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Feminism as Political Philosophy

In a sense, feminism has always existed. Certainly, as long as women have been subordinated, they have resisted that subordination. Sometimes the resistance has been collective and conscious; at other times it has been solitary and only half-conscious, as when women have sought escape from their socially prescribed roles through illness, drug and alcohol addiction, and even madness. Despite the continuity of women's resistance, however, only within the last two or three hundred years has a visible and widespread feminist movement emerged that has attempted to struggle in an organized way against women's special oppression.

The first unmistakably feminist voices were heard in England in the 17th century. In the next 200 years, more voices began to speak together and were heard also in France and the United States. Organized feminism emerged in a period of economic and political transformation: industrial capitalism was beginning to develop, and Britain, France and the United States were adopting political systems of representative democracy. These economic and political changes drastically altered women's situation and also the way in which women perceived their situation. Much of this alteration was a result of the transformation in the economic and political significance of the family.

In the early modern period, production was organized through the household and noble families still had substantial political influence, even though the feudal system had been replaced by the centralized nation-state. In virtue of their family membership, women were guaranteed a certain status both in production and in government, although this status was always lower than that of men. Noblewomen enjoyed considerable political power through the influence of their families, and married women who were not of noble rank had substantial economic power within their families because production was organized through the household. In the preindustrial era, most women were solidly integrated into the system of productive work necessary for a family's survival. In this era, childcare and what we now consider domestic work occupied only a small proportion of women's time. In addition to these tasks, most women made a

substantial contribution to food production through keeping poultry and bees, making dairy products and cultivating vegetables; they were responsible for food processing and preservation; they spun cotton and wool and then sewed or knitted the results of their work into clothes; they made soap and candles, accumulated considerable empirical medical knowledge and produced efficacious herbal remedies. The importance of women's contribution to social survival was so evident that there seemed no reason to raise questions about it: women's place in the social order appeared as a natural necessity.

The impact of industrialization, together with the rise of the democratic state, undermined and finally transformed the traditional relationships that had defined preindustrial society. Among them, of course, it transformed the family and so disrupted women's traditional position. Women of the upper classes lost political power with the decline of aristocratic families and the rise of the democratic state. Similarly women of the lower classes had the basis of their economic power undermined as industrialization removed much of their traditional work out of the home and into the factory. Even though many women were employed in the factories, especially in the early ones, the industrialization of their traditional work meant that women's control diminished over such vital industries as food processing, textile manufacture and garment manufacture. Women's reduced contribution to the household increased their economic dependence on their husbands and diminished their power vis-à-vis their husbands.

At the same time as the decline in the economic and political significance of the family tended to undercut women's economic and political status, it held at least the promise of a new status for women, one not predicated on their family membership. For instance, the factory system and the opportunity for wage labor opened to women for the first time the prospect of economic independence outside the household and apart from husbands. Similarly, the new democratic ideals of equality and individual autonomy provided a basis for challenging traditional assumptions of women's natural subordination to men. The contradictory results of these economic and political developments meant that women's position in society no longer appeared as a natural necessity. Instead, women became what Marxists called "a question." That question concerned the proper place of women in the new industrial society and many answers were proposed. Organized feminism emerged as women's answer to this question.

In the two or three centuries of its existence, organized feminism has not spoken with a single voice. Just as feminism first arose in response to the changing conditions of 17th-century England, so changing circumstances since that time have altered the focus of feminist demands. For instance, suffrage, temperance and birth control have all been, at one time or another, the object of organized feminist campaigns. The most recent resurgence of feminism occurred in the late 1960s with the rise of what came to be known as the women's liberation movement. This movement surpassed all earlier waves of feminism in the breadth of its concerns and the depth of its critiques. It was also far less unified than previous feminist movements, offering a multitude of analyses of women's oppression and a profusion of visions of women's liberation. This book is part of the women's liberation movement. Through a critical examination of four major conceptions of feminism that this movement has appropriated or generated, I hope to strengthen the movement by contributing to the development of a theory and a practice that ultimately will liberate women.

"Feminism" and "Women's Liberation"

"Feminism" was originally a French word. It referred to what in the 19th-century United States was called "the woman movement": a diverse collection of groups all aimed, in one way or another, at "advancing" the position of women. When the word "feminism" was introduced into the United States in the early 20th century, however, it was used to refer only to one particular group of women's rights advocates, namely that group which asserted the uniqueness of women, the mystical experience of motherhood and women's special purity. Ehrenreich and English call this trend in the woman movement "sexual romanticism" and contrast it with the more dominant tendency of "sexual rationalism."¹ In opposition to the romantic "feminists," the sexual rationalists argued that the subordination of women was irrational not because women were purer than men, but because of the basic similarities between women and men. In contemporary usage, the 19th-century restriction on the meaning of "feminism" has again been lost. Now, "feminism" is commonly used to refer to all those who seek, no matter on what grounds, to end women's subordination. That is how I shall use the term in this book.

This inclusive definition of feminism is opposed to the usage of some speakers who employ "feminism" as what Linda Gordon calls "an imprimatur to bestow upon those we agree with."² Because feminist claims touch every aspect of our lives, the term *feminism* carries a potent emotional charge. For some, it is a pejorative term; for others, it is honorific. Consequently, some people deny the title "feminist" to those who would claim it, and some seek to bestow it on those who would reject it. Like Gordon, I think that this practice is not only sectarian but misleads us about history. Just as an inadequate theory of justice is still a conception of justice, so I would say that an inadequate feminist theory is still a conception of feminism. My goal is not the discovery of a Platonic ideal form of feminism and the exposure of rival theories as pretenders. Instead, I want to contribute to formulating a conception of feminism that is more adequate than previous conceptions in that it will help women to achieve the fullest possible liberation.

The "women's liberation" movement, as I have indicated already, is the major version of feminism in contemporary western society. The very name of the movement reflects the political context from which it emerged and provides a clue to some of the ways in which it differs from earlier forms of feminism. Earlier feminists used the language of "rights" and "equality," but in the late 1960s "oppression" and "liberation" became the key words for the political activists of the new left. In the proliferation of "liberation movements" (black liberation, gay liberation, third world liberation, etc.) it was inevitable that the new feminism should call itself "women's liberation." The change in language reflects a significant development in the political perspective of contemporary feminism.

The etymological origin of the word "oppression" lies in the Latin for "press down" or "press against." This root suggests that people who are oppressed suffer some kind of restriction on their freedom. Not all restrictions on people's freedom, however, are oppressive. People are not oppressed by simple natural phenomena, such as gravitational forces, blizzards or droughts.³ Instead, oppression is the result of human agency, humanly imposed restrictions on people's freedom.⁴

Not all humanly imposed limitations on people's freedom are oppressive, however. Oppression must also be unjust. Suppose you are in the proverbial lifeboat with nine other people, that there is sufficient food only for six but that those in the lifeboat decide democratically to divide the food into ten equal parts. Here you would be prevented from eating your fill as the result of some human action but you could not complain that this restriction on your freedom was oppressive as long as you accepted that distribution as just. Thus, oppression is the imposition of unjust constraints on the freedom of individuals or groups.

Liberation is the correlate of oppression. It is release from oppressive constraints.

It is clear from these definitions that there are conceptual connections between oppression and liberation, on the one hand, and the traditional political ideals of freedom and justice, on the other. To speak of oppression and liberation, however, is not simply to introduce new words for old ideas. While the concepts of oppression and liberation are linked conceptually to the familiar philosophical concepts of freedom, justice and equality, they cannot be reduced without loss to those concepts. Talk of oppression and liberation introduces not just a new political terminology but a new perspective on political phenomena. It is a perspective that presupposes a dynamic rather than a static view of society and that is influenced by Marxist ideas of class struggle. Oppression is the *imposition* of constraints; it suggests that the problem is not the result of bad luck, ignorance or prejudice but is caused rather by one group actively subordinating another group to its own interest. Thus, to talk of oppression seems to commit feminists to a world view that includes at least two groups with conflicting interests: the oppressors and the oppressed. It is a world view, moreover, that strongly suggests that liberation is unlikely to be achieved by rational debate but instead must be the result of political struggle.

The emphasis on the process of struggle rather than on its ends relieves those who advocate liberation from the need to attempt a complete characterization of the end at which they aim. It weakens the temptation to plan utopias by the recognition that our conception of what it is to be liberated must be subject to constant revision. As human knowledge of nature, including human nature, develops, we gain more insight into possible human goods and learn how they may be achieved through the increasing control both of ourselves and our world. Through this process, the sphere of human agency is constantly increased. Drought is no longer an act of God but the result of failure to practice suitable water conservation measures; disease and malnutrition are no longer inevitabilities but the results of social policy. Consequently, constraints that once were viewed as natural necessities are transformed into instances of oppression; simultaneously, the possible domain of human liberation is constantly being extended. In principle, therefore, liberation is not some finally achievable situation; instead, it is the process of eliminating forms of oppression as long as these continue to arise.

Women's Liberation and Political Philosophy

New perspectives notwithstanding, there is a continuity between the traditional and the contemporary feminist projects. In seeking liberation, contemporary feminists necessarily take over the interest of their predecessors in freedom,

justice, and equality. Their concern with the traditional concepts of political philosophy means that feminists cannot avoid the familiar philosophical controversies over the proper interpretation of these concepts. Apparently, interminable disagreement over what should count as freedom, justice and equality has led to the characterization of these concepts as "essentially contested,"⁵ and much of political philosophy itself may be viewed as a continuing series of attempts to defend alternative conceptions of freedom, justice, and equality. In developing its own interpretation of these ideals, women's liberation engages in political philosophy.

Partly because of their traditional training and partly in an attempt to "legitimate" the philosophy of feminism, academic philosophers have tended to discuss feminist issues in terms of the older and more familiar concepts. By contrast, the grass-roots discussions of non-academic feminists have revolved around questions of oppression. This new language has raised new philosophical questions relating to the concepts of oppression and liberation. These are some of the questions. What is the precise nature of women's special oppression? Does the nature of their oppression vary for different groups of women? Can individual women escape oppression? If women are oppressed, who are their oppressors? Can one be an unknowing or unintentional oppressor? May oppressors themselves be oppressed? Can individual members of the oppressor group refrain from oppressing women so long as the group, as such, continues to exist? To each of these questions, contemporary feminists have provided a range of competing answers.

Feminist political philosophers thus use both traditional and nontraditional categories in attempting to describe and evaluate women's experience. In either case, they often raise issues that may seem foreign to political philosophy as it is currently conceived. For instance, they ask questions about conceptions of love, friendship or sexuality. They wonder what it would mean to democratize housework or childcare. They even challenge entrenched views about the naturalness of sexual intercourse and childbearing. Their demands or slogans are unfamiliar and may appear non-political. They demand "control of their bodies," "an end to sexual objectification," and "reproductive rights." They even assert that "the personal is political."

In focusing on these issues, feminist theorists are exploring the possibility of applying existing political categories to domains of human existence that hitherto have been considered to lie beyond the sphere of politics. Thus, feminist reflections on equality for women consider not only the questions of equal opportunity and preferential treatment for women in the market but whether equality requires paid maternity leave or even so-called test-tube babies. In raising such issues, contemporary feminists are giving a new focus to political philosophy. Rather than simply providing new answers to old problems, they seek to demonstrate that the problems themselves have been conceived too narrowly. In reconceptualizing old problems or in raising new ones, contemporary feminism is providing novel tests for the adequacy of existing political theories and, where traditional political theory seems inadequate, it is beginning to suggest alternative ways of conceptualizing social reality and political possibility. By seeking to extend the traditional domain of political philosophy, contemporary feminism challenges both existing political theories and our conception of political philosophy itself.

The Aims and Structure of This Book

Contemporary feminists share certain concerns that distinguish them both from non-feminists and from earlier feminists. But the very breadth of contemporary feminist concerns means that there is a "division of feminist labor," so that some feminists are preoccupied with some political struggles, some with others. Some feminists work in universities, some are active in left groups or in community organizing, some are black, some are lesbian. The variety of work and life experience of contemporary feminists results in a variety of perceptions of social reality and of women's oppression. This variety is a source of strength for the women's liberation movement. Earlier waves of feminism sometimes have been charged with reflecting primarily the experience of white middle- and upper-class women. While white middle-class women, at least, are still strongly represented in the contemporary women's movement, increasingly their perspective is challenged by perceptions that reflect the very different experiences of women of color, working-class women, etc. The rich and varied experience of contemporary feminists contributes fresh insights into women's oppression and provides the women's liberation movement with new and valuable perspectives.

It is not always obvious, however, how the new insights and perspectives should be translated into feminist theory. Standing in different social locations, some feminists experience certain aspects of women's oppression with particular sharpness while others are affected more immediately by other aspects. The differing perceptions of women's oppression are often used in developing systematic analyses of women's oppression which differ markedly from each other. For instance, some feminists have no hesitation in declaring unambiguously that women are oppressed by men. Others have adopted the less than self-evident position that, while they may *appear* to be oppressed by men, in reality women's specific oppression is a result of the capitalist system. Still other feminists, although they use the popular language of oppression, attempt to launder it by disconnecting its apparently radical presuppositions; they argue that *both* women and men are oppressed by the "sex-role system." It is clear that contemporary feminists hold a variety of theories concerning women's oppression and women's liberation.

My primary aim in this book is to evaluate these theories. In order to do this, I shall try to clarify the claims made by various feminists and to draw out the presuppositions and implications of feminist claims. I shall then attempt to organize the multifarious and often competing contemporary feminist claims by linking them to certain basic assumptions, in particular to four distinct conceptions of human nature. That is to say, I shall try to identify four alternative conceptions of women's liberation by exhibiting them as systematic political theories. I call these theories, respectively, liberal feminism, traditional Marxism, radical feminism and socialist feminism.

Although much of this book is expository and analytical, my goal is not simply to clarify feminist theorizing. In addition, I subject each theory to critical scrutiny and identify its strengths and weaknesses as a theory of women's liberation. This book is intended as a substantive contribution to feminist theory, insofar as it argues for the superiority of one conception of women's liberation over all the others. That one is socialist feminism.

As the discussion proceeds, it will become evident that it raises a number of meta-theoretical issues regarding the nature of political philosophy. These include the question of the proper domain of political philosophy, a domain which feminism, as I shall show, seeks to expand. Another meta-theoretical question concerns the conceptual connections between political philosophy, on the one hand, and theories of human nature, on the other. By linking feminist political claims to certain theories of human nature, I shall excavate the often-concealed structure of a political theory and encourage the resurrection of philosophical anthropology not only as a legitimate, but as a fundamental philosophical endeavor. In addition, I shall explore the relation between political philosophy and the human sciences. Finally, I shall discuss the question of theoretical adequacy in political philosophy.

The structure of the book will be as follows. Part I will discuss the logical status of a political theory, focusing particularly on the validity of the distinction usually drawn between philosophy and science. I shall argue that a theory of human nature is at the core of both political philosophy and the life sciences, that such a theory is inevitably both normative and empirical and that, consequently, it is wrong to view political philosophy and the life sciences as separate and autonomous disciplines.

In Part II, I shall identify the conception of human nature that lies at the heart of each of what I see as the four major contemporary theories of women's liberation. Part III will trace the connections between each theory of human nature, its correlated feminist critique of contemporary society and its recommendations for social change. It should be noted that Part III is not intended simply as a way of drawing out the logical consequences of the conceptions of human nature discussed in Part II. In spite of my occasional characterization of a certain theory of human nature as the "philosophical foundation" of a certain political theory, I think it is mistaken to present any political theory as a deductive system. Later I shall argue that, just as our beliefs about human nature affect the ways in which we conceptualize social reality, so the ways in which we understand and experience that reality affect our views about human nature. Consequently, a feminist theory is viewed better as a network of normative, conceptual, empirical and methodological claims than as a deductive system. Such a network is sometimes called a paradigm and is often associated with the work of Thomas Kuhn.⁶ Occasionally I may refer to a feminist theory as a paradigm but my use of "paradigm" is rather different from Kuhn's insofar as I believe that paradigms or comprehensive ways of understanding reality are generated by specific historical conditions and reflect the material interests of particular social groups.

In the fourth and final part of the book, I take up the issue of theoretical adequacy in political philosophy. Since I argue that claims in the life sciences, political theories and epistemological claims are mutually dependent on each other, it follows that there can be no theory-neutral interpretations of the criteria for rational choice between competing political theories. I shall show that each of the feminist theories that I identify includes its own conception of theoretical adequacy and so justifies itself in its own terms. I break out of this circle by arguing that socialist feminism provides the most appropriate interpretation of what it is for a theory to be impartial, objective, comprehensive, verifiable and useful. I conclude by suggesting that, on this interpretation, socialist feminism is the most adequate of the feminist theories formulated to date.

Four Conceptions of Women's Liberation

Certain difficulties are endemic to any attempt to categorize social theory. The most obvious difficulty is that theory changes constantly, partly in response to changing social realities, partly in response to new theoretical perspectives. Women's situation is changing rapidly at the present time and feminist theory, in consequence, is constantly developing. Partly because feminist theory is a new intellectual discipline, moreover, feminist theorists are not working within an established paradigm and consequently often challenge their own fundamental assumptions. These rapid changes mean that the present analysis can be useful as a description only for a relatively short time, although I hope that its critical or prescriptive value may be longer lasting.

Another problem that confronts all attempts at classification is the problem of selecting the principles of organization. At any given moment, social reality can be perceived or conceptualized in a variety of different ways and existing feminist theory provides a variety of perceptions and conceptualizations of women's situation. Social theory, however, does not stand outside social reality; it is itself a part of that reality and, like the other parts, is capable itself of being variously analyzed. What kind of analysis one provides, what kinds of similarities and differences one emphasizes, depends on one's purposes in undertaking the analysis.

In my analysis of feminist theory, I am not interested in a taxonomic classification of as many subspecies as possible. Rather, I seek a sound methodology to provide the basis for a theory and a practice that will liberate women. Consequently, I seek to reduce rather than to proliferate theories. I am searching for the genera, the ways of conceptualizing women's situation that are fundamentally incompatible with each other. In order to do this, of course, I must decide which differences count as "fundamental," and I find it most useful to identify fundamental differences by reference to four distinctive conceptions of human nature. These conceptions, I shall show, are correlated with distinctive analyses of women's oppression and distinctive visions of women's liberation.

Like all systems of categorization, mine may be challenged in a number of ways. It collects within one category certain views that some might prefer to keep distinct; it separates views that some might think belong together; and it omits certain views entirely. In what immediately follows, I want to give a preliminary explanation of my system of categorization. The ultimate test of the adequacy of my system, of course, will be found in the body of the book, where I provide the detailed argument for the theoretical unity and for the plausibility of the paradigms that I identify.

Among the most obvious omissions from this book are religious and existential conceptions of women's liberation. Such conceptions have been significant historically; indeed, *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 by the existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, must be considered a forerunner of the contemporary women's liberation movement. I have omitted religious and existentialist conceptions primarily because I find them implausible. They are outside the mainstream of contemporary feminist theorizing, and they have little direct connection with socialist feminism, the version of feminist theory that I consider the most plausible.

Black feminism has not been omitted from the book, but it has not been treated as a separate theory because black feminists utilize a variety of theoretical

approaches. Some discuss the situation of black women in terms of a liberal or a traditional Marxist framework; a few advocate their own version of separatism, black nationalism; a very few are radical feminists, though almost none seems to be a lesbian separatist; and some black feminists argue that the situation of black women can be fully understood only through a development of socialist feminist theory, a development that integrates conceptually the category of racial or ethnic identity with the categories of gender and class. Given the variety in the theoretical orientation of black feminism, I think it more useful to examine their contributions in the context of the four categories of feminism I identify than to present those contributions as reflective of a single black feminist perspective.

A relatively small body of written work is available by feminists of color other than black feminists, and what is available is mainly at the level of description. Of course, a fully adequate theory of women's liberation cannot ignore the experience of any group of women and, to the extent that socialist feminism fails to theorize the experience of women of color, it cannot be accepted as complete. So far, however, relatively few attempts exist by non-black feminists of color to develop a distinctive and comprehensive theory of women's liberation.

Another conspicuous omission from my list of feminist theories is anarchist feminism or anarchy-feminism. While a substantial number of contemporary feminists identify themselves as anarchists, their views do not receive a separate examination in this book. The reason for this decision is that, because anarchism is such a broad term, each of the four conceptions of women's liberation that I do consider contains views that may legitimately be described as anarchist. Anarchist elements can be found in the liberal (especially libertarian) suspicion of the state, in the classical Marxist hope that the state ultimately will "wither away," in the radical feminist attacks on patriarchal power in everyday life and in their self-help alternatives, and in the socialist feminist critiques of hierarchy and authoritarianism on the left. Because such a great diversity of views may be labeled anarchist, it seems impossible to identify a single conception of human nature and society that does not exclude substantial numbers of self-defined anarchists. Consequently, rather than identifying feminist anarchism as a distinct feminist theory, I shall simply note the elements of anarchism as they arise in the context of what I see as the four major contemporary paradigms of women's liberation.

A large number of contemporary feminists identify themselves as lesbian feminists. Once again, they have not been categorized separately, since lesbian feminism has not yet developed a distinctive and comprehensive theory of women's liberation, although it may be in the process of doing so. In the meantime, some lesbian feminist insights have been incorporated by socialist feminism and some even by liberal feminism. My most extended discussion of lesbian feminism, however, occurs in the context of my examination of radical feminism. This is because lesbian feminists typically recommend some form of separatism as a political strategy and separatist strategies follow most naturally from radical feminist analyses of women's oppression.

I say radical feminist "analyses" rather than "analysis" because there is no single radical feminist analysis of women's oppression. Neither, as we shall see, is there a single radical feminist conception of human nature. The political tradition that I call "radical feminism" had its roots in two different types of soil: in the basically liberal civil rights movement and in the Marxist-inspired new left. Because of this contradictory heritage, radical feminists found it difficult

to locate their distinctive insights within a comprehensive theoretical framework and the radical feminist movement in fact generated a variety of analyses of women's oppression and a variety of visions of women's liberation. What unified all these analyses was a conviction that the oppression of women was fundamental: that is to say, it was causally and conceptually irreducible to the oppression of any other group. It is this conviction that I have taken as definitive of radical feminism and that also serves as my justification for identifying radical feminism as a distinctive feminist perspective. It may be that this justification will not serve for much longer. Within radical feminism, I note an increasing divergence between those who emphasize a fundamental and probably biologically based commonality in the experience of all women and those who place increasing emphasis on the way in which women are divided by race and by class. The latter group is moving closer to the position that I characterize as socialist feminism and in a few years the conceptual distinction between radical feminism and socialist feminism may have to be reexamined.

Socialist feminism is perhaps the most questionable of all the four paradigms that I have identified. On the one hand, it may not be clearly separable from some of the most recent expressions of radical feminism, since it does take domination by gender to be at least as fundamental as domination by class, in the Marxist sense of "class." On the other hand, socialist feminism may be viewed as a relatively minor revision of traditional Marxism and some might deny that its revisions of the central Marxist categories are sufficiently significant to warrant its being considered a separate paradigm. In my view, socialist feminism is still distinct from both radical feminism and traditional Marxism. On the one hand socialist feminism today is very different from the most popular versions of radical feminism which, as I shall argue later, either tend toward idealism or have failed to extricate themselves completely from the influence of biologism. On the other hand, I believe that the socialist feminist revisions of Marxism are fundamental, requiring a rethinking of every Marxist analysis, from domestic labor to imperialism. Later in the book, I shall provide the detailed argument necessary to support my claim that socialist feminism, although still in the process of development, is already a distinct and comprehensive, as well as an illuminating and useful, theory of women's liberation.

It is my belief that the four feminist paradigms that I present are the most widely accepted and plausible conceptions of women's liberation that presently exist. Furthermore, since there is a sense in which these theories developed chronologically, even though all are still current and continue to influence one another, it is easy to exhibit each as designed, at least in part, to answer problems inherent in the preceding theory. When each theory is examined in the context of its rivals, the understanding of each is deepened and a sense of the on-going and dialectical process of feminist theorizing emerges.

Given the rapid development and cross-fertilization characteristic of contemporary feminist theorizing, it is obvious that any attempt at categorization runs the risk of oversimplification at best and of distortion at worst. The feminist theories that I identify in terms of their basic assumptions about human nature are meant to be viewed as rational reconstructions or ideal types. This implies that perhaps no individual will accept every aspect of what I identify as a single theory. Those who accept the position in general terms may not have articulated the presuppositions on which I claim their position rests; or they may not wish to draw the conclusions that I think are implied by their view. Alternatively, challenged by other feminist theories, they may have tried to revise their own account, even at the expense of inconsistency with their

own philosophical presuppositions. The reconstruction of feminist theories as ideal types minimizes the similarities between them and sharpens the differences. My ultimate aim is certainly not to deepen divisions among feminists; rather, it is to help resolve them. I think this can be done best, however, by an in-depth examination of our differences that clarifies exactly what is at stake. The way is then prepared for a resolution of those differences, a resolution that can provide a sound basis for future political work and for further theoretical development.

Notes

1. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1979), p. 20.

2. Linda Gordon, "The Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: Three Stages of Feminism," in Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 107.

3. This view is opposed to that taken by Judith Farr Tormey in "Exploitation, Oppression and Self-Sacrifice," *Philosophical Forum* 5, nos. 1-2 (Fall-Winter 1973-74):216. Tormey believes that persons can be oppressed by such non-human phenomena as the weather.

4. The conceptual connection between oppression and human agency is presupposed, in fact, by the next feature of oppression that I mention, namely, that it is unjust. At least as justice is conceived in modern times, questions of justice are considered to arise only with regard to situations that result from human agency. For example, it is neither just nor unjust that some individuals are born with physical handicaps, so long as their handicaps cannot be traced to some prior unjust situation, such as the avoidable malnutrition of their mothers or exposure to avoidable environmental pollutants.

5. W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56(1955-56):168-98. Cf. also Alasdair MacIntyre "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts," *Ethics* 84(1973):1-9.

6. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). In subsequent chapters, I shall elaborate this view of a feminist theory as a paradigm.