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Analysis of Feminism III

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This is the third 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.

The Acknowledgement of the Difference

From the 1970s forward, feminism lay more and more stress upon the difference and a policy according to which equality would become compatible with the acknowledgment of the difference. Thus the problem of connecting the claim for the right to equality with that for the right to difference. Both these claims are at first sight contradictory and, so, one must first understand the meaning of difference and of equality.

The idea of sisterhood then emerged in the history of feminism. The idea first supposes that one acknowledges the fact that women are in general dominated--whatever their social class or social-professional status. A woman who is at a lower class or status is particularly exploited. However, a woman who appears to take advantage from a higher class or status undergoes a domination that is often felt still more heavily. As a matter of fact, she faces the same deep-seated disrespect of her identity. The idea of sisterhood expresses that women should be in solidarity, in spite of apparently unavoidable differences on the social-political ground.

However, it is doubtlessly possible to find another still larger and deeper meaning of the idea of sisterhood. This meaning relates to the relatively recent tendency of women to gather independently from group barriers, whether they be social-political, professional, disciplinary, moral, cultural, or religious. Sisterhood involves a concern for the whole of women--i.e., every group of women, including singleton groups. Luce Irigaray gives evidence of this meaning. She writes, "For my part, I refuse letting me (be) enclosed in only one 'group' of (the) women's liberation movement. Particularly if this [group] [...] pretends to determine the 'truth' of women, legislate on that which is 'to be a woman', and arraign women who would have immediate goals different from its own. I think that what most matters is to [apperceive] the common exploitation of all women and find struggles that are suitable to every woman in the place where she is, whether it be her country, profession, social class, sexual living, that is to say, the kind of oppression that is the most immediately unbearable to her" (1).

This feminist attitude expresses a deep tendency to disregard all the qualitative differences--races, ethnicities, tongues, religions, etc.--that exist between groups of women. In this sense, the idea of sisterhood is much more than a strategic alliance against a common enemy. It is already, in some way, the idea of non-reprobation that is integral respect. In this case, women--all women--are respected with

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their potential dissidence. ((1) Luce Irigaray. (1977). (Trans. Y. Provençal). *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (This sex which is not one). Paris: Editions de Minuit, p. 161).

IBPP Commentary. IBPP noted an irony in the first installment of Provençal's work: that women may be achieving similarity with men in power opportunities by explicitly demarking differences between women and men. A further irony is at least implied in this third installment. For women to successfully demark their differences with men, they must discard differences with women. In yet another irony, unsubjecting the subjugated from some exploitive social discourses seems to necessarily involve the creation of yet other discourses that delimit conceptual possibility, political and sociocultural consequence, and human freedom. Thus, feminism--as analyzed by Provençal--seems to be an ethical and moral failure on both deontological and consequentialist grounds. (See Brush, L.D. (1997). Harm, moralism, and the struggle for the soul of feminism. *Violence Against Women*, 3, 237-256; Goldner, V. (1999). Morality and multiplicity: Perspectives on the treatment of violence in intimate life. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 25, 325-336; Hasso, F. S. (1998). The "women's front": Nationalism, feminism, and modernity in Palestine. *Gender & Society*, 12, 441-465; Mirkin, H. (1999). The pattern of sexual politics: Feminism, homosexuality, and pedophilia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37, 1-24.) (Keywords: Feminism, Provençal, Respect Project.)