

Gender and Domination

Bonds of love, p. 183

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Questions and Responses

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### 1. WHAT DOES BENJAMIN MEAN BY GENDER POLARITY, AND WHAT IS ITS EFFECT?

This is the polarized structure of gender difference: mother is force of irrationality and undifferentiation—irrational oneness; father is source of rationality and separateness—rational autonomy.

### 2. WHAT DOES BENJAMIN MEAN BY MALE RELATIONALITY

While modern liberal thought assumes gender neutrality, the idea of the individual is tacitly defined as masculine, with male hegemony, and the concept of the individual is really the male subject. Rationality reduces the social world to objects of exchange, calculation, and control, setting up a domination that only appears gender neutral, or subject less, with women's subjectivity non-existent, making her an object.

### 3. WHAT IS MEANT BY SOCIAL SEPARATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, AND WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON MEN AND WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE?

The psychic repudiation of femininity, including negation of dependency and mutual recognition, is consonant with the social banishment of nurturance and intersubjective relatedness to the private domestic world of women and children. This is linked to father of autonomy and the mother of dependency. Pure self

assertion governs the public world of men who are thereby deprived of personal authorship and the recognizing response necessary to subjectivity, while in the private life of women, authorship and recognition are preserved but isolated, and so deprived of social effectiveness. The maternal values of private life are obliterated, along with recognition, nurturance and attunement. Benjamin says this is gendered thought, that the instrumental orientation and impersonality of social organization is masculine, and despite women's increasing participation, it remains a man's world, with nurturance banished to private life.

#### 4. WHAT DOES BENJAMIN MEAN WHEN SHE SAYS "THE MISSING PIECE IN THE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN RATIONALITY IS THE STRUCTURE OF GENDER DOMINATION?"

This is the subjugation of women by men whose possession she is. He is neither dependent nor attached, but differentiated in such a way that he denies the primary experience of nurturance and identity with mother, and free of emotional bonds that limit his freedom. The feminist critique rejects the assumption that individuality and rationality are universals, while gender is particular, secondary, not essential.

#### 5. BENJAMIN SAYS THE PROBLEM OF THIS WORLD OF MALE RATIONALITY IS THAT IT LACKS A THEORY OF THE INTERSUBJECTIVE. DISCUSS HER MEANING, INCLUDING BARBARA McCLINTOCK'S REMINDER THAT THE ACT OF KNOWING CAN BE FELT AS COMMUNION, NOT CONQUEST.

Commenting on modern science, Benjamin quotes Kelly as saying that for the scientist, the world outside, the other, is always an object, with the denial of recognition leaving the omnipotent self imprisoned in the mind, akin to the problem in Western thought. What is lacking is a model of the psyche in which the self seeks to know the outside world and longs for contact with the other, so that connecting with the other could only be a return to oneness, dedifferentiation, and irrationality. The feminist way out of this dilemma is a theory of intersubjectivity, where there is a commonality between mind and nature, permitting attunement between knower and known, and the self is not lost and alone. This is like the intersubjective experience of infancy, with different minds sharing the same perception, transitional space is neither inside nor outside, so that knowledge and recognition of the other can evolve—hence, the act of knowing can be felt as communion, not quest. A feminist map of the mind includes self and other, knowing, discovering and creating the world through connection to it. With this more balanced differentiation of self and world, rationality and modern science are redefined, not eliminated, with their boundaries expanded.

## 6. DISCUSS GILLIGAN'S ANALYSIS AND REPUDIATION OF KOHLBERG'S MODEL OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT.

Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* challenged women's exclusion from psychology, exposing the moral and political implications and their attendant gender assumptions. Beginning with Erickson's model of identity development in which progress is separation, with relational considerations subordinated to autonomy and achievement, she discusses his model of moral

development that had dealt with male subjects only, and, when applied to females, perceived them as less likely to achieve higher levels of moral reasoning, characterized by ability to recognize and apply universal norms such as justice and equality. Gilligan showed that women do progress, but their values of psychological truth, caring, nonviolence, are not identical to men. Women are more likely to espouse the ethics of care and responsibility, and men, rights and justice, women liking moral thinking that is contextual and concrete, seeing self in relation to others, and men prefer moral, generalized abstract reasoning. For Gilligan, the moral subject can take the role of the other and accept reciprocity in the abstract, but with men, only by constituting a general point of view, not by taking the other's point of view, only the general not the individual. The man is not interested in the other's needs because they may oppose his own. Only the other who does not compete with me can have needs I respect (wife, child). The formal acceptance of differences opposes the intersubjective appreciation of it, including the particular, individual needs of the other. Without concrete knowledge, empathy, and identification with the other subject, his needs, feelings, circumstances and history, subject to object thinking continues. Tension of recognition to the outside other as both different and alike is absent. A woman's concerns are not sufficiently abstract and universal as are justice and rights, and they are for the nursery, not the public world.

## 7. WHAT DOES SEYLA BENHABIB ADD TO THE DISCUSSION OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DOMAINS IN TERMS OF QUESTIONING POLITICAL MORALITY?

Benhabib contends that the very division between questions of public and private expresses unavowed sexual politics.

Nurtured reproduction, love and care, are consigned to the women's domain and are excluded from moral and political consideration. Nurturing is private, not relationships with outside others, so the other becomes an appendage of the subject, a condition of his being, and not a being in her own right. The individual who cannot recognize the other or his own dependence requires formal, impersonal principles of relationalized interaction. The line between public and private means women will continue to preserve and protect personal life, allowing political morality to sustain the fiction of the wholly independent individuals, protected from individuals like himself. The public world cannot be a space for intersubjective recognition between self and other.

8. WHAT DOES BENJAMIN MEAN BY GENDER CONSERVATISM? HOW DO THEY RATIONALIZE GENDER POLARITY? WHY DO THEY ARGUE AGAINST EXPANDING PUBLIC POLICIES SUPPORTING FAMILY LIFE? WHY DO THE BERGERS OPPOSE EXTENSION OF INDIVIDUALISM TO WOMEN? WHAT IS THE ROLE PERCEIVED FOR WOMEN IN GENDER CONSERVATISM; IN PARTICULAR, WHAT IS THE WOMAN'S DUTY?

Gender conservatism is to accept and celebrate the private sphere of female nurturance. Gender polarity is viewed as natural and inevitable, a separate but equal fantasy that denies that rationalization is male hegemony, and that is still a relationship of domination. They would restore gender polarity, restoring the traditional sexual division of labor in the family

because they see it as the basis for the growth of the autonomous individual. The whole family dependent on the male wage earner to promote stability of the old sexual division., with bringing women to the workplace the obstacle to restoring familial and social stability. Reforming public life to provide more nurturance risks state expansion and might further the rationalization of private life, so that putting more areas of life under public policy and organization would disrupt the domestic arrangements that offer warmth and safety. They are concerned that the masculine principal threatens to exceed its limits. If women would only devote their lives to the endangered maternal role. While they like balance, it is only between public and private based on separate spheres of mother and father. The Bergers, in particular, fear the extension of individualism to women who are no longer willing to devote themselves to fostering the individuality of others, with the individual woman now emphasized rather than the communal context, including mother/child dyad. When women take advantage of the logic of universality, and rebel against their confinement to home, they act against the frame which is work for the autonomous individuality of men, who can work because they are subsidized by the care of labor of the wife-mother. Women's role is to produce autonomous individuals (boys) who can balance their public and private lives, not to be such individuals. Women are needed in the home, which is increasingly impossible except for the wealthy: only the woman is trusted to provide care, so that men can protect their autonomy, by keeping nurturance at home. Men distance themselves from their own early dependency by distancing themselves from those who need help, women and children, not recognizing the number of women and children below the poverty line. Nurturance equals private equals

mother. This requires division of labor between parents, and against creation of conditions that would allow fathers and mothers to nurture their children.

## 9. HOW DO GENDER CONSERVATIVES RESPOND TO THE FEMINIST PROPOSAL OF DUAL PARENTING? WHAT'S THEIR UNCONSCIOUS FEAR ABOUT DUAL PARENTING? WHAT'S THE IMAGE OF THE FATHER AND WHAT'S THE IMAGE OF THE MOTHER?

Rather than responding to the question of dual parenting, they discuss instead about the dangers of collective child rearing. Feminists (eg. Chodorow) propose that that fathers nurturing children would change the male stance toward women, and denounce collective child rearing in the Kibbutz, but this is transformed into a nightmare in which the need for attachment is ignored. There's a less than conscious fear that children cared for by fathers would be neglected or raised with instrumental rationality (impersonally, without care or attunement) displayed in the public, repeating the split between father and mother growing out of conflict between autonomy and attachment. The child, fearing that dependency will contaminate his autonomy, develops a one sided version of independence, but the splitting backfires, for masculine separation and repudiation of femininity have destroyed maternal love and there's no reversal. While instrumentalization of society is accepted so long as private refuge is continued, when nurturance is extended into society it is seen as encroachment on autonomy, a violation of individuality. The individual can be self sufficient outside and regress in private. With father not depended on for nurturance, representing as he does selfish autonomy, mother is only source

of goodness. But using her in this way makes of her an extension of self, so there's no one to come home to. Same contradiction in erotic domination: destroying and objectifying other whom we need; and in the Oedipal drama, wanting to keep mother captive and still alive and vital, protected by separate and responsible father. The fear of being grown up means feeling like a motherless child, and yet it isn't women's abandonment of home that stimulates fear; it is the social division of gender, with idealization of autonomous individuality, bringing about the loss of maternal nurturance it's meant to protect. Idealizing maternal nurturance confirms dualism. Accepting the old ideal is to retain gender polarity. So as the concrete forms of maternal care and recognition diminish, their loss is repaired by symbolic evocation of motherhood, but the symbolism of ideal motherhood obscures waning of sociable domestic world that had supported it.

#### 10. BENJAMIN DESCRIBES IN MANY WAYS AN INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT SITUATION FACED BY WOMEN IN THEIR MARRIAGES AND IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD PRE WW2 AND POST WW2. DISCUSS.

The isolation of the nuclear family deprived the mother of her own holding environment, the web of kin and neighborhood relationships that supported, advised, and nurtured her. The loss was compensated by the partnership marriage of post WW2, bringing a more equal marriage, tasks shared, but it was grafted onto the old sexual division of labor, leaving mothers at home even more isolated and dependent. This has worked to women's detriment, with men's support in the home not offsetting the isolation, disenfranchisement and dependency, the inequality



undermining intimacy and solidarity of the marriage, leading to divorce and women's dependency on men reinforced by wage structure, yet divorced women being left with sole responsibility for raising and supporting children. And the all giving woman who finds fulfillment in her home and children is not respected, yet she is still considered the only possible all good mother. The moral authority of motherhood has been damaged, and her values irrelevant outside the nursery. But the early years of mothering tenderness are the only time of available protection: to lose it stimulates fear of helplessness and abandonment. So daycare is scary and we shouldn't attempt to provide good care.

#### 11. HOW IS ATTACHMENT AND DAYCARE DISCUSSED BY SELMA FRAIBERG, AND HOW DOES BENJAMIN RESPOND, DISCUSSING HOW THE EXPERIENCES OF SEPARATION AND AGGRESSION MAY BE SURVIVED, AND WHY SUCH SURVIVAL IS SO SIGNIFICANT?

Fraiberg wrote about daycare vs. private care, the issue of attachment fragility, one person vs. many attachment figures, the importance of reunion, and, in the main, a plea for an exclusive mothering function as insulation, despite what is happening to infants and young children whose parents must choose between poor daycare and poverty.

Benjamin notes that daycare is mostly inadequate as no public resources go into it and that working men and women should have more access to their children. She questions why critics of daycare don't advocate for the alteration of work that would accommodate parenting. She also questions why, tho it's apparent that high care day care doesn't damage and may even help children, accept the fact that such daycare is only available

to the wealthy. Such help for mother and father would be good, but the ideal of the mother, the all-giving, self contained haven, would be damaged: but the real problems that endanger mothers and their children, inadequate daycare, unavailable medical care, lack of maternity leave, and flexible work time, are left unexamined because of the ideal of motherhood.

Fraiberg's fantasy that the infant is fragile and insatiable is counter to findings that while separation and reunion, anger and resolution, are inevitable, but are quite different from being neglected, abandoned, or subjected to indifference.

And the idealized mother doesn't protect from these experiences nor should she. Experiences that he has destroyed the mother and that she still persists are good and necessary, allowing the infant to experience the other as still inside. The distinction between inner and outer reality that result from successful destruction is crucial to perceiving the other as a separate person who doesn't need to be perfect to satisfy, and is also crucial to reducing the fear of a retaliatory object who embodies one's own aggression. While separation can be interpreted as hostile, both partners use manage it along with the associated aggression. The inability to survive separation and aggression keeps mother and child locked in omnipotence, and the source of this ideal of motherhood is the belief in maternal omnipotence which legitimizes male domination. Also the inability to experience the mother as an independently existing subject. Idealization results from failure of destruction so that hate hasn't come forth and make experience of love less ideal and more authentic. What determines if hate becomes destruction that dispels idealization, or goes inside where it needs idealization as a defense, is what happens in real life. The child needs a mother

as a subject in her own right, and her subjectivity requires imperfection to be real to her and her child. She is not required to be self sufficient, perfect, or omniscient.

**12. BENJAMIN DESCRIBES THE SITUATION IN WHICH TWO IDEAL FIGURES ARE BORN AND ARE BOUND TOGETHER IN A RELATIONSHIP OF DOMINATION: THE PERFECT MOTHER AND THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL. DISCUSS**

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. The larger cultural reality reinforces his fantasy that women's subjectivity is nonexistent or dangerous. The reparation for debasing her becomes sentimentalization and idealization, creating inner fantasy that evades the real issue of recognition.

**13. BENJAMIN SAYS THAT THE CONCEPT OF DUAL PARENTING REPRESENTS BOTH THE VIRTUES AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC FEMINIST APPROACH. EXPLAIN HER MEANING.**

Chodorow and Dimmerstein think that if both men and women raised children, both would become associated with primary oneness. Then the child couldn't resolve the ambivalence toward the earliest parents by splitting the two parents, meaning males would no longer have to break the bond in order to identify with their own sex, and so not denigrate the maternal. They would retain the values of nurturance and empathy, and might begin to dissolve the rationality that supports the

masculine side and determines the major binary opposition: public and private; universal and particular, rational and empathic, subject and object. But this wouldn't wholly eliminate the effects of binary opposition. The core feature of the gender system, promoting masculinity as separate from, and femininity as continuity with, the primary bond, is maintained even tho mother and father participate equally in the bond. Benjamin sees the problem as equally with the deep structure of gender as a binary opposition that is common to psychic and cultural representations. This opposition, which at the psychic level is called splitting, is the pattern for every form of domination, and dominator deprives both subjugator and subjugated of recognition. Gender polarity deprives women of subjectivity and men of recognition. The ascendancy of male rationality results finally in the loss and distortion of recognition in society as a whole. It eliminates the maternal aspects of recognition (nurturance and empathy) from our collective values, actions and institutions. It also limits assertions, making social authorship and agency a matter of performance, control, ad impersonality, and thus vitiates subjectivity itself. In creating an increasingly objectified world, it deprives us of the intersubjective contexts in which assertion receives a recognizing response. We must face this if we are to find our way back thru the haze of domination to the heart of recognition.