "extension" identifies objects in their causal role. She therefore offers the following definition:

Now *extension* is a word applied to that *external object or cause*, which is capable of determining its own peculiar sensible qualities to the mind; and that not only to one mind, but to many minds. This object, capable of producing such *effects*, is also capable of admitting *motion* (i.e. unperceived motion, whatever that quality may be *when unperceived*.) and of determining the SENSE OF IT to *many minds also*.

It has dimensions, therefore, and which dimensions, when void, are capable of admitting the powers of solidity, and when applied to solidity, become capable of filling the dimensions of the void. (p. 625)

As applied to causes, "extension" does not describe anything perceivable, but it does apply to that which, as a cause, takes up space and can move and be either filled or empty.

With this definition in hand, Shepherd can rule out the applicability of terms that impute causality to anything mental. She writes:

Wind, for instance, is not *merely* the sensation of wind, by means of its sound, or its coldness, etc., but by its *effects* on those other objects called trees, ships, the ocean, etc.; for which reason it would be very absurd and contradictory to consider the sensations of wind, as being themselves *windy*. The properties of wind belong not to their definitions. The noise and coldness of wind, are but *effects* on an EXTERNAL CAUSE, capable of producing many other effects and perceptions, which themselves cannot perform: — the same reasoning applies to every other quality determined by the organs of sense. (p. 626)

It is therefore absurd to describe a sensation in the mind as extended. Since anything that is extended has dimensions, this would have the absurd implication that the sensation of a fat man takes up more space than the sensation of a thin one. We use the term "extension" to describe something that by virtue of filling space, having dimensions, and moving, can play a causal role. Sensations don't have any of these properties. Shepherd's tone in this brief paper is brisk and acerbic. She demonstrates what she takes to be the ludicrous results of Fearn's not adequately distinguishing the properties of ideas from the properties of the world they represent or describe. The structure of the argument is tight and the approach dismissive.

Fearn's remarks on Shepherd are considerably more verbose than hers and are also not so clearly organized. Whereas Shepherd lays out at the beginning a statement of where she takes Fearn to go wrong and why, Fearn embeds his arguments against Shepherd in a great deal of additional material.

Initially, he touches on various matters that in one way or another support his views on Shepherd's abilities. He employs an argument from authority, for example, claiming "all philosophers, of every age and sect, are against her Ladyship's way of thinking" (p. 630).⁹ Subsequently, toward the end of his piece, he digresses to embroil Shepherd in his priority dispute with Stewart, which has the effect of downplaying the importance of Shepherd's contribution. But undoubtedly, the most significant difficulty in getting a grip on Fearn's quarrel with Shepherd stems from the basic unclarity of the position Fearn is himself defending. The passage I quoted earlier makes it seem as if Fearn is putting forward a recognizable idealist position of the sort, for example, found in Berkeley, but this does not seem to be the case. Fearn, in fact, holds that it is Shepherd who is tainted by Berkeleianism, by what he refers to as a "scholastic" sort,¹⁰ because, in reserving the term "extension" for external causes, Fearn finds Shepherd to be asserting that the mind is not material. So Fearn does not accept an immaterial view of the mind, and when he describe ideas that are in the mind as extended, he seems to think that this is to be understood literally. Indeed, in her later paper, Shepherd observes that it is Fearn's view that "the human mind is a flexible spherule" that has rendered his work unintelligible both to herself and to Dugald Stewart, who in a letter to Fearn, included in *Parriana*, claimed to have stopped reading Fearn's words when he came to this passage (p. 593). So while Fearn clearly intends to be rejecting a view that there is an external or mind-independent world that can be described as extended, he is apparently of the view that mentality itself is extended.

Fearn finds four issues to complain about in Shepherd's discussion. The first three are all related and concern ways in which Fearn thinks her remarks have failed to do justice to what he means when he describes our perceptions as extended. He says, firstly, that he is not committed to the view that the sensation of a fat man is fat because "[t]o talk of the 'SENSATION' of a *fat man* or of *any man*, is as utterly out of the pale of pneumatology, as to talk of the *sensation of an epic poem*" (p. 635). Secondly, he complains that her example of the lean man's having to become fat in order to perceive the fat man show that she fails to understand the principle of vision. In Fearn's view, perception is to be understood materialistically, under which "the *Sentient Principle or Mind* operates by the medium of a *SURFACE*, which it presents to the impressions of the corporeal or nervous system" (p. 638). Finally, Shepherd's talk of the solidity of extension is irrelevant because, says Fearn, "*we never perceive third dimension of depth immediately as we do surface*" (p. 639). Our ideas are extended but not solid, just like an image on the surface of a mirror. It looks like Fearn is trying to preserve a sense of "extension" which can be used to describe something like a visual field. A visual field, that is, might be thought of as a mind-dependent way of perceiving the world spread out in front of us as a causal consequence of the actions of a nervous system in which, for example, activity on the retina results in a particular spatial configuration of the visual field.

Finally, Fearn has a methodological complaint to make. He alleges that Shepherd has taken the term "extension," which has a familiar, geometrical definition, and redefined it as something unperceived and unperceivable, in a

move he regards as illegitimate. We never, he claims, have grounds for applying the word "extension" to anything unless it is perceivable. He argues:

In order to confirm this truth, it only needs here be suggested that, if the human eye were capable of receiving images, on its retina, of a mile in diameter, but, at the same time, if the nervous fibres of the optic trunk were to *converge*, so as to discharge their impressions upon the mind in a *mere point*, in this case, we *never could by the organ of sight have apprehended the idea of any figure, or extension whatever*: which self-evident truth furnishes a distinct conclusive test, that we *never could so much as imagine such a thing as extension, or figure of any kind*, if we did not contemplate it in the figures we perceived. (pp. 641–2)

Fearn maintains that Shepherd is reasoning backwards, from the causal object to its effects, where this is actually a case of going from the unknown to the known.

Finally, it is clear from his opening and closing remarks that Shepherd's gender is very much on Fearn's mind. His first few pages, as well as the last few, are all about the fact that she is a woman. The tone of his first paragraph is echoed whenever he raises the issue of gender, as he does throughout:

The event of a Lady's having appeared on the *arena* of the most abstruse metaphysical discussion, and this with great brilliancy and depth in her opposition to a host of philosophers, while it is manifest that she has been actuated to this by no other motive than a love of truth, and a laudable ambition of being its champion, is a phenomenon, which was little to be expected at any time, and far less at the present epoch. . . . As, however, this philosophic Lady has professedly written, and published, before she has very seriously studied the writings of other authors,¹¹ or, in other words, has trusted almost entirely to her own original powers, it would have been miraculous, if this cause had not exposed her to some very profound mistakes, over and above any oversights, into which, in common with all writers on the subject, she must have been liable to fall, from biases or other causes. (p. 628)

The contrast between Shepherd's bald statement that Fearn suffers from radically unsound reasoning and Fearn's approach to Shepherd is obvious. On the one hand, he describes her throughout in highly laudatory terms, but on the other, a good deal of the grounds for this attitude of admiration seems to be that Shepherd is engaging in philosophy at all, and his praise of her strengths is accompanied by hints of her deficiencies. Unlike Shepherd, who apparently felt no compunction at subjecting Fearn's views to harsh criticism, Fearn presents himself apologetically for having criticized her, but argues that it would be even ruder to refuse to take her work seriously. Fearn ends his discussion with another paragraph of praise, which raises questions, however, in the mind of the reader, about the seriousness with which Fearn regards Shepherd's work.

Who, then, is there, that can fail to admire that one of her Ladyship's sex and rank, should evince both the bent and the energy to engage in such discussions, as those, which she has not shrunk from entertaining? Her Ladyship has entered, with brilliancy and decision, into most of the dark and difficult questions in metaphysics; wherein she has felt no hesitation in assailing the doctrines of all, who have gone before her; and even has not refrained from pronouncing on the 'puerility' of Newton, in believing that God could have created a world other

than the present one. All this evinces a fine and very extraordinary mind. Can it, then, be wondered at, that her Ladyship, who soars, like the eagle, should have viewed, with no great desire of imitation, that creeping, like the tortoise, in which Newton found his glory, and which, alone, will ever secure to us the consummations of philosophy? (p. 649)

On the one hand, Fearn is undoubtedly correct in imagining he is paying Shepherd a compliment in addressing her ideas at all, but on the other, it is clear he cannot refrain from addressing them as the work of a woman. Fearn wishes to impress his readers as much with her temerity as with her acuity.

The final document in this exchange is Shepherd's reply to Fearn, "Lady Mary Shepherd's Metaphysics," published in *Fraser's Magazine*. She explains that she has taken the step of replying to Fearn when she discovered he had, without her permission, included her piece and his reply in his contribution to *Parriana*. She does not limit herself in it, however, to a defense of her arguments against Fearn, but uses his attack as the occasion for a more wide-ranging account of her own views. She begins by reiterating the position she had laid down in her first remarks. Causes must be distinguished from effects, the sensation of extension is an effect of the unperceived extended movable impenetrability that is its cause. Sensations which are not causes have none of the properties of causes and so are not extended or movable or impenetrable. As before, she argues to assume the opposite is to commit obvious absurdities: "The legitimate consequence of such a doctrine would be, that each mind one met with, might oppose one's progress with its extension, disgust one with its smell, deafen one with its noise, and affright one with its ugliness; or the contrary of all these, according to which ever set of ideas prevailed in it at that time!" (p. 698)

Perhaps the most interesting parts of her article occur where she situates her project with respect to both Fearn and Stewart. Many of the difficulties Fearn has with Stewart arise, she says, because they are using the word "perception" differently. Stewart, she points out, distinguishes between perceptions and sensations in the following manner:

The notion of contrasting colours he terms the *sensation* of the contrasting colours; whilst the notice as of coloured objects at a distance, to which he can move, he conceives to be the perception of external nature, and as only suggested by the sensations of the colours, and this connexion of *sensation* and *perception* he deems a mystery. (p. 699)

Stewart, that is, thinks we immediately sense color patches and on the occasion of these mind-dependent experiences, we come to believe in the presence of mind-independent objects surrounding us. We sense colors and perceive trees and flowers to which we move. But Fearn speaks of perceiving and yet what he takes us to perceive are Stewart's sensations. Shepherd herself agrees with Stewart's distinction, she tells us, but does not hold the connection between sensations and perceptions to be mysterious and inexplicable, and instead argues that an "algebraic relation" can be assumed to obtain among the sensations, the effects in us, and their causes. She explains what she has in mind by taking

Fearn's image of the mind as a mirror and turning it into an animated *camera obscura*:

It will thus appear, that when from my window I see a parterre of flowers, and determine to walk therein, and set out apparently in the direction of the colours, and by means of motion seem to gain upon them, that the whole of this scene goes on inwardly. What is perceived are changes of sensations and ideas—are effects; the correspondent causes which determine them are all external, except one, and that is, the *beginning* of the change from the state of rest in which are those external things, by the impulse with which the will effects the first change of their relative places, and keeps up a succession of similar changes, by the continuance of a similar will. The mind in this scene is as the reflecting mirror is in a *camera obscura*, were it imagined to be *consciously* observing its shifting images, knowing them to be changed by the influence of corresponding, though unlike, objects from without; and directing the succession of its changes, by its power of varying the position of the intervening instruments which connect the exterior changing objects with their responding changing representatives. (p. 702)

In Shepherd's image, the mind is not a passive reflecting surface, but is able to intuit its own presence, through its interactions with external objects and hence able to divine the presence of a causal process, even though the exact nature of that process remains hidden.

Shepherd's contribution to the discussion of perception then lies in her attempt to go beyond Stewart's "mystery" and to say something about the nature of causal process linking the mind and the world. But it is not entirely clear that she has successfully overcome Fearn's methodological worry. Even if we distinguish, as Shepherd does, between the sensation and its external cause, and even if we agree with her that sensations cannot be like or share properties with their external causes, what is the justification for saying it is the external cause and not the sensation that is extended? Fearn could argue that we know what it is to sense a color patch that is larger or smaller, while Shepherd herself describes the external causes as "unperceivable." What Shepherd offers in answer to this question is her theory of algebraic relations, but here Fearn's skepticism—that it is possible to make good on this analogy while still maintaining that what is being related is something extended to something that cannot be extended—seems to the point.

The tone of Shepherd's presentation is calm but distinctly adversarial. She cannot be said to be tactful in her initial description of Fearn:

With respect to Mr Fearn's reply, I feel I speak with candour, although the expression of the sentiment is in my own favour, that notwithstanding such remarks could only proceed from the pen of an erudite critic, yet that they are unphilosophical with respect to the notions which they involve, not only on account of the doctrine concerning the extension of mind in general being at variance with a strictly metaphysical analysis of its powers, as compared with those of matter and space, but also because his opinions appear in many respects to be inconsistent with each other. They also seem to be wanting in a logical precision of statement, for in no way do they form an argument by which to disjoin the subjects and predicates of my propositions. (p. 697)

She also manifests some awareness of the way in which Fearn has attempted to denigrate her. In defending her account of Newton, she says:

Whilst, therefore, he appears to approve of my "intrepidity" in objecting to Sir Isaac Newton's theory, he is only impeaching my good sense, if truly, I were capable to objecting to a theory which seems to support my own doctrine of cause against that of Mr. Stewart's, which I am controverting. (p. 706)

While she picks Fearn up on an issue that bears on a particular line of argument she is making, she never deals with any of Fearn's references to her gender, nor does she ever refer to it herself. She never shows any inclination to apologize for her gender, and indeed, in all of Shepherd's own writings, the fact of her gender is conspicuous by its absence.

The controversy between Shepherd and Fearn concerns a matter of considerable public interest at the time at which they were writing (and indeed remains of great interest today). Shepherd puts forwards positions that are intuitively appealing and defends them deftly. How, then, can we account for her complete disappearance from the stage of philosophy? It has sometimes been suggested¹² that women philosophers easily drop from view because they cannot be slotted neatly into the preferred account of the history of philosophy, in which theories are parried with counter-theories. But this cannot be said of Shepherd, who is, in fact, a master of this preferred account and who inserts herself into it. Can we then blame Fearn for "silencing" her? One problem with accepting this analysis is that, as far as this particular exchange goes, it is not clear that the balance of power lies with Fearn. Not only is Shepherd better at defending her position than is Fearn, but he published his defense in a volume that Shepherd herself dismissed as an "ephemeral production," whereas her defense appeared in a noted public journal. It is of course true that Fearn himself is as unknown today as Shepherd, but this is not all: the noted figure toward whom they orient themselves, Dugald Stewart, is almost as unknown and as unread as either of them. Even the man of whom Stewart was a disciple, Thomas Reid, although better known, is not widely read. In fact, almost the whole century of English language philosophy, to which Shepherd belongs, has disappeared from view, causing the disappearance of Shepherd herself and, one has to wonder, perhaps other women as well. Clearly, in accounting for the disappearance of a particular woman philosopher, there is a great deal that has to be considered besides gender.

Nonetheless, gender considerations are not absent from the exchange between Shepherd and Fearn. It is very hard to discover a woman's sensibility in Shepherd's presentation. She is addressing issues of general philosophical concern, she is not coming at them obliquely or with any particular woman's point of view, and her style of argumentation is one that is more apt to be labeled masculine than feminine. Yet, despite her own gender-neutral presentation, she is undoubtedly being read "as a woman" by Fearn and even by the more sympathetic Blakey. The latter, for example, describes her as a "talented lady" and says of her two books, "These metaphysical works, considered as the productions of a lady, are justly entitled to high praise" (Blakey 1848, p. 40). This kind of reaction on the part of both Blakey and Fearn reminds us of some

obvious facts. When we think of our own motives and concerns as writers, it may or may not be possible to find specific womanly (or manly) concerns and ways of thinking among the uneasy combinations of samenesses and differences that go to make up the way we see ourselves. But whether or not a woman explicitly chooses or explicitly refuses to write as a woman will have nothing to do with the fact that she will be read as a woman. This desire to “read-as-a-woman” can have deleterious effects, as in the case of Fearn’s reading of Shepherd, but there are more subtle effects of this desire as well, as when, in our attempts to uncover our feminine intellectual forebears, we are far more likely to focus on those, unlike Shepherd, who can more easily be “read-as-a-woman” or to direct our reading to those features of a work which appear to be womanly. ϕ

Notes

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929; New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1991).

² For another attempt to answer this question, see Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History,” in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet A. Kourany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 17–62.

³ *Parriana: or, Notices of the Rev. Samuel Parr, LL.D., collected from various sources, printed and manuscript, and in part written by E. H. Barker, Esq.* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828).

⁴ Shepherd’s article appeared in vol. V, no. XXX (July 1832), pp. 697–708. *Fraser’s Magazine* was a Tory Magazine recently founded by Hugh Fraser, edited by William Maginn, and published in London. It aimed at a general middle-class audience, publishing such well known authors as Coleridge, Carlyle, and Thackeray.

⁵ In another portion of *Parriana* Fearn lists himself as the author of the following ten works, all published by Longman and Co., Perternoster-Row; R. Hunter, St. Paul’s Churchyard; and Parbury, Allen and Co., Leadenhall-Street: (1) *An Essay on Consciousness*, 2nd ed., 1812, (2) *A Review of First Principles of Bishop Berkeley, Dr. Reid, and Professor Stewart*, 1813, (3) *A Demonstration of Necessary Connexion*, 1815, (4) *A Demonstration of the Principles of Primary Vision*, 1815, (5) *A Letter to Professor Stewart on the Objects of General Terms, and the Axiomatical Laws of Primary Vision*, 1817, (6) *An Essay on Immortality*, 1814, (7) *An Essay on the Philosophy of Faith*, 1815, (8) *First Lines of the Human Mind*, 1820, and (9) and (10) *Anti-Tooke, or an Analysis of the Principles and Structure of Language*, vol. 1, 1824, vol. 2, 1827.

⁶ This article tells us tantalizingly but perhaps mistakenly that Shepherd was the author of three philosophical treatises. Elsewhere only two are mentioned, or, to the best of my knowledge, have surfaced. While the reprint edition of Shepherd’s works from Thoemmes Press contains a third volume, originally published anonymously, which it credits to Shepherd, the nature of the contents of this third volume make it highly unlikely that it is, indeed, by Shepherd. Another possibility is that the *DNB* is counting each of the two parts of *Essays on the Perception on the External Universe* as a separate volume, although I have no evidence of their ever having been published separately, which would make this speculation more plausible.

⁷ Most of my information comes from Jennifer McRobert, “Introduction,” *The Philosophical Works of Lady Mary Shepherd*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), and from M. A. Stewart, private communications.

⁸ Robert Blakey, *History of the Philosophy of the Mind; embracing the opinions of all writings of mental science from the earliest period to the present day* (London: Trelawney William Saunders, 1848).

⁹ Fearn instances rather surprisingly Descartes here, since one would have thought that Descartes’s assertion that the essential property of matter is extension would have disqualified him. Fearn, however, may have had Descartes’s account of perception in mind.

¹⁰ Fearn speculates that Mary Shepherd may have been instructed by a tutor who was “a scholastic person” and Jennifer McRobert reports this as fact, but in context, it seems that Fearn is speaking hypothetically and not out of any knowledge of Shepherd’s early instructional arrangements. In any case, in Fearn’s usage, “scholastic” seems to be a label for those who take the mind to be an immaterial substance.

¹¹ This charge is quite unjust. Shepherd’s works show her to be widely read.

¹² By Janice Moulton, for example. See “A Paradigm of Philosophy: the Adversary Method,” in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), pp. 149–164.