

Orienting Questions

Jessica Benjamin's, **The Bonds of Love:
Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination** (pp. 1-84)

In Preparation for Benjamin's November 4-9, 2019 visit to
the New Center for Psychoanalysis
Master Clinician-in-Residence Program

1. **Introduction:** How does Benjamin interpret "the problem of domination"?
 - a. Is some kind of domination inevitable (4)?
 - b. Is domination primarily a problem of human nature or of human relationships (5)?
 - c. How does the unexamined psychoanalytic assumption about the subordination of women to men provide "the ultimate rationalization for accepting *all authority*" (7)?
 - d. How does Benjamin propose to analyze the evolution of the structure of domination?
 - e. What gives domination its appearance of inevitability, i.e., makes it seem that a relationship in which both participants are subjects – both empowered and mutually respectful – is impossible?" (8).

2. **Chapter One:** How do "domination and submission result from a breakdown of the *necessary tension* between *self-assertion* and *mutual recognition* that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals"? (12).
 - a. What does Benjamin mean by "*recognition*" (15); "*mutual recognition*" (16); and "*the intersubjective view*" (19)?
 - b. Why does mutuality necessarily involve a "*paradox of recognition*" (31) or an "*essential tension*" (25ff), i.e., "*core conflict between (self) assertion and recognition (of the other)*" (31ff)? Why is the need of the self for the other "paradoxical" (32)?
 - c. Why is that "the ideal resolution of the paradox of recognition is for it to continue as a constant tension" (36)? How does it counter Hegel's paradoxical claim that mutuality *must* break down resulting in domination or the *master-slave* dialectic (32)?
 - d. Benjamin claims that to actualize *being with* the other, or what Erikson called *basic trust*, or Stern calls *core relatedness*, what is needed is something more than drive satisfaction or an object relations focus on the whole object, viz., mutual recognition or the "*paradoxical balance* between recognition of the other and assertion of the self (46)." How does "being with" form the basis of a compassion that can "break down the oppositions between powerful and helpless, active and passive" or counteract the tendency to objectify and deny recognition to the other" (48)?

3. **Chapter Two:** How is domination anchored in the hearts of those who submit to it (52)? That is, how does the state of omnipotence, with its absence of tension, give birth to domination (73)?

- a. How does erotic domination, for both sides, draw its appeal from its offer to break the encasement of the isolated self, i.e., how is it a reaction to the predicament of solitary confinement – being unable to get through to the other, or be gotten through to – our particularly modern form of bondage (83)?
- b. In Benjamin's analysis of domination and submission via the example of sadism and masochism in the Story of O, she seems to pejoratively use terms like 'surrender' or 'devotion' as if motivated by a desire for an illusory form of "ideal" love which invariably results in the progressive loss of O's true self (60). She says "that we see in ideal love a perversion of identification, a deformation of identificatory love into submission" (122). *How does she reconcile the relationship of domination as asymmetrical (62) with real maternal (and/or paternal) asymmetrical love for one's child (82)?* Put another way, how (if at all) does Benjamin distinguish genuine asymmetrical "authority" from "authoritarianism" as means for the realization of "mutual recognition" (64)?