

# THE BONDS OF LOVE

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*PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM, AND THE  
PROBLEM OF DOMINATION*

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# Gender and Domination

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OUR DISCUSSION OF the oedipal model has already revealed the difficulty with the idea that the infant begins with a primal oneness from which he must gradually break free. It follows from this that the mother becomes the force of irrationality and undifferentiation, a threat and a promise calling from the infant past. The return to this mother, invoked by oedipal desire, must be warded off by the father, who accordingly stands for rationality and separateness. This polarized structure of

gender difference leaves only the alternatives of irrational oneness and rational autonomy. In the wake of this splitting, the image of feminine connection appears the more dangerous, the goal of masculine separation the more rational.

Oedipal gender polarity, so compelling in its logic and so formidable in its unconscious roots, is not restricted to the individual psyche, where it is expressed in terms of mother and father. This polarity, as I have already said, has its analogue in other long-standing dualisms of Western culture: rationality and irrationality, subject and object, autonomy and dependency. In this chapter, I will offer some observations on how the split that constitutes gender polarity is replicated in intellectual and social life, and how it eliminates the possibilities of mutual recognition in society as a whole.

The opposition between paternal subject and maternal object clearly reveals the gender structure that analogous dualisms conceal. Significantly, in the cultural representation of dualism the gender aspect is generally unacknowledged. Whereas psychoanalysis unselfconsciously took the oedipal boy as its standard—the male as the model of the individual—much of modern thought claims to speak for the neuter subject, gender-free and universal. Yet the idea of the individual in modern liberal thought is tacitly defined as masculine even when women are included. Identifying the gender content of what is considered to be gender-neutral can be as difficult as undoing the assumption of essential gender differences. We must look for male hegemony where social and cultural theories have seen the workings of neither sex nor psyche.

Feminist criticism in many disciplines has demonstrated that the concept of the individual is really a concept of the male subject.<sup>1</sup> Likewise I will argue that the principle of rationality which social theorists since Weber have seen as the hallmark of modernity—the rationality that reduces the social world to objects of exchange, calculation, and control—is in fact a male rationality. Rationalization, at the societal level, sets the stage for a form of domination that appears to be gender-neutral, indeed, to have no subject at all. Yet its logic

dovetails with the oedipal denial of woman's subjectivity, which reduces the other to object. The psychic repudiation of femininity, which includes the negation of dependency and mutual recognition, is homologous with the social banishment of nurturance and intersubjective relatedness to the private domestic world of women and children. The social separation of private and public spheres—long noted by feminists as the crucial form of the sexual division of labor and thus the social vehicle of gender domination—is patently linked to the split between the father of autonomy and the mother of dependency.<sup>2</sup>

The separation of spheres intensifies as society is increasingly rationalized. As in erotic domination, the process replicates the breakdown in tension: the subject fears becoming like the object he controls, which no longer has the capacity to recognize him. As the principle of pure self-assertion comes to govern the public world of men, human agency is enslaved by the objects it produces, deprived of the personal authorship and recognizing response that are essential to subjectivity. On the other hand, private life, which preserves authorship and recognition, is isolated, deprived of social effectiveness. Thus societal rationalization negates what is truly "social" in social life.

The subordination of all aspects of life to the instrumental principles of the public world also subverts the very values of private life, and thus threatens the maternal aspects of recognition: nurturance (the recognition of need), and attunement (the recognition of feeling). Some social critics blame the erosion of such maternal qualities on women's efforts to enter the public world. But this diagnosis misconstrues the symptoms and ignores their cause. The destruction of maternal values is not the result of women's liberation; it is the consequence of the ascendance of male rationality.

#### MALE INDIVIDUALITY, MALE RATIONALITY

Rationalization, as Weber conceived it, defines the process in which abstract, calculable, and depersonalized modes of interaction replace

those founded on personal relationships and traditional authority and beliefs. Instrumental rationality elevates means to the status of ends. Formal procedures (like law) and abstract goals (like profit) replace the traditional values and customs that form a common cultural life and serve to legitimate authority. Political domination is no longer embodied in personal authority (monarchs), but in the system of bureaucratic rationality ("the administration").<sup>3</sup> For Weber, instrumental rationality leads to a culture of disenchantment in which substantive values are no longer collectively shared, universal, or social; they become private, particular, and personal. Thus the gain in individual authority that emerges in liberal, enlightened society is simultaneously vitiated by the loss of moral reason that gives this authorship its social meaning and impact.<sup>4</sup>

For the Frankfurt theorists, individual authority and agency are only an appearance contradicted by the reality of economic powerlessness and dependency. Following Georg Lukacs, they joined Weber's concept of rationalization to Marx's idea that domination is located in the principle of commodity exchange.<sup>5</sup> A worker sells his labor power in exchange for a wage; but his labor produces more value (surplus value) than that wage; and this surplus is appropriated by capital and wielded as power. Likewise, the worker loses control of the object he produces, in which he might recognize his own labor. Thus the formal principle of "equal" exchange subordinates all other principles of social recognition and masks the domination of one class by another. As domination is rationalized and depersonalized, it becomes invisible, and seems to be natural and necessary.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of rationalization forms a bridge between intellectual history and the history of social and economic relationships. It describes the essence of modern social practice and thought. It is, in Foucault's sense, a discourse.<sup>7</sup> My argument is that it is a *gendered* discourse, that the instrumental orientation and the impersonality that govern modern social organization and thought should be understood as masculine. This means that male domination, like class domination, is no longer a function of personal power relationships (though these

do exist), but something inherent in the social and cultural structures, independent of what individual men and women will.

Thus regardless of woman's increasing participation in the public, productive sphere of society, it remains, in its practices and principles, "a man's world." The presence of women has no effect on its rules and processes. The public institutions and the relations of production display an apparent genderlessness, so impersonal do they seem. Yet it is precisely this objective character, with its indifference to personal need, that is recognized as the hallmark of masculine power. It is precisely the pervasive depersonalization, the banishment of nurturance to the private sphere, that reveal the logic of male dominance, of female denigration and exclusion. Invisible, the structure of gender domination is nevertheless materialized in the rationality that pervades our economic and social relations. The apparent gender neutrality is a kind of mystification, like the mystification that Marx identified as commodity fetishism—an illusion created by the social relations themselves.

Feminist theory has already exposed the mystification inherent in the ideal of the autonomous individual. As our discussion of Oedipus showed, this individual is based on the paternal ideal of separation and denial of dependency. The feminist critique of the autonomous individual closely parallels the Marxian critique of the bourgeois individual, elaborated by the Frankfurt theorists.<sup>8</sup> As Marcuse points out, the denial of dependency is central to the bourgeois ideal of individual freedom:

Self-sufficiency and independence of all that is other and alien is the sole guarantee of the subject's freedom. What is not dependent on any other person or thing, what possesses itself, is free. . . . A relationship to the other in which one really reaches and is united with him counts as loss and dependence.<sup>9</sup>

The ideal of the bourgeois individual, Marcuse shows, is created by an act of abstraction, which denies his real dependency and social

subordination. Consequently, his freedom consists of protection from the control or intrusion of others. It is a *negative* ideal of freedom: freedom as release from bondage, individuality stripped bare of its relationship with and need for others.

From a feminist point of view, the missing piece in the analysis of Western rationality and individualism is the structure of gender domination. The psychosocial core of this unfettered individuality is the subjugation of woman by man, through which it appears that she is his possession, and therefore, that he is not dependent upon or attached to an other outside himself. As a psychological principle, autonomous individuality derives from the male posture in differentiation; that is, from the repudiation of the primary experience of nurturance and identity with the mother. The individual's abstractness lies in the denial not merely of the nourishing and constraining bonds that engage him in society, as Marcuse argues, but also of the primary emotional bonds, conscious and unconscious, that foster and limit his freedom.

Submerged beneath the universal claims of this individual, then, is not only his historic and cultural specificity, but also his gender. While most modern theory has considered this masculine identity too self-evident to be mentioned (the particularity of gender would compromise his universality), it is, nevertheless, retained as an "option": when necessary, it can always be mobilized to exclude or devalue women. It has uncovered the masculine identity of the seemingly neutral universal individual of modern thought and society; indeed, it has shown that neutrality itself is the sign of masculinity, its alliance with rationality and objectivity. The feminist critique has rejected the assumption in modern thought that individuality and rationality are universals while gender is particular, secondary, not essential to their constitution.

Let us be clear about the stakes of this critique: it is not a matter merely of exposing bias, or of the exclusion of women from a world they wish to enter. If the rational, autonomous individual's claim to neutrality is compromised, then so is his claim to universality. If his way of being in the world is not simply human, but specifically

masculine, then it is not universal. And this means that his way is not the only or inevitable way of doing things. Furthermore, if this subject establishes his identity by splitting off certain human capabilities, called feminine, and by refusing to recognize the subjectivity of this feminine other, then his claim to stand for equality, liberty, free thought, and recognition of the other is also invalidated. And this means that his way cannot be the best way of doing things.

#### OBJECTIVITY AND AUTONOMY

In her book *Reflections on Gender and Science* Evelyn Keller makes a convincing case for the masculine character of modern scientific objectivity. Her work adds the missing piece—gender—to the well-known critique of modern science as fundamentally inspired by the project of control and domination of nature. She argues that the relationship between the subject of knowledge and his object may be represented in terms of the relationship between the subject and his love object. Contrasting Plato's metaphor of knowledge as homoerotic union (*knowledge = eros*) with Bacon's metaphor of heterosexual conquest (*knowledge = power*), she shows how gender frames the relationship between mind and nature. She contends that as the character of male dominion over woman has changed, so has the metaphor of scientific knowledge. Beginning with Bacon, modern science adopted the metaphor of subduing nature and wresting her secrets from her.<sup>10</sup> "Instead of banishing the Furies underground, out of sight, as did the Greeks, modern science has sought to expose female interiority, to bring it into the light, and thus to dissolve its threat entirely."<sup>11</sup>

Yet while denying invisibility to nature, the contemporary scientist maintains the invisibility of his personal authorship, protecting his autonomy behind a screen of objectivity. This impersonality of modern science, Keller argues, is actually the signature of its masculine identity.<sup>12</sup> We may note that this image of the scientist as impersonal knower who "tears the veil" from nature's body is



reminiscent of the master in the fantasy of erotic domination, and his quest for knowledge parallels the rational violation in which the subject is always in control.

Indeed, Keller proposes that modern scientific detachment from the object derives from the relation to the mother that I have called one-sided differentiation. Because men originally define themselves through separation from and opposition to the mother, Keller argues, they reject experiences of merging and identification that blur the boundary between subject and object. Thus the masculine stance toward difference accords with the cultural dominance of a "science that has been premised on a radical dichotomy between subject and object."<sup>13</sup> The world outside, the other, is always object. As the first other, the mother, becomes an object, Keller explains, her object status infuses the world and the natural environment.<sup>14</sup>

In the radical separation of subject and object we perceive again the inability to grasp the aliveness of the other; we hear the echo of the unmovable, unmoving character of the master. And yet again the denial of recognition leaves the omnipotent self imprisoned in his mind, reflecting on the world from behind a wall of glass.

This is the impasse of rationalism, analogous to the impasse of omnipotence, in which the subject completely assimilates the outside. It is not a problem exclusive to modern science; it runs throughout Western thought. Lukacs and the Frankfurt theorists identified this tendency in the history of philosophy: as the rational subject of thought became increasingly separated from the object, he internalized the qualities of that lost object, and attributed to himself all that was once part of the objective world. In Kant, for example, space and time, the basic categories of sensuous knowledge, do not exist objectively in reality, which we can never know, but are rather part of the mind of the knower. The transcendental subject "eats up" the reality of the world, claiming that everything perceived is in the eye of the beholder.<sup>15</sup> Thus for the Frankfurt theorists the thinking subject has sucked the life out of the social and natural world, and now, like a swollen tick, is stuck, embedded, in this lifeless world. Of course its

lifelessness does not prevent the host-world from suffocating the subject with its dead weight.

Despite this critique of how the radically separate mind dominates and so destroys objective reality, the Frankfurt theorists could find no other antidote than an even greater self-awareness. In order to break with the rationalist tradition of the individual as "windowless monad," to release the mind from its narcissistic bubble, they looked for some other principle that would limit the absolute self by restoring its connection to the world. In Freud, they found a perspective that challenged the mind's disconnection from the body, and saw omnipotence for the danger it is; but Freud did not address the gap between the self and other selves.<sup>16</sup> The Frankfurt theorists lacked a model of the psyche in which the self truly seeks to know the outside world and longs for contact with the other. Their difficulty was precisely their lack of an intersubjective theory. They could only envision connection as a return to oneness, as dedifferentiation and irrationality—a romantic, and ultimately dangerous reunion with nature.\* The only "solution" to the impasse of the rational mind, then, was constant reflection on its tendency toward domination.

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\*Marcuse, less resigned than Adorno and Horkheimer, did propose the idea of a dialogic interaction with nature, although his adherence to drive theory made him unable to ground it psychoanalytically. Marcuse's vision of a different science and technology has been criticized by Habermas. Though he agreed that the motive of domination and control was embedded in modern rationality itself, especially in science and technology, Habermas disputed the possibility of a different relation to nature in which it was not objectified and instrumentalized but known as an independent, subjective other. He argued that the search for an arena of intersubjectivity (a project which he first formulated and to which he is committed) to counter the goal rationality of science must look elsewhere, in symbolic interaction. But Marcuse's utopianism is, in its intention, closer to the feminist critique of rationality than Habermas's. The latter's argument merely displaces the problem of rationalism—the inability to recognize the other—to the area of symbolic interaction and moral discourse. And there, the same issue arises as in science: only formal procedures and abstraction allow a universal form of recognition, but these negate the recognition of the other's particular subjectivity.<sup>17</sup>

The feminist critique of rationality is able to take the intersubjective route out of this impasse. It is not necessary, as Keller shows, to abandon the scientific project of knowing the world, only to redefine it. While the separation that recognizes the world's outside existence is a condition of vitality, the complete rupture of our connection to the world makes our perception of it static and rigid. Thus Keller proposes a new concept of dynamic objectivity that "actively draws on the commonality between mind and nature," and suggests the reconstitution of the subject-object relationship as one that permits attunement and similarity between knower and known.<sup>18</sup>

This intersubjective perspective envisions a more complex world than the realm of lifeless objects created by the radical separation of subject and object, self and other. By investing one's full attention in the object, one allows it to emerge as real and whole, so that the self is not lost but heightened through pleasure in the object.<sup>19</sup> Here we see how the intersubjective experiences of infancy—the awareness that different minds can share the same perceptions, the experience of a transitional space that is not sharply defined as inside or outside—may become the basis for knowledge and recognition of the other. Keller reminds us that an esoteric tradition of knowledge that respects its object exists as an alternative in Western science. This alternative, "intersubjective" tradition is exemplified in recent years by the work of the biologist Barbara McClintock, whose original work in genetics lay outside the dominant paradigm of "breaking the code." Of her experience studying chromosomes, she observed: "When I was really working with them I wasn't outside, I was down there. I was part of the system. I was right down there with them, and everything got big. I even was able to see the internal parts of the chromosomes. It surprised me, because I actually felt as if I was right down there and these were my friends. . . . As you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself."<sup>20</sup> McClintock's moving image reminds us that the act of knowing can be felt as communion, not conquest.

The feminist critique of rationality thus leads us to redraft our map

of the mind to include the territory of self and other, that space in which we know, discover, and create the world through our connection to it. It identifies the element within the project of knowledge that leads to domination and destructiveness as well as the excluded element that might redeem it. In exposing the structure of rationality and individuality as masculine and one-sided, the feminist critique points out both the origins of domination and the potential for a more balanced differentiation of self and world. To assert that rationality is contaminated by control is not a proposal to scrap it in favor of romantic anti-rationality; it is meant to redefine rationality and expand its boundaries. The point is not to undo all of modern science but to acknowledge the value of what has been banished as irrational and infantile.

Modern science's definition of knowledge in terms of a controlling subject and an objectified world is one instance of the hegemony of male rationality. Let us now consider a related critique: Carol Gilligan's analysis of the masculinist orientation of moral psychology.

While other fields have grown accustomed to feminist theorizing about the subject's gender, psychology was taken unawares when the issue of gender was finally brought to its door. Gilligan's challenge to the exclusion of women's experience from psychology, *In a Different Voice*, drove home the moral and political implications of theories of individual development. Gilligan exposes the gender assumptions in moral development and life-cycle theories, some of which have been widely influential outside the bounds of the discipline of psychology. Thus she criticizes Erik Erikson's model of identity development, in which the stages of life are seen as a progress in separation, and the definition of maturity subordinates relational responsibilities to autonomy and achievement.<sup>21</sup>

Gilligan's research is primarily designed to challenge Lawrence Kohlberg's model of moral development, a theory that originated in studies of male subjects only. When Kohlberg applied his model to women, he found they were less likely than men to reach the "highest stage" of moral reasoning, the ability to reason in formal terms about

universal goals, independent of concrete considerations, conventions, and self-interest. In Kohlberg's theory, this stage is characterized by the ability to recognize and apply universal norms such as justice and equality.<sup>22</sup> Gilligan argues that this conception of morality is one-sided, and specifically, that it reflects the masculine experience. Her own research shows that women do progress toward higher levels of universal judgment, but that their values—such as psychological truth, caring, nonviolence—are not identical with those of men. Although women and men are able to take either position, women are more likely to espouse an ethics of care and responsibility, men an ethics of rights and justice. Women who have demonstrated the ability to reason formally and abstractly nonetheless prefer a style of moral thinking that is contextual and concrete, that sees the self in relation to others.

Gilligan revalues woman's moral position and, more generally, redeems previously denied aspects of feminine experience. Her intention is to correct an individuation that has been centered on the goal of separation.\* She shows how Kohlberg's conception of moral reasoning is grounded in a notion of abstract, formal recognition independent of specific needs or ties ("I recognize you as having the same rights as I have myself"). The moral subject can take the role of the other and can accept the principle of reciprocity in the abstract, but only by constituting a general point of view, not by taking the other's subjective point of view. The particular other is subsumed by the universal "generalized other."<sup>24</sup> We may say that reciprocity of rights is based on the most abstract common denominator—what makes one person like the other—and denies all that is "individual." This symme-

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\*There is an element of reversal in Gilligan's argument but I believe that those critics who see only this element and thus claim that she espouses a "feminine ethos" have overlooked her critique of feminine self-sacrifice and her repeated statements in favor of psychological tension and ambiguity. This misinterpretation has arisen, as Seyla Benhabib suggests, because Gilligan's book contained no explicit discussion of the historical "*constitution* of these gender differences . . . in light of woman's oppression."<sup>23</sup>

try of rights presumes the competition of all against all—the limit and the affirmation of pure assertion. Thus the individual is not “interested” in the other’s needs, indeed, does not recognize them because they may oppose his own. Paradoxically, then, this abstraction from personal needs and the other’s subjective viewpoint militates against recognition of difference. Only the other (my complementary opposite) who does *not* have the same rights as I do, and against whom I do *not* compete, may claim respect for needs—in this category we find the helpless wife, the child, the deprived. Thus the formal acceptance of difference opposes the intersubjective appreciation of it, which includes recognition of the particular, individual needs of the other.

This kind of moral knowledge, Gilligan argues, “in the end is always self-referenced”; despite his encounter with the other, “the self oddly seems to stay constant.”<sup>25</sup> The impact of the other’s difference is never really felt; the collision with reality never shatters the bubble of the self; the “news of difference,” as Gregory Bateson calls it, never gets through. In intersubjective terms, the other is, we might say, not recognized as someone who can be different and yet share the same subjective state. Without concrete knowledge, empathy, and identification with the other subject—with the other’s needs, feelings, circumstances, and history—the self continues to move in the realm of subject and object, untransformed by the other. The self says, “You cannot affect or negate my identity, you can only be the object of my assertion.” What is absent is the tension of recognizing the outside other as both different *and* alike. While the idea of reciprocal rights appears to define recognition, it actually defines only one condition of it. When this condition—equal rights—is confused with recognition itself, it actually makes the recognition of individual needs and differences more difficult. Thus Gilligan’s challenge to the ideal of the autonomous individual also alerts us to the insufficiency of the political ethos of rights.

Kohlberg, and other adherents of his moral philosophy, have rejected Gilligan’s critique on the grounds that women’s concerns with care and emotional truth belong to values of “the good life,” that is,

to private choice rather than public ethics. Furthermore, Kohlberg argues that, unlike justice and rights, women's moral concerns are not sufficiently abstract and universal to be considered proper categories of moral reasoning—they are merely aspects of ego development.<sup>26</sup> It is as if these values were fit only for the nursery, not for the public world. In the public world, only values abstracted from individual, particular needs can claim universal validity—to generalize any individual's needs would compromise the right of every individual to choose his values and pursue the fulfillment of his needs.\*

But as political philosopher Seyla Benhabib points out, this very insistence on the division between questions of public and private expresses an unavowed sexual politics.

This traditional distinction in moral and political theory between justice and the good life does not only reflect a cognitive concern, but has also been a means of legitimizing the split between the public and the private spheres, as these reflect the sexual division of labor current in our societies. The public sphere, the sphere of justice . . . is regarded as the domain where independent, male heads of household transact with one another, while the private-intimate sphere is put beyond the pale of justice and restricted to the reproductive and affective needs of the bourgeois pater

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\*The inability to reconcile individual needs with universal goals is a serious problem for feminist politics as well. Thus feminists opposed the use of universals as a feature of male discourse, but wanted to retain universalism for themselves—as in the claim for a universal woman's essence, or in the idea that women are the new revolutionary subject whose liberation will free everyone. The same groups that once embraced the idea of the unity of women based on their common essence then leapt to a "new" awareness that differences of race and class were the real truth and that all universal categories only serve to deny such difference. In this turnabout there was no stopping point, no consideration of how to sustain the tension between universal commonality and specific differences.

familias. . . . An entire domain of human activity, namely, nurture, reproduction, love and care, which became women's lot in the course of modern bourgeois society, was thereby excluded from moral and political consideration, and relegated to the realm of nature.<sup>27</sup>

The ideal of the autonomous individual could only be created by abstracting from the relationship of dependency between men and women. The relationships which people require to nurture them are considered private, and not truly relationships with outside *others*. Thus the other is reduced to an appendage of the subject—the mere condition of his being—not a being in her own right. The individual who cannot recognize the other or his own dependency without suffering a threat to his identity requires the formal, impersonal principles of rationalized interaction, and is required by them.

The unbreachable line between public and private values rests on the tacit assumption that women will continue to preserve and protect personal life, the task to which they have been assigned. In this way the political morality can sustain the fiction of the wholly independent individual, whose main concern is a system of rights that protects him from other individuals like himself. The public world is conceived as a place in which direct recognition and care for others' needs is impossible—and this is tolerable as long as the private world "cooperates." The public sphere, an arrangement of atomized selves, cannot serve as the space between self and other, as an intersubjective space; in order to protect the autonomy of the individual, social life forfeits the recognition between self and other.

This public rationality necessitates that woman's different voice be split off and institutionalized in the private sphere. This voice is, I suspect, part of the "pianissimo" Weber had in mind when he wrote:

It is the fate of our times, with its characteristic rationalization and intellectualization, and above all disenchantment, that pre-



cisely the ultimate, most sublime values have withdrawn from public life either into the transcendental realm of mysticism or the brotherliness of direct personal relationships. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor is it accidental that today only within the smallest, intimate circles, from person to person, in *pianissimo*, this Something pulsates that corresponds to the prophetic *pneuma*, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together.<sup>28</sup>

#### DEFENDERS OF THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Weber observes that sublime values have become the preserve of private life, with regret rather than satisfaction. This is not the case for many who have come after him. A strain of social criticism has arisen (right *and* left, feminist *and* antifeminist) that celebrates the private sphere of female nurturance and criticizes social rationality while accepting this division, and indeed all gender polarity, as natural and inevitable. This fantasy of separate but equal spheres denies that rationalization is a form of male hegemony; that the modern sexual division, like its more authoritarian predecessors, is still a relationship of domination.

The several versions of this position, which I shall refer to as gender conservatism, display a common contradiction. Although they criticize the effects of rationalization (for example, the invasion of family life by state institutions and mental health professionals) they accept its premise: that the split between nurturance and rationality in social life is unavoidable. Gender conservatives offer a well-worn alternative to the repudiation of maternal nurturance by male enterprise: the restoration of gender polarity in a best-of-all-possible separation of spheres. They want to restore the traditional sexual division of labor in the family precisely because they see it as the matrix for the growth of

the autonomous individual.\* Conversely, they attribute the breakdown of this family form not to the dissolution of larger kin and neighborhood ties, but to the demise of the independent male wage earner. Thus they would recreate the conditions in which the whole family depends on the male wage earner in order to promote the purported stability of the old sexual division. For gender conservatives, the feminist project of bringing women into the public world is the main obstacle to restoring familial and societal stability.

The defense of "the family" has been formulated not only by avowed conservatives like Brigitte and Peter Berger, sociologists who see themselves as Weberian critics of rationalization, but also by historian Christopher Lasch, who calls himself a radical, and political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain, who calls herself a feminist.<sup>30</sup> Although each of these authors has a somewhat different position, all are gender conservatives who criticize rationalization in the name of protecting the family, its sexual division of labor, and, above all, women's mothering. All see the idea of reforming public life to provide more nurturance as a dangerous invitation to state expansion and further rationalization of private life. As they see it, to put more areas of life under the jurisdiction of public policy and organization would only disrupt the domestic arrangements that offer a last refuge of warmth and safety. But here arises the dilemma that gender conservatives cannot solve. Although their ideal is the structure of gender polarity, which upholds masculine rationality and autonomy in the public world and honors feminine

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\*The idea that changes in family life have undermined individualism and the work ethic is a shibboleth of social criticism closely allied with the criticism of the "New Narcissism." But, as the sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues have recently documented, the old work ethic of competitive individualism is still flourishing and is quite compatible with the narcissistic focus on the self.<sup>29</sup> What has changed is that the struggle for individual achievement or survival is no longer endowed with meaning by the broader society; individual performance is now divorced from participation in community life.

nurturance in the home, the masculine principle cannot in fact be contained in public life. It inevitably threatens to exceed these limits and devalue the cherished haven of home.

For the defenders of the family, the damage done by the rationalized public world of men can be repaired by women, if only they will play by the rules of gender polarity and devote their lives to the endangered maternal role. In *The War over the Family*, for example, the Bergers make no bones about defending the bourgeois family in its classic nineteenth-century form, in which "the woman is paramount in the home" and has a "civilizing mission" outside of it. They state categorically that "the bourgeois family is the necessary social context for the emergence of the autonomous individuals who are the empirical foundation of political democracy." This family, they claim, was based on an ethos of *balance* which "made it possible to socialize individuals with singularly stable personalities, . . . a balance between individualism and social responsibility, between 'liberation' and strong communal ties, between acquisition and altruism."<sup>31</sup> The balance the Bergers celebrate is, of course, the one between public and private, based on the separate spheres of mother and father.

The Bergers concede that the extension of individualism and rationalization into every area of life has rent the old fabric of society.<sup>32</sup> Individualism has brought about its own demise; it has undermined the very family that gave birth to the stable individual. But since the Bergers consider the family woman's domain, we are not surprised to discover, as we read on, that what they lament is not so much the general expansion of male rationality but the particular extension of individualism to women. The Bergers suggest that the family is undermined by feminist "hyperindividualism"; women are no longer willing to devote themselves to fostering the individuality of others.<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, Lasch and Elshtain, who know better, equate feminism with the ethos of corporate liberalism and individualist competition—as if it all came down to more places for women financial executives.<sup>34</sup>

The Bergers appear entirely ignorant of the feminist critique of individualism and rationality, and attribute to feminists an ideal of the

individual which is really their own. In feminism, they claim, "the individual woman is now emphasized over against every communal context in which she may find herself—a redefinition of her situation that breaks not only the community between the spouses but (more fundamentally) the mother-child dyad, . . . the most basic human community of all."<sup>35</sup> The Bergers believe that women's independence virtually threatens life itself, the most vital human bond.

The problem with this defense of the family as matrix for the autonomous individual is, again, the one that arises from the language of gender-neutral universality: the moment women take advantage of the logic of universality and rebel against their confinement to the domestic sphere, the advocates of autonomy trot out the hidden gender clause. The unspoken assumption is that women, by upholding the private sphere and creating a nurturing environment, create the framework for the autonomous individuality of men. The Bergers finally hope that women "will come to understand that life is more than a career and that this 'more' is above all to be found in the family. But, however individual women decide, *they should not expect public policy to underwrite and subsidize their life plans.*"<sup>36</sup> (emphasis added) Thus, while men can have a career and "more," subsidized by the care and labor of the wife-mother, women should realize that this offer is not open to them. Their role is to *produce* autonomous individuals (boys) who can balance their public and private lives, not to *be* such individuals. Berger and Berger present their proposal for women with no thought of the contradiction between the democratic ethos of formal equality and substantive inequality—let alone domination—nor with any thought of the inherent instability of such a contradiction.

The Bergers' plea also exemplifies the other contradiction that arises from gender polarity: defending the traditional female ethos of nurturance while affirming its exclusion from the public social world.<sup>37</sup> While they object to women sharing in the pursuit of individualism, they continue to defend the individualist ethos. They are convinced that any limitation placed on free enterprise, and any state program for social support, is a step away from democracy, a step toward the

death of individualism. This is why no woman should expect public policy to support her "life plans"—even if these plans include no more than single-handedly feeding, clothing, and sheltering her children through minimum-wage employment.

Although they acknowledge that the family is the victim of the very forces of rationalization to which it gave birth, the Bergers never pause to question the principle of rationality, especially the principle of capitalist economy (production for profit, all services organized through economic exchange, unchecked competition). Nor do they see how these principles threaten the ideal of mutual responsibility which their bourgeois family stands for. The lack of support and responsibility in public life creates unremitting anxiety about being at the mercy of a heartless rationality. This is why the *idea* that women are needed in the home—increasingly impossible in actuality except for the well-to-do—has once again become so popular, an enchanted vision of a maternal haven.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that this insistence on the division between public and private is sustained by the fear that anything public or "outside" would merely intensify individual helplessness, that only the person we have not yet recognized as outside (mother and wife) can be trusted to provide us with care, that the only safe dependence is on someone who is not part of the struggle of all against all, and indeed, who is herself not independent. Thus we can only protect our autonomy and mask our vulnerability by keeping nurturance confined to its own sphere.

Perhaps, also, the social provision of nurturance is too threatening a reminder of early dependency in the very outside sphere which was supposed to be our escape from it. The kind of social support that might spark our identification with the helplessness of the needy is bitterly resisted. This attitude generates a vicious cycle in which the unconscious revulsion against early states of dependency or helplessness is reinforced by the spectacle of those who are left in the lurch. The visible consequences of our failure to provide socially organized nurturance—a safe holding environment—intensify our distance and disidentification from those who require support. Witness the refusal to

recognize the increasing number of women and children below the poverty line.

While the values of competition, success, and hard work seem to thrive as ever, the values of collective nurturance and responsibility for others have suffered. Of course, these are not intrinsically female values, but in our society they are almost exclusively familial and private, and thus associated with women. It would be more accurate to say they are *parental* values, part of the private lives of women and the growing number of men who are consciously emphasizing fatherhood. But in the logic of gender polarity, *nurturance* = *private* = *mother*. This equation insists on the division of labor between the parents, and so acts against the creation of conditions that would allow fathers *and* mothers to nurture their children.

While conservatives like the Bergers blame feminists for the conditions of marital instability and mothers' unwillingness to stay home with their children, they are silent about the lack of social support for families. Nor have they anything to say about the relationship between fathers and children. Here we might note a peculiarity common to all of the authors cited. Their response to the feminist proposal of dual parenting and to the critique of instrumental rationality as masculine is to change the subject and talk loudly of the dangers of collective childrearing. In *The Minimal Self* Lasch reports, accurately enough, that psychoanalytic feminists believe that the problem of instrumental rationality will persist "as long as society assigns children exclusively to the care of women and subordinates the work of nurture to the masculine projects of conquest and domination." Rather than directly confront this idea, Lasch simply asserts that Freudian feminists want more than "an expanded role for men in childcare"—yes, they want an *equal* role. "They call for the collectivization of childrearing."<sup>39</sup> Without any comment on male responsibility for children, Lasch changes the subject to public childcare.

This sudden change of subject struck me as significant when I found identical elisions in other defenses of the traditional family. Thus in her book *Public Man, Private Woman* Elshtain dismisses Chodorow's

idea that male parenting would change the male stance toward women as "counterfactual," and goes on to denounce collective childrearing and, specifically, the destruction of individualism in the kibbutz. To back up her argument, she calls on the evidence that without specific attachments children are damaged, and the correlate assumption that daycare means the substitution of temporary attachments for permanent ones.<sup>40</sup> The feminist proposal that fathers nurturing children would simultaneously repair the repudiation of the mother and reconcile men to nurturance is transformed into a nightmare vision of raising children like Perdue chickens.

I think this displacement reveals something about the fear of being left in the father's care—the preconscious assumption that men would either neglect children or raise them with the same instrumental rationality (impersonality, lack of care and attunement) that they display in public enterprise. It reveals that the state, that purveyor of instrumental rationality, really is symbolically equated with the detached father. We can speculate that the insistence on maintaining the separation between public and private simply repeats the splitting of father and mother. As we have seen, this split grows out of the conflict between autonomy and attachment. The child, fearing that dependency will contaminate his autonomy, develops a one-sided version of independence. But splitting backfires: for now masculine separation and repudiation of femininity have destroyed maternal love; and having left mother, there is no turning back.

Gender conservatism accepts the instrumentalism of society as long as society permits the existence of a private refuge. Indeed, it fears any extension of public nurturance and support as an encroachment on autonomy, a violation of the territory of pure individuality. Restricted to the private enclave, the mother is equated with the infantile ideal: she is the constant source of goodness, the one who can make everything right with the world. This scheme preserves the split between outside and inside, so that the individual appears self-sufficient in public but can relax and regress in the safe enclave of the wife-mother. Yet it is precisely this split on the psychic and social level that

provokes the deep anxiety about losing access to home, mother, dependency, and nurturance—about being exposed to the cold, ruthless outside.

This anxiety is, in turn, plowed back into the urgent wish to restore the boundaries between personal and public that “ideally” protect the inner, private core of the self. The idea of home functions metaphorically to protect the needy, dependent, and vulnerable self from exposure and violation. The inner core of need (still seen as infantile since the autonomous adult should not need anyone) can never be revealed “outside,” in public, except as weakness. The ideal mother-wife protects the autonomous individual from having to admit his needs by meeting them in advance; she protects him from the shame of exposure, allowing him to appear independent and in control. Therefore losing control over her, the object, is a threat to the individual’s self-control, to his sense of an intact self.

As long as the father (and men in general) cannot be depended upon in the same reliable way for tenderness and holding, as long as he represents selfish autonomy, mother (and women in general) will remain the only source of goodness. The problem is that using the wife-mother as a prop for autonomy threatens to reduce her to a mere extension of the self; it risks using her up. The ideal of autonomous individuality with its stress on rationality, self-sufficiency, performance, and competition threatens to negate the mother so completely that there may be no one to come home to. This is a version of the contradiction we saw in erotic domination, the fear that we have destroyed or wholly objectified the other whom we need. It is also another version of the oedipal model: wanting to devalue and control the other while still drawing sustenance from her, wanting to keep mother in captivity and yet alive and strong, protected by a separate and yet responsible father. The panic about women leaving home does express a psychic reality: the fear of paying the price for individual autonomy and social rationalization, the fear that being grown up means feeling “like a motherless child.” But it is not women’s abandonment of the home that stimulates this fear. Rather, the social



division of gender—with its idealization of autonomous individuality—is at fault, bringing about the loss of the very maternal nurturance it is meant to protect.

### THE LOST IDEAL OF MOTHERHOOD

If there is no true recognition of the mother's part, then there must remain a vague fear of dependence. This fear will sometimes take the form of a fear of women in general or fear of a particular woman, and at other times will take on less easily recognised forms, always including the fear of domination.

Unfortunately, the fear of domination does not lead groups of people to avoid being dominated; on the contrary, it draws them towards a specific or chosen domination. . . .

—D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*<sup>41</sup>

In acknowledging the erosion of maternal nurturance by societal rationalization, I do not intend to idealize private motherhood as the advocates of gender polarity have done. The sentimental ideal of motherhood is the product of the historic separation of public and private spheres that gave gender polarity its present form as an institutionalized opposition between male rationality and maternal nurturance. To idealize maternal nurturance, a position some feminists share with gender conservatives, only confirms the dualism and denies historical reality. To accept the old ideal of motherhood—even as an ideal—is to remain inside the revolving door of gender polarity.

The contemporary celebrations of motherhood are a classic example of reenchantment, which is the attempt to replace a lost relationship with an ideal. Disenchantment (the impersonality and neutrality bred by rationalization) inevitably stimulates the search for reenchantment, in this case, for a regendered version of society. Such regressive re-

enchantment can rely on the structure of gender polarity that is preserved, albeit beneath the surface, by rationalization. Thus as the concrete forms of maternal care and recognition diminish, their loss is repaired by the symbolic evocation of motherhood.

The symbolism of ideal motherhood actually obscures the waning of the sociable domestic world that originally supported it. The isolation of the nuclear family household in the post-war era and the reduction of its social ties with the outside world (which are now largely ties of consumption) deprived the mother of her own holding environment—the web of kin and neighborhood relationships that supported, advised, and nurtured her. The loss of this support was compensated for by a more equal sharing of tasks and a more intimate personal cooperation between man and wife: the separate spheres were replaced by a new image of marital solidarity, the so-called “partnership marriage,” which became the model of the post-war era. But the ideal of marital solidarity was simply grafted on to the old sexual division of labor, leaving mothers of this era at home, more isolated and dependent than ever.<sup>42</sup>

The contradiction between the ideal of marital solidarity and the framework of gender polarity, especially the public-private split, has largely worked to women's detriment. While men's greater participation in domestic life offers some women greater intimacy and support, it hardly offsets the greater isolation, disenfranchisement, and dependency that characterize privatized motherhood. The inequality between men and women at work and at home constantly undermines the intimacy and solidarity which are the theoretical goal of modern marriage. This disparity between ideal and reality is obviously a major cause of marital disharmony and divorce—still a very different experience for women than for men. Women's dependence on men continues to be reinforced by the wage structure; this is especially the case when women interrupt work to care for children. Yet women are likely to have sole responsibility for raising and supporting children after divorce.<sup>43</sup> As a result, mothers are almost as helpless as they were in the days of total economic dependency—and in some ways more so.

The nostalgia for gender polarity, as many feminist observers have pointed out, is a reaction against the present desolate condition of motherhood. It reflects the misguided hope that by returning women to dependency, by blaming women (and not men) for the destructive effects of autonomy, men can be lured back to familial responsibility.<sup>44</sup> It also reflects the assumption that it is women's job to restore and repair the private sphere. As Elshtain declares in her challenge to feminism, if women are relocated in the public world, no one will tend the private "little world" with its "joys and tragedies."<sup>45</sup> In other words, nurturance is particular and feminine; private life is a delicate plant whose growth requires the exclusive devotion of the gentler sex.

But ironically, the new conditions of mothering, even as they have generated a longing for the maternal ideal, have made it even more unrealistic.<sup>46</sup> The all-giving woman who finds fulfillment in her home and children is no longer well respected. Yet she is *still* considered the best possible, indeed the only good, mother; she is *still* a reproach to the many who work. The moral authority of motherhood has been damaged, yet motherhood remains the backbone of socialization and care. Though maternal care is still regarded as vital for small children, its values are nearly irrelevant for life outside the nursery.

The restriction of mothering tenderness to the early years creates a sense of scarcity; giving an infant or small child into someone else's care is tantamount to depriving them of their only shot at intimacy, protection, and warmth. The early years are not only formative; they seem to be the *only* time when any sort of protection is available from the hardness and profligacy of the culture. The thought of losing this protection stimulates intense fears of helplessness and abandonment. It is hardly surprising that the idea of daycare arouses so much passion. As we have already seen, daycare is the lightning rod that attracts all the fears and fantasies about the mother's role. In her book *Every Child's Birthright; In Defense of Mothering*, child psychoanalyst Selma Fraiberg (well known to parents for her guide, *The Magic Years*) offers a good illustration of the use and abuse of psychoanalysis in the daycare-versus-exclusive-mothering debate. Fraiberg's argument, and

others like it, have persuaded countless people that we need not try to provide good daycare for children since it is impossible in any case.

It is worth considering briefly Fraiberg's argument: she begins with the well-known work on the infant's need for attachment, but quickly distorts it with her own observation that a baby cannot "switch partners and bestow his love upon a stranger."<sup>47</sup> But the issue is not *switching*, it is *adding* partners (a limited number, of course). Most babies who are firmly attached to mother (and, let us add, father) *can*, as Bowlby acknowledges, acquire other attachment figures—the people they see on a daily or regular basis. Such babies greet their regular sitters with pleasure, and, since they are used to forming new relationships, can (perhaps with difficulty but not damage) switch to a new sitter if necessary.\* Furthermore, by eighteen months most infants can form strong attachments to other children, whom they greet with a special joy.

Fraiberg abandons empirical evidence altogether when she turns to what she defines as the preschool group: ages three to six (not a meaningful category, since six-year-olds are twice as autonomous as three-year-olds, and are considered schoolchildren). At this age, she claims, children still do not become attached to groups or teachers; they require an individual mother substitute, and can stand "the strain of prolonged separation from mother" in nursery school for only a few hours. Citing directors of "daycare centers known to me," Fraiberg contends that children who spend the day in nursery care show "by afternoon, after nap time, restlessness, tearfulness, whininess, or lassitude."<sup>48</sup> My own (equally subjective) evidence indicates otherwise: the symptoms Fraiberg describes are the ones I have seen in late afternoon

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\*In my own research I have found that when one-year-old babies were left alone with the stranger in the Ainsworth experiment ("strange situation"), the babies of working mothers who had had regular sitters related to and "used" the stranger to remain calm. Of the babies in exclusive-mother care, most showed stranger anxiety and became upset when left by mother with the stranger. All babies were upset when left completely alone, as expected.

tours of households in which babies and toddlers were in the sole care of their (good enough) mothers; and they are much worse in winter when mother has been tending to a small infant since 6 A.M. In daycare centers known to *me*, at the end of the day children still concentrate when listening to stories or coloring, play actively outdoors, and get a new burst of enthusiasm when the parent appears. What happens at that moment of reunion—and here I absolutely agree about the importance of primary attachment—makes all the difference.

Although Fraiberg does not flatly equate daycare with abandonment, the Bergers are not so careful. They actually go so far as to quote Bowlby's research findings (that infants left alone in hospitals become apathetic and dejected) as proof of the damage done by daycare. "The setting was a hospital but the same results would apply to any facility," claim the Bergers.<sup>49</sup> This is an equation Bowlby explicitly rejected. Bowlby has stated unequivocally that daycare does not interfere with attachment to the parents; and the literature on attachment has long since disconfirmed his original theory that attachment devolves on only one person in favor of the idea of multiple attachment figures, as the Bergers must surely know.<sup>50</sup>

The pleas for exclusive mothering function as insulation against the frightening facts about what is in actuality happening to the increasing numbers of infants and young children whose parents must choose between poor daycare and poverty. There is no question that much childcare outside the home in this country is grossly inadequate. This is hardly surprising, since virtually no public resources go into providing it.<sup>51</sup> Neither is there any question that, ideally, working parents should be more available to their young children, and less burdened by conflicting demands. But it is not obvious why critics of daycare do not advocate the alterations in work organization that would accommodate parenting. Nor is it clear why those who concede that high-quality daycare does not damage and may even help children accept the fact that such care is available only to the privileged few. How would it look if a study of the school system, finding it wanting except for the private schools attended by the rich, suggested that the public schools be

abandoned and all their students be educated at home? And what about the parents who would have to stay home and tutor them?

Although actual mothering and fathering would be more effective if our organization of work and childcare were improved, the *ideal* of the mother—the all-giving, self-contained haven—would be damaged by it. When the ideal of the self-contained mother clashes with external reality, the defenders of gender polarity will inevitably rush to protect the ideal. As the conditions of mothering become more difficult and the sense of living in a dangerous world increases, the need for the ideal of motherhood becomes more acute. As is so often the case, the symbolic invocation of an ideal and what threatens it mobilizes more political energy than the appeal for concrete social reform. Here we see the truly dangerous consequences of regressive reenchantment. When antiabortionists invoke the image of the fetus being torn from the womb and left to die, or the image of the maternal body being violated, this mobilizes mass passion.<sup>52</sup> The practical demand for a system of prenatal care that would lower the high infant-mortality rate in the United States has not, because it is not “enchanted,” is not linked to a powerful chain of symbolic images. The real problems that endanger mothers and children—inadequate daycare, unavailable medical care, lack of maternity leave and flexible work time—hide behind the ideal of motherhood, the vision of a self-sufficient family guarded by an omniscient angel of the house.

What can our psychoanalytic perspective tell us about the power of this ideal, a power that overcomes concrete needs and empirical facts? How can we understand the extreme passion that is aroused by the specter of mothers leaving their helpless infants in the care of others (a practice once typical in most families that could afford servants)? What fantasy about separation is at work?

One element of this fantasy is the notion that the infant is infinitely fragile in his dependency and insatiable in his need. Thus Lasch: “It is because the biological need for nourishment is suffused with desire that the infant’s greed is insatiable; even the temporary absence of the mother gives rise to frustration and to feelings of rage.”<sup>53</sup> Now there is no

evidence that the infant is insatiable—although his needs may exceed what one person who has been awake half the night feels happy providing in a given day. Nor does his “desire” (which, as we have seen in chapter 3, develops later, along with symbolic representation and the sense of subjectivity) devolve on only one person. Furthermore, the image of maternal absence Lasch evokes is abstract and fantastic: does he mean an infant left alone in the crib to cry or an infant left in the care of a familiar adult who is holding and entertaining him?

Ordinary experiences of separation and reunion, anger and resolution, go with the territory of infancy and childhood; working these experiences through is vastly more productive than never experiencing them at all. Obviously these experiences are quite different from being neglected, abandoned, or treated with consistent indifference. Yet many people at quite different points along the sexual-political spectrum—including many a guilty mother—are stirred by the conviction that separation is destructive, infantile wrath swift and dangerous. But there is a distortion in perception here. This is the stuff that the idealized image of motherhood, “the fantasy of the perfect mother,”<sup>54</sup> is made of.

Let us consider once again the relationship between real separation (the experience of someone leaving) and mental separation (the internal conviction that someone is outside the self). When someone who is not felt to be outside the self leaves, one may feel hopelessly alone and yet enmeshed with an undependable, abandoning object who keeps everyone else away. If the child feels unable to contain or express the anger at being left, anger threatens to destroy the object. This is so frightening to the child that the object must be protected at all costs (“Mother is wonderful, I would never be angry at *her*”). If the child cannot get angry about his mother’s leaving, or about any other frustration, he never enjoys the positive experience of destruction that Winnicott describes: “that he has destroyed everyone and everything, and yet the people around him remain calm and unhurt.” As a result, he continues to experience the object as inside; he does not learn that “what he feels to be true is not necessarily

real, that fantasy and fact, both important, are nevertheless different from each other."<sup>55</sup>

This distinction between inner and outer reality—the result of successful destruction—is crucial to perceiving the other as a separate person who does not need to be perfect or ideal to satisfy you. It is also crucial to reducing the fear of a retaliatory object who embodies one's own omnipotent aggression. A successful experience with the real vitiates the need for the ideal—the ideal may still have allure, but it is no longer such a vital protection against loss or attack.<sup>56</sup>

Separation—whether really leaving or simply asserting one's own will—is often interpreted as a hostile act, by both parties. Both must manage not only separation, but the associated aggression. As we have seen, the inability to survive separation and aggression keeps mother and child locked in the field of omnipotence. The child misses not only the encounter with mother's independent subjectivity (she goes away), but also the opportunity to work through the pain of that encounter, turn it into an *internal* emotional reality ("I am sad and angry; I've destroyed her; I've lost her") that can be distinguished with relief from the *external* reality ("She has returned; she accepts my grief and loves me still; she is not destroyed"). Similarly, when the mother fears that her act of leaving will destroy her child, she does not see him as separate. Consciously, her child is perfect (as her own mother was) and no sacrifice is too great; unconsciously, he is powerful and destructive (as she was, when she wanted to separate or when she denied her mother's independence). Neither she nor her child could tolerate the disillusionment of knowing that she exists independently of him. Mother and child must cooperate in the fantasy that he is the center of her life.\*

At the source of the ideal of motherhood is the belief in maternal omnipotence which, as we have seen in the oedipal model, legitimates

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\*Freud himself was not free of this idealization, expressing repeatedly the certainty that a woman's greatest love is for her first-born son, that the son gets the love the husband hoped for, and so forth.<sup>57</sup>



male domination. The idea that mother is or should be all-giving and perfect (just a kiss away from all-controlling) expresses the mentality of omnipotence, the inability to experience the mother as an independently existing subject. This idealization testifies to the failure of destruction; hate has not been able to come forth and make the experience of love less idealized and more authentic. It is a maxim of psychoanalysis that idealization is a defense against aggression and so emerges when hate cannot be integrated with love; this failure of integration is the essential element in splitting. What determines whether hatred becomes the destruction that dispels idealization or, instead, goes inside where it requires idealization as a defense is, finally, *what happens in real life*. The child can only perceive the mother as a subject in her own right if the mother *is* one. And here we must be clear that the mother's subjectivity (in contrast to the maternal ideal) must include imperfection to be real, to her and her child; real subjectivity does not require her to be self-sufficient, perfect, and omni-competent. Yet this ideal of self-sufficiency commonly goes unquestioned, as it did for the mother who, when asked what care and support *mothers* need, could not understand the question and finally replied, "Someone taking care of *me*? . . . *I'm* the mother, *I'm* the one, I take care of *him!*"

The fantasy of the omnipotent mother is the result of psychic splitting, replicated at many levels of cultural and social experience. We can imagine a cycle something like this: The negation of the mother's independent subjectivity in social and cultural life makes it harder for her to survive her child's psychic destruction and become real to him. Since the child has not been able to engage in successful destruction, he is less able to distinguish the real person from the fantasy. The larger cultural reality then reinforces his fantasy that women's subjectivity is nonexistent or dangerous. And so on.

The symbolic structure of gender polarity produces the fantastic ideal of motherhood even as it stimulates the fear of destroying all maternal goodness. On the social level, male rationality sabotages maternal recognition, while on the psychic level, the oedipal repudia-

tion of the mother splits her into the debased and the idealized objects. The reparation for debasing her takes the form of sentimentalizing and idealizing the mother, a strategy that locks both men and women into an inner fantasy world and evades the real issue: recognition of each other.

The dynamic which first undermines the mother concretely and then attempts to repair her through symbolic reenchantment gives rise to two ideal figures: the perfect mother and the autonomous individual, bound in a relationship of domination. The more the individual repudiates the mother, the more he is threatened by his own destructiveness and her all-powerful weakness or retaliation. The more the subject splits off his dependency, the more his unconscious dependency increases and internally threatens his sense of independence. The self's aspiration to be absolute destroys the self, as well as the other, for as long as the other cannot face the self as an equal in the struggle, the battle results in loss, and not mutual recognition. The ideal mother is the after-image of the true lost other, who can return only when she ceases to be split off from the autonomous individual.

We have seen how the universal structures of individuality and rationality in our culture are gendered and represent a basic split between subject and object. We have seen how this rationality expresses masculinity and suppresses femininity, and how the increasing hegemony of rationality leads to a paradoxical reaction: the attempt to reenchant the world by appealing to the same gender splitting that gives disenchantment its character.

This strategy is not only appealing to gender conservatives, but also to feminists, who, in the effort to unveil the neutral discourse and reveal its gender often forget that this neutrality is precisely where male domination is located. They are mystified by the fact that the underlying structure of male domination is so depersonalized and has so little, apparently, to do with individual men. Thus many feminists have turned to the movement against pornography which repersonal-

izes domination by focusing on men's sexual violence. Presenting woman as pure victim and man as pure destroyer, the anti-pornography movement sees male violence as the basis of male power—and the essence of heterosexuality. As Andrea Dworkin insists, "The process of killing . . . is the prime sexual act for men in reality and/or imagination."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, women's subordination, heterosexuality, and gender identity, are all defined by sexual violation. In the words of the movement's main theorist, Catherine MacKinnon, "To be about to be raped is to be gender female in the process of going about life as usual."<sup>59</sup> It is probably no accident that MacKinnon's main project as a lawyer is to expose the violence and domination that are protected by formal legal principles of equality and justice. But her analysis of these principles misses the point that impersonal legal structures are not merely a cover for male violence, that they themselves express the primary course of gender domination.

It is difficult to grasp the fact that the center of male domination lies not in direct expressions of personal violence (rampant though they are) but in the societal rationality which may or may not be defended by men. Male domination, as Weber said of rationalization, works through the hegemony of impersonal organization: of formal rules that refer to the hypothetical interaction of autonomous individuals; of instrumental knowledge founded in the subject's control of the object world; of the accumulation of profit, which bows neither to need nor tradition. It is this protean impersonality that makes it so elusive.

Societal rationalization has a paradoxical tendency to neutralize gender difference and yet to intensify the dichotomies that are rooted in it. The terms of the dichotomy are often neutral, abstracted from gender; yet they can be regendered at any moment. The polarity of subject and object is the enduring skeletal frame of domination, ready to be fleshed out with manifest gender content when the situation demands. This is especially true of the distinction between public and private: at one moment it is ostensibly about "work" and "family," at another, clearly about men and women. Thus we are often confused

by the way that gender difference "floats" in social reality, inconstant but never truly eliminated. As we have seen, this inconstancy is exacerbated by the fact that the dichotomous structure informs both individual psychic representations and collective cultural representations.

The pervasive effects of gender polarity demand a radical extension of the feminist critique—beyond the critiques of the family, the images of mother and father, or patriarchy. The proposal for dual parenting exemplifies both the virtues and the limitations of the psychoanalytic feminist approach. Chodorow and Dinnerstein conclude from their analysis of female mothering that if both men and women raised children, both would become associated with primary oneness. Presumably, then, the child could not resolve the ambivalence toward the earliest parent by splitting the two parents. This would mean that males would no longer have to break that bond in order to identify with their own sex, and thus they would not have to repudiate and denigrate the maternal. They would retain the value of nurturance and empathy, and this might begin to dissolve the rationality that supports the masculine side and determines all the major binary oppositions: public and private, universal and particular, rational and empathic, subject and object.

But the reorganization of parenting in individual families cannot wholly eliminate the effects of binary opposition—though it can mute the splitting that underlies it, weaken the conviction that it is a function of gender, and sequester it in fantasy. The core feature of the gender system—promoting masculinity as separation from and femininity as continuity with the primary bond—is maintained even when mother and father participate equally in that bond. For example, the father's primary care of the infant does not detract from the boy's readiness to identify with the standard cultural representations of masculinity and to locate his fantasy play "outside" the parent-infant relationship, not with dolls but with space ships. This may occur because parents are not only objects of identification; they actively, albeit unconsciously, shape the child's identity in accordance with the culture—continuity in girls, discontinuity in boys. At times it even

seems that regardless of what real parents do, the cultural dualisms sustain the splitting of gender and recreate parental images as polar opposites. Chodorow grants that the reorganization of parenting alone would not break up the gender polarity; and she points out that this reorganization could not occur without vaster changes that would challenge other aspects of rationalization—above all, the relation between public and private. But this still casts the problem in terms of the relationship between family and social organization. In my view it is equally important to grasp the deep structure of gender as a binary opposition which is common to psychic and cultural representations.<sup>60</sup>

This opposition, which at the psychic level is called splitting, has its analogue in many other levels of experience, and is the pattern for every form of domination. As we have repeatedly seen, domination ultimately deprives both subjugator and subjugated of recognition. Gender polarity deprives women of their subjectivity and men of an other to recognize them. But the loss of recognition between men and women as equal subjects is only one consequence of gender domination. The ascendancy of male rationality results finally in the loss and distortion of recognition in society as a whole. It not only eliminates the maternal aspects of recognition (nurturance and empathy) from our collective values, actions, and institutions. It also restricts the exercise of assertion, making social authorship and agency a matter of performance, control, and impersonality—and thus vitiates subjectivity itself. In creating an increasingly objectified world, it deprives us of the intersubjective context in which assertion receives a recognizing response. We must face the enormity of this loss if we are ever to find our way back through the maze of domination to the heart of recognition.

## C H A P T E R   S I X

# Conclusion

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DOMINATION, I HAVE argued, is a twisting of the bonds of love. Domination does not repress the desire for recognition; rather, it enlists and transforms it. Beginning in the breakdown of the tension between self and other, domination proceeds through the alternate paths of identifying with or submitting to powerful others who personify the fantasy of omnipotence. For the person who takes this route to establishing his own power, there is an absence where the other should be.

This void is filled with fantasy material in which the other appears so dangerous or so weak—or both—that he threatens the self and must be controlled. A vicious cycle begins: the more the other is subjugated, the less he is experienced as a human subject and the more distance or violence the self must deploy against him. The ensuing absence of recognition, indeed of an outside world, breeds more of the same. What has always been assumed but not explicated is this psychological destruction of the other which is the condition of any particular fantasy of domination.

The role of “the other,” which for so many is their only moral refuge and political hope, is no less complicated. The subjugated, whose acts and integrity are granted no recognition, may, even in the very act of emancipation, remain in love with the ideal of power that has been denied to them. Though they may reject the master’s right to dominion over them, they nevertheless do not reject his personification of power. They simply reverse the terms and claim his rights as theirs.

This cycle of reproducing the idealized authority even in the act of liberation is the cycle Freud described in the father-son struggle. Conceived in terms of two selves who both wish to be absolute, the father-son struggle does not allow for the recognition of someone outside the self, since the son is constantly taking the father inside himself, trying to become him. The father-son relationship, like the master-slave relationship, is a model in which the opposition between self and other can only reverse—one is always up and the other down, one is doer and the other done-to.

This reversible complementarity is the basic pattern of domination, and it is set in motion by the denial of recognition to the original other, the mother who is reduced to object. The resulting structure of subject and object (gender polarity) thoroughly permeates our social relations, our ways of knowing, our efforts to transform and control the world; and it is this gendered logic which ultimately forecloses on the intersubjective realm—that space in which the mutual recognition of subjects can compete with the reversible relationship of domination.

The denial of subjectivity to women means that the privilege and power of agency fall to the father, who enters the stage as the first outsider, and so represents the principle of freedom as denial of dependency. Ironically, then, the ideal of freedom carries within it the seeds of domination—freedom *means* fleeing or subjugating the other; autonomy means an escape from dependency. The ideal of individual power and freedom is all the more seductive once the breakdown of mutual recognition has locked the self in the vacuum of zero tension.

To halt this cycle of domination, I have argued, the other must make a difference. This means that women must claim their subjectivity and so be able to survive destruction. They may thus offer men a new possibility of colliding with the outside and becoming alive in the presence of an equal other. The conception of equal subjects has begun to seem intellectually plausible only because women's demand for equality has achieved real social force. This material change makes the intersubjective vision appear as more than a utopian abstraction; it makes it seem a legitimate opponent of the traditional logic of subject and object. The vision of recognition between equal subjects gives rise to a new logic—the logic of paradox, of sustaining the tension between contradictory forces. Perhaps the most fateful paradox is the one posed by our simultaneous need for recognition and independence: that the other subject is outside our control and yet we need him. To embrace this paradox is the first step toward unraveling the bonds of love. This means not to undo our ties to others but rather to disentangle them; to make of them not shackles but circuits of recognition.

Even in theory, of course, this is not a simple proposition. The basic tension between self and other which intersubjective theory illuminates is only one side of the story. The intersubjective model of self and other is abstracted from the web of intrapsychic life, which has stamped the history of the individual and the culture with its symbols and fantasies, its drama of subject and object. I have condensed the intrapsychic side of the story as the splitting of tension into complementary forms: subject and object, idealization and repudiation, good



and bad, doer and done-to. But my point is that it is crucial to respect the different realities that intersubjective and intrapsychic theory describe, and not to see one as epiphenomenal and the other as essential. To assert the possibility of mutual recognition is not to suggest that in an ideal world recognition would never falter, and the tension between and within individuals would never break down. Such ideal constructions do not help us to understand the subtle way by which what we most desire may alternatively enthrall or liberate us.

The close kinship of thralldom and liberation, their common roots, requires us to recognize the doubleness of psychological reality. Thus beginning with the first relationship—of parent and child—we note the uneasy coexistence of contradictory tendencies: mutual recognition and unequal complementarity. We observe how complementarity subsumes mutuality in erotic domination, where the idea of a powerful person acting on a powerless one inspires the thrill of transgression. Again, beginning with the infant's struggle to individuate, we see how readily the reaction against dependency can turn into ideal love of paternal power. This process of defensive idealization marks the entry into a gendered reality. To be sure, the idealization of the early figures who raise us is to some extent inevitable. It is one pathway of the desire for recognition, a welcome escape at just the moment when the child's awareness of opposition between self and other brings the fall from grace: the confrontation with difference.

What is not inevitable is that this confrontation will be resolved only by splitting, and that this splitting will be conventionalized as gender opposition. It is not inevitable that the knowledge of difference be reduced to the complementarity of male and female—a parallel to the split between subject and object, good and bad, doer and done-to. It is this complementarity which, even as it appears to idealize sexual difference, recasts the knowledge of difference as invidious comparison. As we have seen, the spurious embrace of difference only defines the other in mirror opposition to the self. It thus precludes the necessity of dealing with the contradictory tendencies within the self. This escape from the knowledge of self is what

constitutes temptation in the struggle to deal with the complexity of life outside the garden.

It is possible to resist this temptation; it is possible to analyze the psychic processes that foster splitting and underlie domination without casting them as unambiguously good or evil, or equating them with masculine and feminine attributes. Feminism has by no means transcended this temptation. But because feminist theory necessarily addresses the psychological bond between the powerful and the powerless, it has begun to question the logic of splitting—with its dualism, polarization, and simple reversal of roles. My purpose in putting forth an intersubjective theory is not to engage in such a reversal: I do not posit an original pure culture of intersubjectivity, a feminine realm corrupted by the culture of phallic symbolization and paternal idealization. Such a scheme of feminine innocence and phallic evil would only restore the old gender opposition; it would simply repeat the strategy of the opponents of instinct theory, which reversed the model of original evil controlled by culture in favor of a model of original goodness distorted by culture. It is important to be cautious of falling into such a reactive position—this caveat applies even in proposing that certain psychic processes underlie the breakdown of tension into domination. After all, breakdown of tension is as much a part of life as recreating it once more. The logic of paradox includes the acknowledgment that breakdown occurs. A sufficient ground for optimism is the contention that if breakdown is “built into” the psychic system, so is the possibility of renewing tension. If the denial of recognition does not become frozen into unmovable relationships, the play of power need not be hardened into domination. As the practice of psychoanalysis reveals, breakdown and renewal are constant possibilities: the crucial issue is finding the point at which breakdown occurs and the point at which it is possible to recreate tension and restore the condition of recognition.

My conclusion is both modest and utopian. The renewal of mutual recognition in the wake of its breakdown is not a final, redemptive “end of prehistory”; rather, it is a necessary part of the continuing

process of individual and social change. To aspire to this renewal is to accept the inevitable inconstancy and imperfection of our efforts, without relinquishing the project. Feminism, though many think the contrary, has opened up a new possibility of mutual recognition between men and women. It has allowed men and women to begin confronting the difficulties of recognizing an other, and to expose the painful longing for what lies on the other side of these difficulties. To attempt to recover recognition in personal life does not mean to politicize personal life relentlessly or to evade politics and give up the hope of transformation—though all these failures do happen in real life. It means to see that the personal and social are interconnected, and to understand that if we suffocate our personal longings for recognition, we will suffocate our hope for social transformation as well.