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Analysis of Feminism II

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Title: Analysis of Feminism II

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This is the second in a 5-part series on an analysis of feminism based on the research of Yvon Provençal. Dr. Provençal has been teaching philosophy at the Cégep de Granby (Québec) for nine years. He received his PhD in philosophy from the Université de Montréal in 1979. Dr. Provençal is the founder of the Respect Project. The Project focuses on research related to the integral respect of cultures and persons, is the source of Dr. Provençal's work on feminism, and is located at http://pages.infinet.net/provyvon/index_eng.html. Dr. Provençal can be reached at yprov@videotron.ca. What follows is a slightly edited version of his work on feminism.

Women's dissidence: the most threatening one.... When women are affirming their own difference, they are appearing as the worst threat in the sight of the dominating moral culture. The feminists got into the habit of designating the latter under the name of "patriarchal society."

The dominating moral culture, as any group, tends to reprobate every different group. Its members tend to feel as a threat just the manifestation of the existence of another group than their own. This explains why dissidence has been and is again so generally reprobated.

Then women themselves constitute one distinct moral culture, within the many societies. Feminism is one of the clearest manifestations of this culture and its possible dissidence. Therefore, one easily reprobates the feminists.

In order to affirm their dissidence, feminists readily speak in a provocative way. This mainly shows their wish that the women culture be acknowledged. Many feminists say that they want to reject the dominating culture's power and, along with it, the political morals and institutions in general, and also its mind of competition. Sometimes they go further and want to reject rationality and science--such as these have been in the past and are again today--because these are perceived as features of male domination.

Feminists willingly oppose the existing conception of rationality. They prefer another kind of rationality, which is found upon a different principle or sensitivity. For example, Germaine Greer writes, "It is true that women often refuse to argue logically...But it is also true that in most situations logic is simply rationalization of an infra-logical aim"(1). As a matter of fact, if this "aim" is linked to the identity of the mentioned group--let us say, the patriarchal society--one cannot say that it is exactly in accordance to its kind of rationality, since identity is not described therein as something rational. This feminist writer is right in taking a higher rational standpoint in order to criticize an insufficient kind of rationality. She is right again in writing: "The male logic succeeds in solving only simple problems...A woman...is more sensitive to the complexity". A woman--as are dissidents from cultures that are controlling the discourse--is more likely to see or feel that which is reducing in this discourse. Of course, she is often taking a chance that this argument is termed only somewhat objective. The latter reaction is to be expected because the dominating culture is feeling threatened in its identity.

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This likely explains why the feminists often refuse to subordinate the question of women to the general benefit of political groups or trade unions. These groups and unions claim to have a rational and universal type of discourse. However, this discourse ignores the numerical difference between groups in general. In other words, these political groups or trade unions are generally not able to rationalize or describe the difference between the women culture and their own.

Germaine Greer remarks, in this connection, that women have been "charged, since the dawn of civilization, of duplicity and intrigue" (loc. cit., p. 144). She aims in fact at the type of charge that one brings against dissidents, from the place in which one controls the language. In this way, the image of the dissidents is distorted without their being able to reply on an equal footing. The feminists are very preoccupied with the question of language, which they handle in an original way.

Another important feminist writer, Betty Friedan, challenges the social sciences. According to her, these are liable for the distortion of women's image. For example, the women's image has been influenced by that which she calls the "feminine mystique" (2). She aims especially at psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. According to the approach of the Respect Project, Betty Friedan is right on this point. However, these sciences distort not only the image of the women culture, but also of moral cultures.

Therefore, one can think that feministic-type principles could contribute powerfully to establish a basis of integral respect for all cultures and groups. Here, we can see that one important thing has been forgotten by existing science. It is essentially the very notion of moral culture, including the women culture. The present scientific undertaking can be considered as tinged with a "pseudo-scientific" color, a little like astrology or alchemy. However, it would be at a more advanced stage than existing science.

It is disquieting that women can be dissident from science and rationality. However, in addition, they can think of leaving their usual "role." Simone de Beauvoir has well described what this traditional role means in the light of the dominating culture. From the point of view of biological and social reproduction, it is fundamental to such an extent that any defection from it naturally appears as a betrayal. The women, she writes, "live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economical condition, social standing to certain men--fathers or husbands--more firmly than to other women...Even in a dream, a woman cannot exterminate the males. The bond that unites her to her oppressors is not comparable to any other" (3).

This feminist writer refers to a man who writes "...the woman is not the useless repetition of the man but the enchanted place in which is accomplished the living alliance of man and nature. If she would disappear, then the men would be alone, aliens without any passport in a frigid world..." (4). This speech for the defense repeats in other words the idea of the "eternal woman," while clearly suggesting that the dissidence of women is severe to such an extent, in the sight of men, that it is practically tantamount to high treason.

The women culture is not yet acknowledged as such by the dominating moral culture. Every time a woman is deciding to become a dissident from the dominating moral culture, she is considered by many as being at serious fault. This is particularly the case in the sight of her near relations--i.e., husband, family. The theme, "the personal is political," means, among other things, that the women often are constrained by the surrounding society to maintain themselves in a role that they have not chosen or do no longer want. In particular, the integral respect of moral cultures concerns this kind of situation. To date, this respect exists nowhere between the many cultures on the planet. However, the feminists lay

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stress on the acknowledgment of the most essential difference--that has been called here "numerical difference" -- and on the right of every woman to be respected in her own difference. Accordingly they promote integral respect in an important way. ((1) Germaine Greer. (1970). *The Female Eunuch*. London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada, p. 130. (2) Betty Friedan. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., p. 137. (3) Simone de Beauvoir. (1971). *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*) (Trans. H. M. Parshley). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. xix. (4) Michel Carrouges. *Les pouvoirs de la femme* (*The powers of the woman*) (Trans. Y. Provençal). *Cahiers du Sud*, 292.

IBPP Commentary. This segment of Provençal's research suggests the significant import of variants of feminism and may also--ironically--suggest an impediment to the Respect Project. As to the former, feminist variants embrace much more than the superficially political of competing for resources of a world wherein need far outstrips such resources. The Issue is not a divvying up of the pie, a negotiation for compromise, nor even a contestation resulting in a new exploiter being functionally equivalent to the old. Instead the Issue becomes a whole new conception of the world that--if conceived--must threaten the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral aspects of one's very being (feminist, antifeminist, and nonfeminist alike.)

As to the latter, given the totalizing nature of feminist epistemologies, metaphysics, and ethics, respect for cultures deviating from a feminist line must be extinguished after being entertained as an opposition from which feminist strivings can further crystallize. In this respect, the patriarchal antecedent may be said to still serve as a subjugating discourse that ever deeper has insinuated itself in a false consciousness exemplified by feminist strivings. (See Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics*. Stanford University Press; Lott, B. (1990). *Dual natures or learned behavior: The challenge to feminist psychology*. In R. T. Hare-Mustin (Eds.). *Making a difference: Psychology and the construction of gender*. Yale University Press; Riger, S. (1995). *Epistemological debates, feminist voices: Science, social values, and the study of women*. In N. R. Goldberger et al. (Eds.). *The culture and psychology reader* (pp. 139-163). New York University Press; Smith, J.C., & Ferstman, C.J. (1996). *The castration of Oedipus: Feminism, psychoanalysis, and the will to power*. New York University Press.) (Keywords: Feminism, Respect Project.)