



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Canadian Theses Service**

**Service des thèses canadiennes**

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## **NOTICE**

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## **AVIS**

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

**The Feminist Ethical Process**

**Susan Shea**

**A Thesis  
in the  
Faculty of  
Arts and  
Science**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**August 1989**

**© Susan Shea, 1989**



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-51336-5

Canada

## ABSTRACT

### The Feminist Ethical Process

Susan Shea

The aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which feminism has developed a unique ethical process. Parallels and differences between feminism and traditional ethical theory as well as between different feminist-based ethical approaches will be explored. Shifts and changes within the developing feminist ethical process will be examined in depth.

The course by which feminism arrives at ethical understanding of particular issues will be presented through a brief history of some of these issues as drawn from popular feminist media. Changes in feminist approaches to such issues are then illustrated by various models proposed to characterize the feminist ethical process at different stages of development. Examples for this more theoretical section of the thesis are drawn from current bodies of work by feminist theologians, philosophers, literary theorists, ethicists and from the community of feminist theorists/activists in general.

Finally, the significance of feminism as ethical process as compared to fixed systems of traditional ethics will be analyzed. The benefits of such a difference will then be weighed against the problems which it generates, problems which pose a fundamental challenge to feminism as a coherent social movement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Martha, Kathleen, Celest, P.C. and Retread.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Pornography/Censorship Debate	10
Chapter 2: Separatism	21
Chapter 3: Critical Theory and Literary Influences	34
Chapter 4: Racism As Fundamental Challenge	48
Conclusion	61
Notes	67
Bibliography	73

INTRODUCTION

The question "Is there a feminist ethic?" is the starting point of this thesis and one which has raised considerable controversy and discussion within the women's movement over the past few years. Most feminists would agree that there exists within our communities a common commitment to justice for women but beyond this it has proven difficult to pin down a single form or set of principles such a commitment would take (though Eileen Manion and others have attempted to do this). (1) Thus far, there is no unanimity among feminists as to what constitutes a feminist "ethic", yet there is no denying what can only be described as a distinctly feminist tradition with regard to particular ethical issues. Yet even the notion of "tradition", if we follow philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre's definition as a "set of shared attitudes, beliefs and presuppositions", (2) implies a consensus which is not always found among feminists. A common "feminist ethic" is still more difficult to prove.

There are a number of reasons for this. One is the high degree of suspicion with which the term "ethics" is regarded by many feminists who think immediately of oppressive religious or philosophical traditions which have usually served to keep women in their place. But is such suspicion sufficient reason for dismissing the concept altogether?

### Traditional Ethical Theory

Some feminists have concerned themselves with making important distinctions between traditional ethics and what is being proposed as an emerging feminist-based ethic. Feminist philosopher Susan Sherwin and others have effectively criticized traditional moral theory and have at least pointed toward the development of alternative ethical models.

Sherwin's critique of traditional male philosophy in general (Kantianism and Utilitarianism specifically), points to an emphasis on abstraction, the valorization of "rugged" (3) individualism, and the banishment of emotion from the moral arena as features which have in fact contributed to the creation of a profoundly immoral society. Sherwin sees feminism as the corrective - a system of values based on social interaction and cooperation, the personalization of ethical issues as opposed to a conceptualization of free-floating moral "actions" without context, and a situational, case-by-case approach to ethics far removed from systems based exclusively on abstract principles.

In feminist ethical discourse, the role emotion does and should play is acknowledged, a radical departure from traditional malestream ethics. Women are necessarily subject to injustice; feminists are consequently passionate about justice. Thus what is often perceived from outside the movement as bitterly divisive or vicious can often, in fact, be a manifestation of intense caring and commitment. In particular, debates around violence against women are usually



intensely emotional, and with good reason. This is not to say that feminists approach ethical dilemmas irrationally, but rather that there is a balance of thought and feeling put into ethical decision-making.

What Sherwin and others have also noted is the way in which the political is ignored or deemed irrelevant in traditional ethical discourse. Abstract moral principles presuppose a social equality which we as women know does not exist, Sherwin argues. In reality, ethical issues have to do with power as in, for example, the issue of abortion (Who has the power to control women's bodies?). Sherwin's point about power is that because it is so unevenly distributed socially, how can one make generalizations about how "one" (Man? Woman? Black? White?) ought to behave? Oppressed people will naturally feel morally obliged to one another, but not at all toward their oppressors. Unlike some traditional moral theory then, feminism incorporates a political understanding of social inequity into its conception of ethics, according to Sherwin.

Thus Sherwin and others have pointed out significant differences between traditional ethics and what a feminist approach to ethics would look like. Yet the notion of a "feminist ethic" is still met with resistance by many feminists.

One frequently noted difficulty with describing an ethic as "feminist" appears to be a purely technical one. A single ethical issue has been known to provoke more than one

feminist response as in, for example, the pornography / censorship question. This issue has, in fact, generated competing responses both of which could claim ethical motivation to be "feminist" in their promotion of "the good" for women (i.e. pornography or censorship as "bad" for women).

This difficulty only exists, however, if we accept a traditional definition of ethics which sets up a dualistic good/bad, right/wrong model of conceptualizing reality. Feminism, for its part, is openly critical of the dualistic approach of traditional ethics which reduces everything to polar opposites, then privileges one side of the equation over the other. By contrast, feminism can rarely be reduced to a single point of view on any issue.

That feminism can accommodate competing perspectives is both its strength and its weakness. Although we have witnessed periods of dogmatism and moral prescriptiveness in the history of the women's movement as well as times of bitter division, feminist positions are constantly in flux, open to debate and ultimately self-critical, unlike those of other ethical systems. Thus on the one hand, there is the openness and flexibility of pluralism; feminist ethical perspectives are ever open to new ideas and experience. On the other hand, we lack the stability and certitude of an authoritative and closed ethical system. In Chapter 3, we will examine more closely the advantages and problems of the structure (or lack thereof) of the feminist ethical process.

The main argument of this thesis is that there is indeed an ethical component to feminist political activity and theory but because it now bears so little resemblance either in structure or content to familiar ultra-rationalist philosophical approaches or severely moralistic religious ones, it is hard for us to identify. Because there is no single feminist ethic to which one can appeal (this is what distinguishes it from traditional ethical theory), it is simpler to deny the existence of an ethical aspect to feminist thought. As stated previously, the object of this inquiry will be to provide substantial proof to the contrary.

It will be argued that feminism is an on-going ethical process (as opposed to a set of immutable principles) concerned with the well-being of women and, by extension, with society in general. As we analyze particular issues in greater detail, we will trace the development of this process to the present day. What at first appear to be ethical imperatives in early feminism give way to growing contradiction, competing points of view, and self-criticism. Finally, some synthesis comes into view. One position doesn't "win" over another, though initially they may, and often do, clash. Ultimately, elements of both are retained, creating a new position, and the process begins anew. This dialectical movement will become clearer as concrete examples are discussed (see Chapters 1 and 2).

In Chapters 3 and 4 we will examine the development of a "polyvocal" feminist ethical model which incorporates several

perspectives within itself (it is thus distinguishable from the dialectical model). This relatively recent approach is partly the result of feminism's attempts to address its own failures, among them racism and absolutism (to be covered in detail in Chapters 3 and 4).

As mentioned earlier, there is a strong resistance among feminists to the notion of a "feminist ethics". "Ethics", they argue, is as much a patriarchal construction as any other malestream discourse (see Lou Nelson's article, among others) (4) if not more so, since women have only in recent times been accorded the status of full moral agents (and still, not always, as in the abortion debate).

There has been a tendency in many feminist quarters to reject all types of theory as constructed and enforced for the service of patriarchal interests. It is only fairly recently that feminists have tentatively sought to extract certain valuable insights contained in otherwise misogynistic bodies of work (i.e. Freud and, to a lesser extent, Foucault). Still, among feminists, there remains a broad spectrum of opinion as to whether such reclamations can ever be used to women's benefit.

As noted earlier, some feminists see the term "ethics" as conceptually problematic and irredeemable from patriarchal control in its present dualistic form. As long as concepts such as "good" and "bad" exist as defined by those with power, they will continue to be used to serve the interests of the prevailing ideology, they argue.

Other feminists worry about the moral/religious connotations of the term, that "ethics" will inevitably find its roots entangled in Christian precepts. Feminist scholars have, in fact, drawn some interesting parallels between feminism and certain aspects of organized religion (see Christine Overall's account of "feminist conversion", the experience of "sisterhood and community", and "Feminism as belief and value system"). (5) Though many feminists would prefer to downplay these similarities, they are nonetheless fairly significant and could benefit from further analysis (Manion looks at this as well). (6)

Carried to its extreme, "feminism as religion" is clearly embodied in the "radical feminist" ethical system of Mary Daly which duplicates the Christian ethical tradition it sets out to critique - in form if not in content. It is interesting to observe the conversion experience by women in the process of reading Gyn/Ecology (7), who clearly appear to have "gotten religion". (It is no coincidence that Gyn/Ecology is commonly referred to as the "Feminist Bible").

Finally, resistance to the term "ethics" by feminists is often the result of prolonged exposure to some of the more dogmatic tendencies in the women's movement which have sought to etch in stone that which is "good" or "bad" for women. Deviants from these hard-and-fast principles have sometimes found themselves chastised for having the "wrong" view and have been labelled "politically incorrect" (though "morally incorrect" is closer to the real meaning or intent). No

wonder the term "ethics" disturbs so many feminists; it is associated with this impulse to determine and control behaviour, exactly that which we've sought to escape.

As much as feminists dislike the term or even the idea of ethics, it is difficult to deny their existence in the history of the women's movement. Often the notion of "ethics" is conflated with "politics", as above. One is seen to have "good politics" if one favours justice for women and works toward that end. What is really being described here is the ethical motivation which guides political action.

One of the best arguments against the term "feminist ethics" is its assumed universality. Over the past few years the voices of women of colour have shown that often feminism does not speak for them. In fact, the "we" of the women's movement has seldom reflected the experiences of women of colour, working-class women, lesbians, disabled women or any women who are not white, heterosexual, able-bodied and middle-class. The question "ethical for whom?" is one the women's movement is now (though extremely late) beginning to confront. In Chapter 4 we will explore the importance of such critiques to a developing feminist ethical process.

The aim of this paper therefore is less toward discovery of a "feminist ethic" than toward tracing the dynamics of what may be termed a feminist ethical process. This process is evident in the unravelling of all issues important to the women's movement; several examples will be presented in the paper.

Three issues on which I intend to focus will each comprise a chapter - the pornography/censorship issue, lesbian separatism (also known in certain contexts as Cultural Feminism), and racism within the women's movement. Each of these issues represents some of the hottest and divisive debates in the history of the movement yet also serves as a unique illustration of what will be seen as a developing feminist ethical process. A more theoretical chapter will be included exploring the process itself as it has developed and continues to evolve, using current examples of feminist critical theory. The process will then be contrasted to other ethical systems and, drawing attention to its benefits and flaws, examined as an alternative to them.

The concluding chapter, while far from "conclusive", will summarize and draw together the main themes and arguments of the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER 1The Pornography/Censorship Debate

By way of illustrating theoretical claims about feminism as "ethical process", the next few chapters will focus on specific issues. This chapter will trace the development and transformation of the pornography/censorship question over the years, what effects different feminist ethical perspectives have had on its progress, and the way the question is regarded today as compared to the days of its conception.

The Canadian feminist anti-porn movement began in the late seventies. Among many other sources, the NFB film Not A Love Story is a powerful visual example of the rage and indignation of these early days. Women, once silent and embarrassed about pornography, began to articulate their anger toward a medium which they suddenly realized had more to do with misogyny than sex. Around this anger came forth an analysis whereby pornography came to signify, in explicit visual terms, the general sense of degradation and powerlessness experienced daily by women in a sexist society.

In looking at its roots, we know the early anti-porn movement was clearly motivated by a concern for women in the form of striking back at that which hurt, terrorized, and silenced us. However, due to the intensity of the anger and pain around the issue (both fully justified), discussion about it tended to generate "more heat than light" (1) as Canadian feminist Mariana Valverde aptly puts it. The



bombing of a porn outlet in Vancouver (Red Hot Video) by vigilante feminists, is a good example of this collective rage finding dramatic and immediate expression, but with little long term effect.

Early strategies to fight pornography then, were as powerful and passionate as the emotions which fuelled them but, in fact, were hastily developed without a great deal of reflection.\* There seemed to be a frantic desire to do something immediately; the dignity of women demanded action. Thus fast-acting and dramatic strategies such as violence and censorship were adopted.

Feminist proposals for censorship, however, were met with swift, critical reaction by other feminists. Canadian anti-censorship activist Varda Burstyn argued, from a Marxist perspective, that pornography was just another cultural product to be bought and sold by capitalism. Censorship would not "solve" the problem of pornography, she argued, and would only push it further underground. Furthermore, censorship in the hands of the politicians or defined by "community standards" would invariably only ever be used against the progressive artistic communities and not that which the anti-porners sought to have banned in the first place - violent pornography.

---

\* Yet emotion has always been a necessary part of the feminist ethical process. Though it did not always result in the most effective strategies, it did provide the impetus which pushed feminists to action and which ultimately brought the discourse to its present stage.

Critics such as Burstyn were then portrayed by anti-porn activists, especially in the U.S., as uncaring, unmoved by the violent misogyny of pornographic images. How could one argue for "freedom of speech" (men's) when images of women bound, gagged and beaten were the inevitable results of such freedoms? What about freedom for women, they argued? In Canada, Burstyn caught the brunt of anti-porn outrage; at best she was perceived as an unconscious apologist of male sexual libertarians, at worst a pornographer herself.

These emotionally charged exchanges were played out publicly in the pages of Toronto feminist publication Broadside between Varda Burstyn and American anti-porn activist Catharine MacKinnon. The bitterness of this particular exchange caused many feminists to stop and reflect on the ethics of a debate in which women sought to discredit and slander one another in so vicious a fashion (an ethical dilemma itself which will resurface in Chapter 2).

The exchange began with a decision of Burstyn's to let Penthouse Forum print an article in which she analyzed and critiqued pornography. Anti-porn activists charged Burstyn first with "legitimizing pornographers" (2), then with "breaking solidarity with feminists" (3), two charges to which she responded in Broadside.

A letter from MacKinnon appeared in the next issue of Broadside denouncing Burstyn as a "collaborator with pornographers" (4) and as having violated fundamental "standards of sisterhood" (5). But MacKinnon's assumption of

a universal feminist ethic on porn was then swiftly attacked in turn:

... her charge of "collaboration" reduces an important difference of opinion within the women's movement on political strategies to overcome women's oppression to a question of morality. (6)

Early in the debate then, we see signs of resistance to the proposal of an absolute feminist ethic.

So, what are the ethical implications to be drawn from this debate? Certainly both positions may be seen to proceed from a perspective of what is "best" or "good" for women though each has a different view of what that is and how it will be accomplished. What is interesting is how each incorporates the methods of traditional ethical systems in trumpeting their own ideas and arguments as the sole truth and trying to silence the views of the other as either "too rational" (anti-censorship) or "too emotional" (anti-pornography). Each imputes ulterior motives or a hidden agenda to the other (Burstyn is an agent for masculine values, MacKinnon is anti-sex). Further analysis of the history of the debate may help to uncover and clarify in greater detail its implications.

As was much early Second-Wave feminist thought, anti-porn theory was characterized by a simplicity of analysis and a long-repressed white-hot anger. Slogans such as "Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice" were flung about uncritically. Informed mainly by a particular American feminist sensibility (labelled alternatively by

critics as Female Essentialism, Cultural Feminism and Sexual Pessimism) pornography came to be viewed as the product of an innate and violent male sexuality which thrived on the domination and sexual degradation of women.

The most vocal and probably most extreme proponent of the female essentialist position in the anti-porn movement is American Andrea Dworkin who set up the "male as natural rapist/female as victim" dichotomy. Gradually, however, feminists began to question the simplicity of such positions, particularly in the context of a growing interest by feminists in exploring female sexuality and desire.

Canadian feminist Mariana Valverde's Sex, Power and Pleasure (7) documents these shifts quite well as do some earlier U.K. and U.S. "sex texts" (Powers of Desire (8), Pleasure and Danger (9), Sex and Love (10), to name a few). In terms of our sexuality, many women resented being portrayed by the anti-porn movement as victims and rejected absolutist, essentialist arguments about the "goodness" or "badness" of male and female sexuality. Finally, many women regarded the extremity of positions such as Dworkin's to be motivated by an anti-sex bias.

Several conditions then, may be observed to have contributed toward a shift away from more extreme anti-porn positions. First, the passage of time saw some of the "heat" drain from anti-porn rhetoric. Second, strategies developed by the movement were gradually seen to be at best, ineffective, at worst, harmful to women. Finally, a growing

interest by feminists in female sexuality set up a challenge to the more sex-negative elements of the anti-porn discourse.\*

A distinct, third voice emerged from the anti-pornography / anti-censorship struggle; it stated somewhat less heatedly that yes, pornography was bad for women, but so too was censorship and its repression of discussion about women's sexuality. These new voices, such as Carol Vance's in Pleasure and Danger, saw that worrying about the dangers of sexuality for women had, at the same time, led us away from exploring its pleasures. With its emphasis on sexual danger for women, the anti-porn discourse did not welcome open discussion about female sexual pleasure.

Initially, attempts were made to silence this third voice in "either/or" ethical terms, as in, "How can we talk about sex when life and death issues such as rape, poverty and the daily exploitation of women go unresolved?" Carol Vance argued, however, that we would wait forever for the "right time" to talk about sex, that the repression of such discussion and exploration may be as "bad" for women in the long run as not addressing the "life and death" issues (of which sex is one anyway, she adds).

---

\* Observing such a shift is not to suggest the total disappearance of extreme anti-porn activist groups, which continue to exist (women regularly exposed to female victims of male violence such as those working in battered women's shelters and on rape crisis lines tend to make up a good number of their members). It does suggest, however, a decline in their numbers and at least a modification of strategies previously committed to violence and/or censorship.

As in so many divisive feminist issues, a pattern may be observed here. First there is the powerful response to a particular oppressive situation, in this case the exploitation of women through pornography. In simple terms, the operative ethic here condemns the exploitation and violation of women's bodies and seeks its end.

Though the "heat" around the issue is certainly fully justified, it did not promote productive discussion or lead to effective strategies for change. In fact, the "heat", if sustained, at some level prohibits all discussion which may be seen to contradict it. In this case, the charge that anti-censorship advocates did not care about the harm done by pornography was intended to silence any opinion around the issue which did not share its indignation. On the other hand, the ultra-rationalist approach by anti-censorship advocates lacked a certain credibility or emotional commitment to feminists caught up in early gut-level reaction to pornography. Anti-censorship intellectuals, in fact, did their own share of "silencing" by characterizing the emotions around the anti-porn movement as excessive and therefore illegitimate in some way (ironically, a traditionally masculine argument against women's moral competency).

Despite Mary Daly's claims that "Rage is not a stage" (11), the level of anger which characterized the anti-porn movement could not be widely sustained. Though still committed to ending pornography, many anti-porn activists came to recognize the complexity of the issue and the need

for more sophisticated and effective long-term strategies. The momentary catharsis of porn-outlet bombings or anti-porn legislation was fleeting.

Censorship was not a victory. As Burstyn predicted, obscenity laws were turned not against violent pornography but against artistic, feminist and gay communities. Despite the desire for immediate change, it became clear that ending porn would be a long, arduous process accomplished through re-education and not through the quick, violent approach or band-aid legislative strategies such as the Minneapolis Ordinance (Dworkin and MacKinnon's unsuccessful attempt to legally bind pornographers).

Within feminist communities, other ethical dilemmas emerged over the definition of pornography itself. All feminists would agree that the exploitation of women is wrong but what constitutes "exploitation" may vary among feminists, especially with the advent of certain "pro-sex" feminist positions.

The third and present stage of the pornography / censorship issue is a cooler, more reflective period. What was once characterized as a hot debate is no longer really regarded as such. While some feminists still fall into one of the two camps - anti-pornography or anti-censorship - most would claim to belong to both without having their motives questioned as once they would have.

The ethics surrounding the issue have undergone several interesting changes and transformations. The initial impulse

was to attack what was exploitative of or harmful to women. Dissent or criticism, regarded with fear and suspicion as attempts to undermine "good" things being done for women, were silenced. One either was "for" or "against" women in much the same way as, under Christianity for example, one is either for or against its principles.

Thus for a time a rather simplistic, traditional and rigid ethical model of right and wrong prevailed against which dissenters spoke out at their own risk. However, despite the enormous pressure to conform to such a model, over time, women did finally speak out as a result of, I have argued, the three conditions mentioned previously. But certain questions remain which need to be addressed.

Why has feminism, at certain points, adopted traditional ethical models in approaching difficult and/or painful issues? Has feminism managed to escape their hold and if so, why and how?

One answer is certainly that the youth and insecurity of the early women's movement caused it to fall back on known ways of doing things. Women felt forced to take a stand on the pornography/censorship issue one way or another. "Fence sitting" put one's loyalty to women into question.

Treatment of dissent took similar known patterns. The silencing of "fence-sitters" was not so different in kind from the treatment of heretics or dissenters to political or religious movements. The "all or nothing" commitment required (characteristic of a movement under seige) would



brook no criticism or discussion.

With respect to many other issues in the early women's movement, we can observe this kind of absolutist, traditional ethical approach (see Chapter 2). However, unlike many religious, political or philosophical systems, in feminism we can also observe a break from this model at a certain point.

As previously noted, the inability to manage internal dissent has a lot to do with the movement's age and lack of experience. There had not yet been time to construct alternative forms and approaches to theory and practice, thus traditional methods were initially appropriated. But, as Audre Lorde has said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (12), an important insight feminism was relatively quick to grasp. How could we ever hope to critique or change a system with its own corrupt methods?

Time was not the only factor. The "master's tools", by which I mean traditional ethical approaches to difficult issues, have always been and will continue to be the most attractive means to resolving ethical dilemmas. The simplicity, familiarity and finality of the absolutist "right or wrong" judgement is infinitely more appealing than the prospect of alternatives which may promote further complexity, ambivalence or, worst of all, no final and authoritative solution to the problem.

Finally, no matter what degree of pressure or tendency to silence dissenting opinion, feminists have always managed

to find a forum in which to critique the supposedly "uncritiquable" positions of the women's movement. This point is crucial to an understanding of the feminist ethical process.

Ultimately, no position is sacrosanct or exempt from challenge. Itself proceeding from a critical perspective of a patriarchal world, feminism ultimately values even self criticism over the fear of divisiveness experienced by other political or religious organizations whose internal critics are cast out as heretics or dissenters. Critics of feminism can remain feminists (though, as we will see in the critique of feminism as racist, certain women prefer other terms to "feminist").

Thus neither the anti-pornography or anti-censorship movement can today be conceived as "right" or "wrong" in a traditional ethical sense. Elements of both have been retained and integrated into new perspectives which are presently as concerned with the welfare of women as these earlier positions were. In Chapter 3, we will look at the ways in which feminism has tried to avoid the dualistic "either/or" trap of other ethical systems.

CHAPTER 2Separatism

During the seventies, female separatism offered itself to feminists as the means to full women's liberation, putting women first and severing dependent ties to men. Though its origins and early development are important, it is the later feminist critique of separatism which draws out its ethical implications for feminism. In tracing the evolution of female separatism over the last twenty years we will once again observe feminism's ultimate rejection of absolutist principles and a movement toward a more open ethical process.

Female separatism began with the belief that any connections to men undermined women's political struggle for liberation. This meant that despite total commitment to the women's movement, women who continued to have male partners (sexual or otherwise) or any voluntary connections with men contributed to the general oppression of women. By virtue of their sexual orientation, heterosexual women were therefore seen to cement women's oppression: "You do not free yourself by polishing your chains, yet that is what heterosexual women do." (1)

Theoretically, what had by this time come to be known as lesbian separatism, to many seemed a logical and literal extension of feminism and its central message: "The personal is political". (2) In a political context, lesbian separatism presented itself as the revolutionary strategy to end women's oppression:

Kings do not sit down with peasants, Americans don't take tea with the Chinese, and whites will not reckon with racism until the collective force of the opposition gives them no choice.

(3)

No doubt a global general strike on the part of women would put us in a rare bargaining position but, once in such a position, what did lesbian separatism have in mind?

What was unclear at this time (late seventies) especially was the distinction between separatism as end and means. If separatism were strictly a political strategy to facilitate women's liberation, it would then be in the business of putting itself out of business as it were (i.e. women's liberation, once achieved, would no longer require the strategy, separatism). For many, however, separatism was merely an extension of their lesbianism and not a strategy for forcing men to "reckon" with us. For them, developing a separate women's culture in which men would never have to be reckoned with at all was the end in itself.

Like the early anti-porn movement, lesbian separatism articulated a problem and offered, for the first time, a road to women's empowerment. Apart from men, women began to work together, developing our own ideas and an autonomous women's voice. Like workers in the labour movement, women needed a chance to organize separately, apart from the influence and power of those who benefit (willingly or indirectly) from our oppression.

As with any marginalized, exploited group, be it labour, racial, religious, or ethnic minorities, or women, the

impulse to organize separately constituted a serious threat to the privilege of the dominant group. Thus the label "lesbian" was intended to silence the separatist element of the women's movement (though many separatists were lesbian, many "straight" women were also originally part of this movement) in much the same way the label "communist" was designed to purge the labour movement of its more militant members. Despite its later problems then, lesbian separatism at this stage revealed itself to be the most direct and fundamental challenge to the patriarchal system.

Much like the anti-porn movement, separatism in its first incarnation gradually hardened into a rigid, ideological position (see instances of heterophobia, silencing, etc., noted earlier). Again, one either was "for" or "against" women - heterosexual women were colluding with the enemy while lesbians were fully committed to women on all levels. In this scenario, lesbian separatism emerges as the morally superior (or what has been termed "politically correct") position.

How lesbian separatism evolved from political strategy to moral imperative bears a striking resemblance to the progression of the pornography/censorship question. Like anti-censorship advocates, heterosexual feminists whose opinions on strategy differed from separatists, were frequently silenced with the "collaborator with the enemy" charge. Once again, we see the enormous attraction

"either/or", simplistic ethical analyses have for early feminism.

When feminists first began to critique separatism, they did so both from political and ethical perspectives. As a political strategy, lesbian separatism was fraught with practical and logical problems and as more and more feminists came to remark, lesbian separatism lost sight of what may be the only real feminist ethical "principle" - the commitment to justice for all women.

Practically, lesbian separatism's underestimation of the power of heterosexuality's hold over women was naive and unrealistic. Even the relatively skimpy privilege-by-association accorded heterosexual women is a safer bet to most women than the unknown fate of those who would bite the crumb-feeding hand of the system.

A second obvious problem of the separatist analysis was its confusion of the system of sexism with individual men (see Rosemary Ruether for valuable distinctions here (4)). Certainly men as a class all benefit from male privilege. On the other hand, individual men have been known to renounce this privilege in very effective ways in their attempts to combat sexism. And certainly individual women have been known to benefit indirectly from the institution of sexism.

Equating male supremacy with heterosexuality was another mistake since misogyny and male supremacy are as outstanding features of the gay male community as among heterosexual men.

Finally, from a strategic perspective, lesbian

separatism's ultimate goal of withdrawal and isolation from the "real world" would certainly limit the influx of converts or "new recruits" to the position.

There remains also the practical problem of "separatism as ideal" vs "separatism as reality". Though early separatists made every attempt to purge their lives of men emotionally, socially and economically, it is now widely conceded that such a strategy is neither realistic nor necessarily desirable. Even Mary Daly, the most widely known of radical lesbian separatists, is forced to accept a salary from a patriarchal institution.

Ultimately the most articulate and important critique of separatism emerged from a distinctly ethical perspective in which certain aspects of it were seen to be profoundly unjust and harmful to many women. It is important, however, to distinguish between the liberal feminist critique of separatism which feared losing touch with heterosexual/male privilege (and/or feared the label "lesbian") and ones which were genuinely concerned about alienation and the "trashing" of certain kinds of feminists. Early liberal attempts to discredit separatism as a form of "man-hating" were often simply homophobic and did not sufficiently recognize its political value.

The non-liberal feminist critique of separatism which emerged in the late seventies responded to certain of its features which many feminists regarded as unethical to women. As we will see, separatism both required and assumed a race,

class and sexual privilege itself which horrified women who had adopted feminism in the first place in order to fight male privilege. Though such critiques certainly had a political angle, the ethical dimension is even more readily apparent.

The very act of "separation" from the dominant system presupposes a certain physical, emotional and economic independence to which very few women have access. Mary Daly, a powerful advocate of lesbian separatism, served as an easy target for early feminist ethical criticism. As a white, middle-class, openly lesbian, tenured university professor and author, many feminists saw her decision to withdraw a highly privileged one. In her article, "Who Wants A Piece of the Pie?" (5), feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye points out that only the ultra-privileged can, in reality, afford to opt out of the system.

In its early ideological form, separatism did not take into account the social realities of most women. How many working-to-middle class women can afford to bite the hand which feeds them, in the home or the workplace?

Many women of colour such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks attacked Daly and other proponents of lesbian separatism as racist (see Chapter 4 for detailed account). Despite sexism in Black and ethnic communities, many women of colour perceive their survival to depend upon solidarity along racial or religious, and not gender lines. Further, many women from different cultures see the family as an important



source of meaning and empowerment in their lives. Thus to suggest separatism as a means to women's liberation (for women of colour, the separation from community and/or family) is to have excluded their voices in the formulation of such a position as well as toward future visions.

Another problem with the "withdrawal" dimension of separatism is both political and ethical. In critiquing Daly's position as a spiritual alternative for women, Christian feminist ethicist Beverly Harrison underlines both its ethical and political dangers:

Daly's imagery, even if it stems from poetic license, is dangerous. It gives aid and comfort to those who have very strong political and economic reasons to encourage a spirituality that does not focus on injustice and the personal suffering it generates. Feminists, whose commitments must be to deep and profound change, should have no part in supporting a world denying spirituality or in encouraging ways of speaking about the world that may invite withdrawal from struggle. (6)

In other words, more privileged women will, in adopting a separatist lifestyle, not only abandon women with less access to such a choice but will also give up the world to those presently bent on its control and inevitably, its destruction.

This marks an important shift in the history of feminist thought - the divergence of feminism as a social movement and feminism as a cultural/spiritual force. Clearly, those of Harrison's persuasion took the former path; those of Daly's took the latter. Many, like Daly, had given up on the possibility of social change and sought to build a new world based on "women's values". Others, like Harrison, argued

that changing the world was not only possible, but our only hope, and a central commitment of feminism as a social movement.

Many feminists found the hierarchy of sexual practice eventually built into separatism a major ethical problem. Because lesbian separatists reserved their sexual energy exclusively for women and heterosexual women channeled theirs to men (read oppressor), lesbians suddenly possessed an implicit moral superiority over their straight sisters. Interestingly, though many heterosexual women vehemently opposed this view, some of them accepted the guilt accompanying the role of "traitor" to the cause, so compelling was the separatist argument at a certain point. Many guilty and defensive-sounding remarks from heterosexual feminists may be found in a collection of letters entitled: Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism released in April, 1981. (7)

Naturally the critique of lesbian moral superiority came primarily from heterosexual feminists, but many lesbians were quick to add their voices (Echols, Campbell, etc.) First, the privileging of lesbian sexual practice was attacked because it accorded legitimacy to only one form of sexual practice - an exact duplication of the heterosexist process of compulsory heterosexuality. (8) In other words, the legitimizing and prioritizing of certain sexual practices carry with them a prescriptiveness or coerciveness toward that practice.

The implication that heterosexual women possess a "false consciousness" in that their sexuality is socialized rather than chosen (see again Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality") is a condescending and presumptuous view which many lesbian separatists nevertheless held. In this scenario, female heterosexuality shifts from the "collaborator with the enemy" mode to the role of victim or dupe to a heterosexist system.

This ties in with a second critique - that of sexual orientation as a moral or political "choice". Sexual orientation, we now realize, is a complex series of biological (some argue), psychological and social forces combined with an element of choice by the individual. It is now understood that lesbianism is as psycho-socially determined as heterosexuality. Separatism's assertion of lesbianism as the politically or morally correct "choice" of an individual naively ignores the variety of other factors involved. One does not simply "decide" one's sexual orientation for the sake of good politics.

Another problem of ascribing "correct" politics or morals to a particular orientation is the conflation of sexual preference with political commitment. Many lesbians identify themselves as apolitical; their contact with other lesbians is strictly social. Heterosexual feminists, on the other hand, have a long history of political activism in the women's movement. Though percentage-wise lesbians have a higher degree of participation in feminist political

struggle, it is now clear that political commitment cannot be measured by sexual orientation.

Feminist Susan Griffin's analysis of ideology (to be discussed at length in Chapter 3) brings us to the ethical implications of separatism's view of heterosexual women as "the other". The gist of Griffin's argument is that within all ideology, the emergence of an "enemy" or "other" always becomes a central feature. The hierarchalization of sexual practice in lesbian separatist ideology then, turns heterosexual women into transgressors, and they assume the role of "the other". One of the central feminist criticisms of separatism from an ethical perspective becomes obvious here - if feminism is about affirmation and justice for women, lesbian separatism is then at odds with certain of its fundamental values.

Finally, a significant practical criticism of lesbian separatism involves the distribution of energy theory (i.e. energy given to women as positive, to men, negative). Aside from the conflation again of individual men with men as a class, the assumption here is that there exists a finite or fixed amount of energy, i.e. that the energy given to a man has been taken from a woman. Such a premise would seem to have its basis in nineteenth century scientific misconceptions rather than contemporary political theory.

In light of so much widespread criticism, separatism as

ideology or lifestyle began to lose its popularity.\* Again, a third voice emerged, one which critiqued the political and ethical limitations of separatism while still recognizing its value. This is especially important since it carefully distinguished between the liberal critique of separatism as "man-hating" and more sophisticated feminist ethical analyses. This third voice also made the important distinction between separatism as ideology and separatism as strategy. While separatism had developed into a harmful and often unjust ideological position, it argued, as a strategy its original valuable elements needed reassessment with a view to their reclamation.

Marilyn Frye, who makes the distinction between separatism as ideology and "theme" (9) is an important contributor to this new, evolving perspective, bringing back the more positive features of separatism in a new way. Frye reminds us of why separatism emerged in the first place - to provide the essential breathing space from which the oppressed group may organize itself apart from the oppressor; according to Frye, the telling reaction of men (and some women) - panic, name calling, attempts at repression (often successful) - are all signs that such a strategy is both valid and effective. There was no doubt we had hit a nerve.

---

\* Again, this is not to suggest the disappearance of hardline separatist ideologues altogether. American separatists such as Jeffner Allen, Sarah Hoagland, and others continue their contributions toward keeping the dream alive. (See recently released For Lesbians Only anthology.)

Attempts to quash separatism in any form have a long history (the purging of "lezzies" and "commies" is only one example). Charges of reverse discrimination have also been effective. As long-time victims of discrimination ourselves, women are particularly vulnerable to manipulation by this charge. According to Frye, answers to such charges must be devised, recorded, and passed on if separatism is to survive as a strategy. Two good examples follow.

Feminist theologian Elisabeth Fiorenza advances the concept of "Woman Church" (10), which distinguishes between oppressive, sexist usage of separatism by the powerful and liberating usage by the powerless. Similarly, lesbian separatist Lucia Valeska makes a useful distinction between the terms "segregation" and "separatism" (11), the former the oppressor's instrument of control, the latter a tool of survival for the oppressed.

Frye reminds us also of the continuing necessity of women only consciousness-raising groups and Take Back the Night marches. Such instances of separatism, she claims, have been institutionalized into mainstream feminism with good reason.

It is possible then, to see an evolution away from the rigid, ideological separatism of the late seventies toward a more "thematic" type of separatism, as Frye would have it. Certainly attempts have been made to silence all aspects of separatism from within feminism and, were useful distinctions such as Frye's not raised, they may have succeeded.

As it stands today, the right-or-wrong, coercive elements of early ideological separatism may be viewed as good examples of a position in its ethical infancy (i.e. the need for absolute ethical guidelines). As the movement gains power and self assurance, it can develop critiques which needn't completely condemn or commit to obscurity the original position, as developing ideology is wont to do.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Critical Theory and Literary Influences

In the eighties feminism has, certainly theoretically, expanded to include not only analyses of women's oppression but also a self criticism which has been brought to bear on the limitations of such analyses. This tendency has been most clearly evident in the work of recent feminist critical theory (especially feminist literary theory) as well as analyses which now admit psychological as well as political dimensions to feminist experience and theory.\* At the same time, the ethical structure underlying feminist action has gradually evolved and matured into one which acknowledges the complexity and diversity of ethical issues in its response to them.

The initial backlash and rebellion against early feminist moral repression (see previous chapters) was significant; feminists were clearly unwilling to accept a traditional ethical system, telling us that which we could and could not do. Most were quick to assert what we did not want, others began to articulate why we didn't want it, still others wanted to formulate what we did want (this last remains, to this day, necessarily incomplete as we will see later).

---

\* This latter movement is largely due to the influence of French and other non-Anglo/American feminist thought which has sought to reclaim and incorporate useful aspects of psychoanalytic theory into feminist criticism.



In the ground breaking article, "The Way of All Ideology" (1), Susan Griffin attempted to tackle all three in evaluating the past, present and future of feminism and its ethical implications. Unlike immediate reactionary responses to feminist moral dogmatism, Griffin's is a reflective, constructive and sometimes visionary analysis which was clearly developed with care over time. It remains among the most rigorous, yet sensitive critiques of feminism to be found.

Formally, "The Way" is one of the earliest examples of what has been called "polyvocality" (2) or the rendering of thought in the form of a "double discourse" (3) to be observed in feminist thought and writing which would later become so important to a new feminist critical discourse. This form, which incorporates two voices within the text, reflects the ambivalence and contradiction inherent in all thought and/or theory which the supposedly objective and authoritative voice of traditional theory is not permitted to contain. (This notion is central to the evolving feminist ethical process and will be discussed at length later in the chapter.)

Instead of rejecting feminism wholesale, Griffin critiqued the ideological aspects of feminism which began to emerge, in which a certain moral prescriptiveness appeared to play a large role. As suggested in the title, Griffin's analysis pertains not only to feminism, but also to the general transformation process of theory to ideology:

But when a theory is transformed into ideology, it begins to destroy the self and self knowledge. Originally born of feeling, it pretends to float above and around feeling. Above sensation. It organizes experience according to itself, without touching experience. By virtue of being itself, it is supposed to know. To invoke the name of this ideology is to confer truthfulness. No one can tell it anything new. Experience ceases to surprise it, inform it, transform it. It is annoyed by any detail which does not fit into its world view. Begun as a cry against the denial of truth, now it denies any truth which does not fit into its scheme. Begun as a way to restore one's sense of reality, now it attempts to discipline real people, remake natural beings after its own image. All that it fails to explain, it records as dangerous. All that makes it question, it regards as its enemy. Begun as a theory of liberation, slowly it builds a prison for the mind. (4)

Certainly this is a fairly accurate characterization of the shift in feminism from a theory of liberation toward an often repressive practice in its early stages. According to Griffin, part of the answer to breaking this seemingly inevitable pattern lay in understanding its origins.

Despite early feminists' skepticism and outright rejection of psychological analyses (which might contradict the feminist political agenda), Griffin nevertheless proposes the notion of "the denied self" (5) (posed originally by Simone de Beauvoir) perceived at the root of ideological development. According to this theory, undesirable characteristics found in the self are projected outward onto "the other", hence for example, women's "natural" carnality, the "laziness" of blacks, etc. Receptacles of these qualities then become "the enemy" who must be controlled or annihilated. Though far from a complete explanation for

aberrations such as sexism and racism, the psychological analysis provides at least a piece of this very complex puzzle.

Associated with "the other" then, is the natural, the emotional, the physical, the uncontrollable. Identified with the self are the rational, the spiritual, etc. Important to note in this dualistic system is the splitting of inferior/superior values - the former to "the other", the latter to the self.

According to this dualistic paradigm, feeling, creativity, sensation, all belong to the realm of "the other". Ideology then appears as a way to "... control reality with the mind, assert the ideal as more real than reality, or place idea as authority above nature ..." (6) although it can never do so. Clearly it is this impulse at work, at least partially, in early feminist ideology which generates the kind of moral prescriptiveness we have seen in response to various issues (see previous chapters).

That ideology is constructed out of fear (fear of difference, newness, change) and the desire to control are perhaps Griffin's most important insights and ones which feminist critical theory returns to again and again. Instances of censorship and harsh treatment of dissent at last come to have some explanation; it is actually the silencing of the self which raises too many pesky, unanswerable questions, problems and contradictions which

theory can no longer adequately explain. Griffin puts it thus :

She [the ideological self] wants me to produce a comprehensive world view so that nothing in the world is unexplained. She is a Prussian soldier in the world of intellect. She is not interested in unanswered questions, in uncertainties, intuitions, barely grasped insights, hunches. Moreover she wishes every idea to be consistent, to conform to one ideal. She is not familiar with Freud's notion that in the unconscious what seems contradictory to the conscious mind is resolved. She is impatient for resolution. (7)

Compared to the persecution of Jews, heretics, communists, etc. throughout history (all manifestations of "the denied self" projected on to "the other"), the internal squabbles of the women's movement seem hardly worth mentioning. Yet all represent, in their own ways, the vicious side of ideology which is born of fear and the need for control. As we examine other feminist critical thought, this notion will recur in different forms.

Traditional ethics, it may be said then, always serve an ideological function. Though ideology, as Griffin points out, is usually initially born of a liberatory impulse, the ultimate object is to control that which threatens to transgress its boundaries. Thus, eventually what was "good" or "bad" for women, according to certain feminist ethical principles of the time, turned out often to have little to do with reality itself and more to do with its control. At a certain point, for example, women who wanted to "talk sex" were, from a certain ideological perspective, either treated as heretics or as if they did not exist.

Griffin's article, among others, marks an important paradigm shift in feminist ethical perspectives. Analyses of feminism as ideology certainly provided at least a partial explanation for the conventional and limited ethical focus of feminism to date. A new skepticism toward "either/or" approaches to issues began to pervade the writings of feminist thinkers. New ways of conceptualizing reality in thought and written forms were offered as alternatives to traditional and what has been perceived as simplistic, inadequate renderings of reality, both in theory and artistic expression. Some of this work will now be explored in greater detail in order to better document the theoretical and ethical shifts to which I refer.

In the past ten years, feminist critical theory has made major progressions, especially in the area of feminist literary criticism. As a result, we now have a solid analysis of oppressive conditions for women prior to the establishment of the women's movement as well as constructive criticism of early feminist attempts to address these conditions. Finally, there are now definite signs of a developing and distinctly feminist critical practice, as opposed merely to the challenge to existing traditions, which provides a brand new lens through which to view theory and experience.

French feminists have sought to incorporate elements of psychoanalytic theory (Freud, Lacan) since, as Griffin has earlier pointed out, strictly political analysis, though

important, is inadequate to a fuller understanding of women's oppression and strategies for change. Other directions pursued by feminist critical inquiry lean toward post-structuralist and deconstructionist approaches (Foucault and Derrida for example) combined with principles drawn from feminism. What all these streams have in common, however, is a critique of traditional (including feminist) forms of writing and thinking which have inadequately and/or falsely interpreted reality, especially for women. What they propose are new ways of approaching this task, ways of writing and thinking in different forms which attempt to expose and confront the ideological biases of traditional forms.

The ethical aspirations of these thinkers are clear; they are interested in authenticity, the breakdown of authority, and in revealing the "single voice" approach to expression as inevitably having more to do with power than truth. They now recognize traditional ethics at work within feminism as supportive of ideological interests. Where once internal dissent was hushed up for the sake of presenting a united front, internal criticism is, at least theoretically\*, now largely believed to be essential to the whole feminist process.

---

\* In practice there is still some debate over this. A recent conflict in the Women's Review of Books over the ethics of feminist reviewing and publishing revealed that criticism is still unwanted in many quarters. Still, offense was taken here not so much at the fact of criticism of one feminist's work by another so much as how the criticism was conveyed, in this case, viciously. (8)

These new approaches to thought have implications for ethics, as it will be shown, since the "master's tools" or traditional absolutist approaches to complex ethical issues within feminism have proven inadequate and so often destructive.

One of the central challenges made by feminist critical theory is to the traditional "authoritative" approach to thought and verbal or written expression (what Elizabeth Meese refers to as "univocality" (9)). Clearly, fascist tendencies which develop within ideology may be traced in part to this source. Most literature and theory as we know it follows this model in which an idea is presented from a single point of view as "truth". Any doubts on the author's part cannot be revealed in the text or his/her argument will lose its credibility. Thus the author's object is to persuade the reader of a single truth, when in reality, several truths may be said to exist at once.

Contemporary feminist critic Toril Moi (10) offers an interesting example of this process in the work of early feminist critic Kate Millett who, Moi argues, herself used this primitive model of criticism to attack sexism in literature. Though Millett's was a ground-breaking work in its day, Moi's contemporary review of Millett's Sexual Politics (11) sees it as an angry, persuasive piece of feminist propaganda. In offering the "single truth" of woman as victim, it asks us either to accept the authority of Millett's argument or not. Grey areas are not permitted;

Millett would have us accept an absolutist type of feminism free of niggling contradictions which might challenge the role of woman as ever and always victim as a less than realistic representation. Echoing Susan Griffin, *Moi* is here concerned with the imposition of feminist ideological structures upon reality which may not only not accurately reflect it but which may also force it to fit its own framework.

Similarly, critic Catherine Belsey (12) challenges sacred traditions such as textual authority, universal truths, and realism said to exist in literary works of art. Her critique of ideology mirrors Griffin's - that ideology serves to suppress contradiction, preserve social formation. Realism, she argues, is merely another ideological tool; it is not plausible because it accurately reflects the world, but because it presents what is familiar, comfortable, traditional, thus preserving ideology.

On a more literary level, many feminist writers are experimenting with form as a means of directly challenging so-called universal truths and the univocal, authoritative approach of conventional literary expression. In her essay "The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis" (13), Jane Gallop attempts a re-reading of Freud through Lacan but with a feminist influence. What is interesting is the form Gallop implements; the text is presented through two voices, in side-by-side columns down the page (the double discourse referred to earlier), Gallop's way of expressing ambivalence



toward the ideas explored in the text. In this way also Gallop is able to assume and critique the role and power of the author simultaneously.

Others experimenting in this area include Rachel Blau DuPlessis whose deconstructionist "For the Etruscans" (14) also questions the absence of doubt and contradiction within theoretical discourse. Critical of the "one truth", authoritative approach of traditional theory, DuPlessis nevertheless also expresses her fears with regard to a new model of discourse which may be too open, pluralistic, chaotic, that we may be merely seeking to avoid conflict, letting everyone be right. DuPlessis does not propose solid solutions - as she argues for an interpretive rather than an authoritative perspective, conclusions are left open to the reader - in keeping with the spirit of what she is proposing.

Finally, feminist critical theorist Elizabeth Meese sums up the attraction of a new feminist critical discourse, as well as its problems. Questions of central importance include: How may the existing theoretical discourse be deconstructed/subverted without replacing it with a new critical hegemony, this time a feminist one? How may the traps of absolutism and authority implicit in the construction of all theory be avoided?

Meese begins by citing two examples of feminist literary criticism, both of which have fallen short as "successful" models. "Prescriptive criticism" (15), with its explicitly political and moral agenda, was rejected by feminists since

it seemed intent merely on replacing masculine values with feminine ones. "Pluralistic criticism" (16) advocated openness to a variety of critical approaches but wished to remain "... captive of none" (17). Its advantage, Meese contends, is that it values multiple interpretations and "... avoids the sin of replacement" (18); feminists need not develop a new theory. The central problem of pluralism?:

To embrace pluralism is to espouse the politics of the masculinist establishment. Pluralism is the method employed by the "central" authorities to neutralize opposition by seeming to accept it. The gesture of pluralism on the part of the "marginal" can only mean capitulation to the center. (19)

What then are the alternatives for a feminist critical practice to co-optation within the system on the one hand and the separatist model on the other? Meese imports the ideas of Jane Gallop and French feminist Luce Irigaray to shed new light on the problem.

Gallop's "de-centering" (20) technique and Irigaray's (21) deliberate avoidance of precision represent the conscious decision to not construct theory, according to Meese. The problem of textual authority is solved (or is it since this now becomes the new theory?)

Meese argues that this new theory is different since it accepts/documents internal contradiction and is self-critical. It proposes a "polyvocality" (22) (see Gallop's "double discourse") resisting the authoritative, single voice of traditional theory, remaining open to change and challenge.

Meese concludes by identifying the value of feminist criticism as a "theorizing process" (23) rather than "theory". Our own internal struggles (i.e. racist, classist, heterosexist, lesbian privileging biases within the movement) illustrate the dangers of the univocal, single truth approach. "What it comes to is that there is no single monovocal theory worth writing." (24)

The significance of new feminist critical models for ethics is two-fold: one, they provide detailed analysis and criticism of the dominant discourse to which traditional ethics belong and two, they propose interesting alternative models.

The challenge to the ideological function of ethics is perhaps most important. As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, even within feminism, ethics have served to support a dualistic system based on dominance in which principles are defined as superior/inferior rather than merely different. Contemporary feminism is generally unwilling to accept such models any longer; reality is more complex than absolute, "right/wrong" approaches to ethics will allow.

Some feminists argue that the term "ethics" itself cannot be reclaimed for our usage, so closely identified is it now with the traditional model, and that new models call for new terms. However, while no new word has been devised, the concern for justice for women and activity toward this end continues and generally the term "Feminist Ethics" is applied.

The acknowledgement of more than one truth in the processes of thought and expression is a revolutionary concept in terms of ethics. According to this idea moral dilemmas would no longer be solved, for example, based on the persuasiveness of one side of a question over another; the existence of multiple interpretations and truths will be acknowledged and decisions made after exploring all sides of the issue. This would mean replacement of the absolute certitude of the authoritative method by an approach which does not silence its fear or ambivalence in the face of complexity.

As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, these changes are already in progress. The feminist "party line" is increasingly open to criticism; ethical debates are no longer framed in simple terms as in what is "bad" or "good" for women (especially since it is now understood that what is "good" for some women is "bad" for others - see Chapter 4).

Even abortion, that untouchable, undebatable issue so fiercely protected by feminists, finds itself on the table as admission of grey areas by some begins to undermine absolute pro-choice positions (see Not An Easy Choice: A Feminist Looks at Abortion, by Kathleen McDonnell.) Thus politics and ethics, it would seem, do not always converge. It is sometimes necessary to take a stand on an issue such as abortion while still feeling some ethical ambivalence about it. After all, full reproductive freedom is our ultimate goal; abortion is a band-aid solution. Yet as long as our

goals are kept far beyond our reach, we will continue to have to fight tenaciously for whatever small measure of freedom we have in the meantime.

Some feminists have argued that the move toward pluralism creates too much openness, that if feminism is made too broad, it will eventually become meaningless and consequently, powerless. (Some have even proposed, such as DuPlessis, that the tendency toward pluralism may proceed from a distinctly feminine desire to avoid conflict, please everyone, keep the peace at all costs.) That is to say, the fear that feminism could become all things to all people, thus leaving us divided on the issues, raises important political dilemmas (i.e. how to present a united front at the abortion clinic entrance if one is too wimpy on the issue?) Others argue, however, that the movement is solid enough that differences may be explored without the roof caving in on our heads, and that avoidance of difference represents the real danger in the long run.

In Chapter 4, the issue of difference and political solidarity as it pertains to race and class difference in the women's movement will be discussed at length. As will be shown, feminist treatment of difference raises serious ethical questions and challenges certain basic feminist assumptions.

CHAPTER 4Racism as Fundamental Challenge

Feminist literary theorists are not the only ones calling for new feminist ethical models which incorporate elements of self criticism and "polyvocality". In recent years, feminism has been challenged to examine its own failures in addition to those of the sexist society it is critiquing, to acknowledge its own ethnocentric, racist and class biases. Feminism, we are now beginning to realize, has in some ways exhibited tendencies as profoundly unethical as those expressed toward women by patriarchy. Thus the development of a feminist ethical process has been pushed to a new level, a critical point which some believe feminism may not survive.

Led primarily by women of colour, this new critical perspective of feminism challenges the notion of a universal "woman's experience" (1) which, they argue, ignores (some say deliberately) class and/or cultural difference among women. Elizabeth Spelman has pointed out that to speak "as a woman" (2) as feminism claims to do, has usually meant to speak only for the interests of white, middle-class women. The word "woman" in feminist discourse does not, in reality, include women of various race and class backgrounds, Spelman argues, in much the same way that feminists have shown that the generic term "man" or "mankind", despite its claimed universality, does not actually apply to women.

Examples of the backlash against a white, middle-class

hegemony appeared early on in criticism specifically directed at the more obvious targets of so-called radical feminism and lesbian separatism (see "Separatism" chapter), both of which were, in many cases, overtly racist and/or ethnocentric. Black theorists/activists Audre Lorde and bell hooks were among the first to take radical feminists such as Mary Daly to task on this issue. Both Lorde and hooks argue that radical feminists such as Daly, in an effort to confront and expose the androcentric bias of traditional scholarship and research, have overlooked their own ethnocentric bias. Lorde in particular characterizes Daly as "a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western european frame of reference" (3).

Daly's exclusive selection in Gyn/Ecology of white women as symbols of power and women of colour as symbols of victimization (i.e. clitoridectomy and infibulation of girls in some Third World countries) is, in Lorde's view, "to make a point by choice" (4). In other words, Daly's particular methodology has served to distort and trivialize the experiences of women of colour and Third World women in its selection of some materials and exclusion of others.

In an effort to create a comprehensive and all-encompassing theory of women's oppression, Daly makes the serious error of erasing difference among women, according to Lorde. Certainly, the global oppression of women knows no ethnic or racial boundaries, she argues, but that is not to say that each experience of it is identical. Here, Daly's

universalizing of women's experience has overlooked the variety of forms and degrees of patriarchy which have been practiced against women of different races, classes and cultures. Lorde points out, for example, that statistically women of colour are three times more vulnerable to individual and institutionalized forms of male violence, a fact rendered invisible by Daly's reductionist radical feminist analysis.

bell hooks argues against the radical feminist emphasis on the universal "woman as victim" as extremely misleading. Radical feminist theory has tended to obscure the ways not only in which different women are victimized differently but also the ways in which some women have victimized others:

Identifying as "victims", they (white women liberationists) could abdicate responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism and classism which they did by insisting that only men were the enemy. They did not confront the enemy within. (5)

In recent years, charges of ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism have been made against a predominantly white, western, middle-class women's movement by women who fit none or few of these categories. In many cases, these women perceive the women's movement, in fact, as a microcosm of the wider patriarchal system. In the same way women of all races and classes have been silenced and oppressed by patriarchy, so too have women of colour, varying ethnic origins, different classes, sexual orientation, less educated women, etc. been silenced by the dominant voice within feminism. It is no



... mere accident of history that white middle-class women in the United States have in the main developed "feminist theory" (as opposed to Black Feminist theory, Chicana Feminist theory, etc.) and that so much of the theory has failed to be relevant to the lives of women who are not white or middle class. (6)

Thus, we return again to the problem of universalizing women's experience, a process seen as racist here by Black feminist theorists. bell hooks expands on this theme:

... feminist emphasis on "common oppression" in the United States was less a strategy for politicization than an appropriation by conservative and liberal women of a radical political vocabulary that masked the extent to which they shaped the movement so that it addressed and promoted their class interests. (7)

Thus, according to hooks, the universalizing of women's experience goes beyond simple ignorance on the part of white, middle-class women; it has actually served to promote the interests of some women at the expense of others.

bell hooks has written extensively of her first-hand experiences of racism within the women's movement. As in patriarchy, she believes, only statements which echo the values of those who dominate the women's movement are heard.

Further:

Even though they [white feminists] may (emphasis mine) be sincerely concerned about racism, their methodology suggests they are not yet free of the type of paternalism endemic to white supremacist ideology. (8)

hooks' critique of the radical feminist analysis sheds light on the problems and limitations of blaming patriarchy alone. As a Black, working-class feminist, hooks makes the connections between patriarchy, capitalism and racism, each

of which is mutually supportive of the other. An analysis of patriarchy alone is simply insufficient to understanding the complex inter-relationships which form dominant ideology. Thus, it is with an assurance both political and personal that hooks can identify as "privileged" those feminists (such as Mary Daly) who insist "that gender is the sole determinant of woman's fate." (9) Furthermore, the triple marginalization of Black working-class women from the dominant discourse renders them uniquely sensitive and capable in contributing to the development and revisioning of feminist theory, hooks adds.

To say that all women are dominated by all men is too easy; hooks, in recounting the history of white supremacy among women, demonstrates how Black women have envied, feared and served their white "sisters" through the ages. It is for this reason that the universal "sisterhood" proposed by radical feminists has met with more than a little skepticism by Black and other feminist scholars/activists.

Especially offensive to these Black critics is the lesbian separatist position which to hooks is the most racism-laden and class biased theory of all. As discussed in Chapter 3, the option of separation from men is one closed to most women in the real world, (if it is considered desirable at all) particularly to women of other cultures for whom family plays such a central role. The suggestion that women abandon the lives they have is not only not a real option, but a de-valuation of their real lived experience.

Furthermore, hooks asserts, separatism's goal of the "radical exorcism" (10) of men from daily life demonstrates its idealistic, philosophical character rather than any realistic social or political value. The reductionist identification of men as "the enemy" (11) serves to "mystify the social basis of exploitation" (12) which for many women is multi-faceted and not simply experienced at the hands of men.

In addition to charges of racism, the related issue of cultural imperialism in feminist theory/practice has received its own share of criticism. Essentially, cultural imperialism within the women's movement has consisted largely of privileged white, western women telling Black and/or Third World women how and why they are oppressed and how they should go about changing this. Mary Daly's critiques of Indian Suttee, Chinese Footbinding, and African clitoridectomy and infibulation rituals, though classic examples of cultural imperialist tendencies, are only a few examples among many.

During a lecture date at Concordia last year, Angela Davis spoke of the cultural imperialism of white western feminists, in particular with respect to the infibulation rituals performed on African girls and women. Davis contends that western feminists have, with characteristic moral outrage, taken up this cause without ever having asked the opinions of their African "sisters" on the subject. Certainly, many African women are already at work on this issue, according to Davis, but overall it does not presently

take priority on the African women's agenda as many western feminists have suggested it ought.

For many of these women, particularly those of South Africa, the crucial issue at hand is the preservation of the lives of their children and their existence as a people in the face of extreme natural hardship and murderously oppressive (white) political regimes. When they ask for the help of feminists on these issues, they do not need to be lectured instead on the horrors of "genital mutilation", an issue about which they are already well aware.

Davis's suggestion that western feminists listen to the voices of African women rather than impose our own values is well taken. It is up to African women to determine their own needs and set their own agendas. The role of western feminists is to follow their lead, to provide aid according to their specifications. The key, as Audre Lorde and others have suggested, is to avoid the impulse to universalize our experience, to recognize cultural difference as something we can learn from and respect.

bell hooks suggests that the feminist emphasis on a "common oppression" (13) in all its racist implications, has alienated many Black women to the point where they dissociate themselves from the notion of feminism itself. For example, Black novelist Alice Walker prefers the term "womanist" to better describe her particular perspective.

Despite much negative experience in "feminist movement" (14), hooks is still committed to a struggle which works

toward the eradication of sexism in all its forms. Rather than define herself as a feminist though, hooks states, "I advocate feminism" (15) since to call oneself a feminist is, in hooks' view, to dissociate from other political struggles. Because of its white, middle-class hegemony, feminism in its present form has come to mean a white, middle-class struggle (what Marilyn Frye has called a struggle for "joint dominance" (16) with white, middle-class men) of little relevance to women outside these boundaries.

More recently, the work of Elizabeth Spelman has contributed to the growing chorus of voices intent on critiquing and (for some) changing the values of feminism as we know it. Like Lorde and hooks, Spelman attacks the tendency toward erasure of difference by the more dominant elements within feminism and examines the source and effects of this tendency.

Western feminist theory is not fundamentally different from western philosophical theory in general, Spelman argues, in its "discomfort with manyness" (17), and hence its desire to universalize. Feminists, she proposes, are as sloppy with the term "women's condition" as traditional philosophy has been with "human condition". (18) The parallels between what disturbs feminists about traditional philosophy and what disturbs many women about feminism are multiple, as Spelman goes on to demonstrate.

Spelman sees the impulse to universalize as less a "problem of difference" than a "problem of privilege". (19)

In other words, "manyness" is only a problem for the dominant whom the notion of a "common oppression" serves. The function of not focussing on difference, Spelman concludes, is to preserve the privilege of those who control the movement.

Those who control the women's movement repeatedly point to the political importance of the "single voice" approach they see as necessary to preserving a common front. In Chapter 3 we saw how feminist literary critics pointed to the intellectual dangers of textual authority in the "single voice" approach found in literary expression. Critics such as Spelman now offer concrete connections between "univocality" and power as they challenge the legitimacy of the "single voice" approach as a way for white women to retain control over the movement (in much the same way white males preserve their hold on the literary establishment.)

First, Spelman challenges the "single voice = common front" premise by demanding why it is less dangerous not to focus on difference. Why wouldn't the struggle between different voices produce in the end a more powerful movement? Second, Spelman points out that if the interests of women of colour are not represented by feminism, why should these women care a whit about preserving its cohesiveness?

There has been strong resistance on the part of white, middle-class feminists to acknowledge our movement's race and class biases. As Spelman points out, we have tended to treat such issues as abstractions (notice the parallel to the

feminist critique of traditional ethics here), turning racism and classism into something experienced by some women rather than something perpetrated by some women on others.

Softer critics such as Adrienne Rich argue that feminist racism is not based on white supremacist values but on a kind of tunnel vision that sees any but white experience as insignificant (the ethnocentric model). Others argue that racism and the preservation of privilege in the women's movement may be unconscious. To quote Spelman:

Those of us who are white may not think of ourselves as racists, because we do not own slaves or hate Blacks, but that does not mean that much of what props up our sense of self is not based on the racism that unfairly distributes benefits and burdens to whites and blacks. (20)

Traditional feminist analyses of racism take a variety of peculiar forms. The ranking of oppressions has been one such form as in Mary Daly's view of gender oppression as somehow "worse than" or inclusive of, race or class oppression. Spelman describes the "additive analysis" (21) which treats the oppression of Black women as a further burden as opposed to a different burden. The additive analysis, Spelman argues, ignores the important differences in the context in which Black and white women experience sexism. For example, the "woman on pedestal" model of sexism experienced by middle-class, white women is probably one not familiar to most Black women.

Spelman's most important contribution to current critiques of feminism is her thesis of "exclusion" (22), and

how clearly this process reveals the power structure underlying feminist theory. That the women's movement now acknowledges that "Feminist theory must take differences among women into consideration" (23) is, on the one hand, an important concession in this area but, more importantly, identifies those who have heretofore had the power to exclude difference from consideration. In other words, the intention to "bring in" different women in effect preserves their status as outsiders. (24) Put simply, "Welcoming someone into one's home doesn't represent an attempt to undermine privilege; it expresses it." (25)

Thus it is white, middle-class women who have until now possessed the power and authority to determine what is similar and what is different, a privilege feminists have critiqued in traditional philosophy. The feminist assertion that all women share a common oppression expresses an arrogance only the powerful in this context can fail to see:

A description of the common world we share "as women" may be simply a description of my world with you now as an honorary member. (26)

Spelman urges us further to be wary of classificatory schemes such as "woman" or "black" in general since those who have had the power to create and maintain such schemes in the first place will surely do so with their own interests in mind.

A difficult paradox now faces feminists who wish to address the problem of racism, according to Spelman. Our attempts to hear the voices of different women cannot help



but be gestures of inclusion which thus perpetuate the privilege of our established "we". "We" are now deciding to hear "them"; why should they choose to talk to us since again it is "us" setting the terms, calling the shots? On the other hand, feminism can no longer afford not to look at racism and still call itself the women's movement.

Spelman thinks feminism will survive this crisis provided major reforms are implemented. The beginning will be hardest since gestures of openness by the dominant are sure to appear paternalistic and intrusive and may be rejected. Still, doing something not particularly well is surely better than doing nothing at all.

Spelman offers a number of remedial suggestions for feminism, the first being to make sure that analyses of women's oppression are now made in the context of race and class struggle as well. The blanket critique of patriarchy as the central oppression must be put to rest. Feminism must now specify which women and men it is talking about (i.e. analyze gender relations between men and women of the same race and class).

Finally difference must be understood as an enhancement of the movement rather than a threat to its coherence. The "united front" presently at stake consists largely of a privileged elite which represents only a fraction of all women. To quote Spelman again: "Feminism must make visible that we make a common struggle, if at all, through our differences from one another, not around them." (27)

In the debates around pornography/censorship and separatism, which ethical face feminism should wear was hotly contested, yet the ethical core of feminism was never actually challenged as it has been over the issue of racism. Feminism's past central ethical claim, its commitment to justice for all women, has by now been called into question.

One would expect critics such as Lorde, hooks and Spelman to abandon feminism for its political, ethical and intellectual failures. Instead their words have been instrumental in igniting slow, hard, painful changes. It is precisely this ethical crisis which is provoking new developments in feminist process. There are signs that feminism is becoming aware that its critique of traditional ethics must now be turned on itself. Exposure to sexism and androcentrism has already facilitated a recognition by feminists of our own racism and ethnocentrism, if only intellectually at this point. Whether feminism can successfully address its own failures across the board and whether changes are acceptable remains to be seen.

### CONCLUSION

The question with which this thesis began, "Is there a feminist ethic?" may, in some sense, be answered affirmatively, yet in another sense, have no answer at all--in keeping with a truly polyvocal perspective. If we are looking for a universal guideline to which we can appeal for answers to ethical dilemmas, we will not find one in feminism. The term "feminist ethic" is surely part of the problem here. What I have described throughout the thesis can in no way be conceptualized in the same manner as other known ethical systems. Thus the notion of a feminist ethical process or ethical tradition has been proposed to describe what clearly exists yet, in some sense, eludes categorization.

The notion of a feminist tradition may now be recognized as a result of the many challenges made to its ethical legitimacy in recent years. In his discussion of political, philosophical and/or religious traditions, philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre points out that:

... only when traditions either fail and disintegrate or are challenged do their adherents become aware of them as traditions and begin to theorize about them. (1)

Certainly, feminism's ethical failures have, on the one hand, forced it to seriously re-evaluate its goals and beliefs; - yet, on the other hand, have further promoted its sense of identity. Early conflicts over issues of sexuality especially (i.e. pornography/censorship, separatism, sado-

masochism) were clear signs of a breakdown of consensus. Later, challenges to feminism as intellectually and ethically flawed (critiques of feminist racism, absolutism) seemed to further threaten its power as a coherent social movement.

Yet feminism must remain a powerful tradition if its most articulate critics are also its most ardent adherents. Susan Griffin's critique of ideology could as easily have led to a rejection of feminism as to a reformation of it. And Meese's fears about a new feminist critical hegemony bring us dangerously close to abandoning feminist theory altogether. Finally, charges of racism have called into question certain fundamental principles of feminism. Yet it is evidently these types of crises which build and, in fact, reinforce tradition. According to MacIntyre:

An epistemological crisis can only be recognized for what it was in retrospect. To have passed through an epistemological crisis successfully enables the adherents of a tradition of inquiry to rewrite its history in a more insightful way.

(2)

This thesis represents only one such attempt to review, interpret and document the development of ethical currents underlying what can now be perceived as feminist tradition.

To summarize, we have seen an early reliance on traditional "either/or" ethical approaches give way in certain areas to a dialectical model in which competing perspectives gradually come to influence one another to form new ones. More recently, internal (and external) criticism, especially charges of racism (Chapter 4) and intellectual

absolutism (Chapter 3), have led to the development of what has been called a polyvocal model of ethical discourse.

The development of a feminist ethical process has been gradual and on-going, oriented more toward a vision of what we don't want as opposed to the development of a concrete program of our own. Thus feminism first critiqued and rejected certain aspects of traditional ethical systems such as over-emphasis on abstraction, de-politicized ethics, and the dismissal of emotion as irrelevant or detrimental to ethical decision-making. It took much longer before feminism recognized traditional ethical patterns within itself such as the tendency toward absolutist (either/or) approaches, dualism, and prescriptive dogmatism, all of which are still, at times, in evidence. Some feminists, for example, continue to take "either/or" positions on the pornography/censorship and separatism debates. Yet there are others who in time come to reject this model as one which does not contribute to dialogue or movement.

This is precisely what is significant about feminism as process as opposed to fixed system. We still find individuals strongly committed to one side of a question or another, unwilling to budge or hear any but their own voice. Though many remain rooted here, the "process" orientation of feminism recognizes that dialogue is not always possible or desirable at a certain point, yet in time may (and often does) become so.

The dialectical model of the feminist ethical process is

represented by the "third voice" we observed, for example, in the pornography/censorship and separatism debates. This is the voice which managed to critique and retain elements of both sides of the debate, synthesizing them into a new position which, in turn, exposed itself to the same process.

The polyvocal model to emerge later is quite different from the dialectical process since it attempts to contain two or more voices within itself without synthesis. The idea of polyvocality is to resist the appeal of generalizations, pat answers, and universal truths, a difficult and potentially problematic approach.

The polyvocal ethical model is perhaps the most promising and dangerous thing ever to happen to feminism. As Catharine R. Stimpson points out, such an approach challenges

a group's essential unity. Instead of consensus, it would set up coalitions. It would search for affinities, not for a common identity. Equally chary of a dominant discourse, such a group would trust oppositional viewpoints, like those of women of color ... .. Given its multiplicity of oppositional voices, such a group would, I suggest, have to develop an ethics of correction, an ethics that delights, not in the imposition of "right", but in charity of response, clarity of speech, and self-consciousness about principles and practices.

(3)

This is not to suggest that feminism has already adopted a polyvocal ethical structure, only that there currently appears to be a strong shift in this direction. In fact, many feminists, especially those engaged in the "sex debates" (pornography, prostitution, sado-masochism) even today may be

found entrenched in absolute positions\* or engaged in the process of self-criticism (the dialectical cycle). Still others such as Spelman are now saying that there can be no ethical feminist theory which does not recognize the value of difference and "manyness". It is the development of a truly polyvocal feminist discourse which allows for the co-existence of all feminist ethical approaches (either/or, dialectical, polyvocal).

In conclusion, it must be conceded that despite the identification of various models of feminist ethical process we are no closer to a definition of what a "feminist ethic" is, only to what it is not. For example, a feminist ethic does not:

- attempt to abstract real life and death issues
- depoliticize ethical issues
- exclude emotion
- silence/discredit internal opposition
- operate on exclusive principles

In some sense, a feminist ethic must not be too clearly defined if it is to retain its constantly theorizing and changing character. If anything, a feminist ethic is identifiable by its vulnerability to critique and crisis, its continuously reflective and self critical nature, and

---

\* A group of U.S. feminist anti-pornographers recently forced the closing of a feminist bookstore because it continued to make available, despite protests, controversial lesbian sexual material which they believe glorifies violence against women.

finally, by its very lack of definition. A structured program sets limits, closes itself to alternative ideas and approaches.

Still, feminism may be understood to possess a loose ethical tradition. In its short history, it has assimilated other traditions, later rejected (and sometimes retained) elements of them, and tried to begin its own. Whether feminism can transcend the problems of other ethical systems (i.e. dualism, prescriptiveness, etc.) remains to be seen, though it has made a good start. On the other hand, its lack of structure creates new problems. Some argue that there is no longer such a thing as "feminism", so distinct in some sense are, for example, liberal, socialist and radical feminisms (see Stimpson's analysis of consensus) (4). As well, there is feminism's bad record at representing the majority of women's interests. There is nevertheless the potential to learn from past failures and to build, if not a movement, then (perhaps as Stimpson envisions) a powerful coalition which will coordinate rather than try to represent the demands of the many voices calling for change.



NOTES

Introduction

1. Eileen Manion cites seven points on which she believes feminists agree in "In The Name of the Mother: Feminism as Faith and the Work of Mary Daly" in Feminist Ethics (Vol. 8, no. 4: Summer, 1988), pp. 5-18.
2. Alisdair MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 401.
3. Susan Sherwin, "A Feminist Approach to Ethics" in Resources for Feminist Research (Fall, 1987), p. 26.
4. Lou Nelson, "What's So Feminist About Feminist Ethics?" in The Canadian Journal of Feminist Ethics (Vol. 2, no. 1: Spring, 1987), pp. 29-34.
5. Christine Overall, "Feminism as Religion?" in The Canadian Journal of Feminist Ethics (Vol. 1, no. 2: Summer, 1986), pp. 1-5.
6. Eileen Manion, op. cit., pp. 5-18.
7. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

Chapter 1

1. Mariana Valverde, op. cit.
2. Varda Burstyn, "Considering Context and Content," in Broadside (Vol 7, no. 1: Oct. 1985), p. 8.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Standards of Sisterhood," in Broadside (Vol. 7, no. 3: Dec. 1985 - Jan. 1986), p. 6.
5. Ibid., p. 6.
6. Sue Findlay, Letter to the editorial collective, in Broadside (Vol. 7, no. 4: Feb. 1986), p. 3.
7. Mariana Valverde, op. cit.

8. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

9. Carol Vance, ed., Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

10. Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan, eds., Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions, (London: Women's Press, 1983).

11. Mary Daly, op. cit.

12. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Sister Outsider, (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 110.

## Chapter 2

1. Rita Mae Brown, "The Shape of Things to Come," Plain Brown Wrapper, (Oakland: Diana Press, 1976), p. 111.

2. Charlotte Bunch sums it up thus: "there is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not personal," (Charlotte Bunch quoted in Lydia Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution, (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1981), p. xix.

3. Lucia Valeska, "The Future of Female Separatism," Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest, with an introduction by Charlotte Bunch, (New York: Longman, 1981), p. 30.

4. Rosemary Reuther, Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 180-181.

5. Marilyn Frye, "Who Wants a Piece of the Pie?" Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest, p. 94.

6. Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 6.

7. Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism, Collection of letters in response to the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists paper (London: Onlywomen Press, 1981).

8. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds., Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality, (New Feminist Library, 1983), p. 177.

9. Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983).

10. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 347.

11. Lucia Valeska, op. cit., p. 23.

### Chapter 3

1. Susan Griffin, "The Way of All Ideology," in Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Barbara C. Gelpi eds., Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, (University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 280.

2. Elizabeth A. Meese, Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 110, 127, 147.

3. Jane Gallop, "The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis," The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 127.

4. Susan Griffin, op. cit., p. 280.

5. Ibid., p. 275.

6. Ibid., p. 278.

7. Ibid., p. 279.

8. Kathleen M. Martindale, "The Ethics of Feminist Reviewing," in The Simone de Beauvoir Newsletter (Vol. 9, no. 1: 1989), pp. 39-42.

9. Meese, op. cit., p. 142. 10. Toril Moi, Sexual Textual Politics, (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

10. Toril Moi, Sexual Textual Politics, (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

11. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, (New York: Equinox, 1971).

12. Catherine Belsey, in Terence Hawkes ed., Critical Practice, (London and New York: Methuen, 1980).

13. Jane Gallop, "The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis," The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982).

14. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "For the Etruscans," in Elaine Showalter ed., The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

15. Meese, op cit., p. 140.

16. Ibid., p. 141.

17. Annette Kolodny quoted in Meese, op. cit., p. 141.

18. Meese, op. cit., p. 141.

19. Gayatri Spivak quoted in Meese, op. cit., p. 141.

20. Meese, op. cit., p. 144.

21. Luce Irigaray quoted in Meese by Gallop, op. cit., p. 144.

22. Meese, op. cit., p. 147.

23. Ibid., p. 150.

24. Ibid., p. 149.

#### Chapter 4

1. Mariana Valverde, op. cit., p. 13.

2. Elizabeth V. Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 14.

3. Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider, (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 68.

4. Ibid., p. 68.

5. bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 46.

6. Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got A Theory For You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for "The Woman's Voice"", in M. Pearsall ed., Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy, (Belmont, California, 1986), p. 21.

7. bell hooks, op. cit., p. 6.

8. Ibid., p. 12.

9. Ibid., p. 14.

10. Mary Daly, op. cit., p. 112.

11. bell hooks, op. cit., p. 25.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 6.

14. Ibid., p. 26.

15. Ibid., p. 29.

16. Marilyn Frye, "On Being White: Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race & Race Supremacy," The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 125.

17. Spelman, op. cit., p. 2.

18. Ibid., p. 9.

19. Ibid., p. 162.

20. Ibid., p. 121.

21. Ibid., p. 125.

22. Ibid., p. iii.

23. Ibid., p. 162.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 163.

26. Ibid., p. 142.

27. Ibid., p. 177.

**Conclusion**

1. Alisdair MacIntyre, op. cit., p. 8.
2. Ibid., p. 363.
3. Catharine R. Stimpson, "Nancy Reagan Wears a Hat: Feminism and Its Cultural Consensus," in Critical Inquiry 14, (Winter 1988), pp. 240-241.
4. Ibid., pp. 223-243.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Translated and edited by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Belsey, Catherine. Critical Practice. Edited by Terence Hawkes. London and New York: Methuen, 1980.
- Brown, Rita Mae. "The Shape of Things to Come." Plain Brown Rapper. Oakland: Diana Press, 1976.
- Burstyn, Varda, ed. Women Against Censorship. Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre Ltd., 1985.
- Campbell, Beatrix. "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't." In Sexuality: A Reader. Edited by Feminist Review. London: Virago Press, 1987.
- Cartledge, Sue and Ryan, Joanna, eds. Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions. London: Women's Press, 1983.
- Daly, Mary. Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "For the Etruscans." In The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory. Edited by Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Dworkin, Andrea. Pornography: Men Possessing Women. New York: Perigee, 1979.
- Echols, Alice. "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-1983." In Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality. Edited by Carol S. Vance. Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins. New York: Crossroad, 1983.
- Frye, Marilyn. "On Being White: Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race & Race Supremacy." Also "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power." The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory. New York: The Crossing Press, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Who Wants a Piece of the Pie?" Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest. New York: The Crossing Press, 1983.

- Gallop, Jane. "The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis." The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Griffin, Susan. "The Way of All Ideology." In Feminist Theory: A Critique Of Ideology. Edited by Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi, University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Harrison, Beverly Wildung. "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." Making the Connections: Essays on Feminist Social Ethics. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Hoagland, Sarah Lucia and Penelope, Julia, eds. For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology. London: Onlywomen Press Ltd., 1988.
- hooks, bell. Feminist Theory From Margin to Center. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Irigaray, Luce. Speculum de d'autre femme. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974.
- Klein, Bonnie Sherr. Not A Love Story. Montreal: Studio D, National Film Board of Canada.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Criticism." Feminist Studies 6 (1980): 1-25.
- Lorde, Audre. Sister Outsider. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- MacIntyre, Alisdair. Whose Justice? Which Rationality? Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. "Standards of Sisterhood." Broadside 2, (Winter 1985-86): 6.
- Manion, Eileen. "In the Name of the Mother: Feminism as Faith and the Work of Mary Daly." Feminist Ethics 1, (Summer 1988): 5-15.
- Martindale, Kathleen M. "The Ethics of Feminist Reviewing." The Simone de Beauvoir Newsletter 9 (Concordia University), (Winter 1988): 39-42.
- McDonnell, Kathleen. Not An Easy Choice: A Feminist Re-Examines Abortion. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Meese, Elizabeth A. Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986.



- Millett, Kate. Sexual Politics. New York: Equinox, 1971.
- Moi, Toril. Sexual, Textual Politics. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Nelson, Lou. "What's so Feminist About Feminist Ethics?" The Canadian Journal of Feminist Ethics 1, (Summer 1986): 29-34.
- Overall, Christine. "Feminism as a Religion?" The Canadian Journal of Feminist Ethics 1, (Summer 1986): 1-5.
- Reuther, Rosemary. Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." In Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality. Edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Sherwin, Susan. "A Feminist Approach to Ethics." Resources for Feminist Research, (Fall 1987): 25-28.
- Snitow, Ann, Stansell, Christine, and Thompson, Sharon, eds. Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.
- Stimpson, Catharine R. "Nancy Reagan Wears a Hat: Feminism and Its Cultural Consensus." Critical Inquiry 14, (Winter 1988): 223-243.
- Valeska, Lucia. "The Future of Female Separatism." Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest. New York: Longman, 1981.
- Valverde, Mariana. Sex, Power and Pleasure. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1985.
- Vance, Carol S. Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.