EMBODYING AUTONOMY:

Women and Moral Agency

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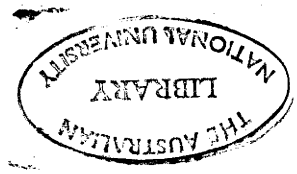

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EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE ACKNOWLEDGED

THIS THESIS IS MY OWN WORK

ABSTRACT

This thesis has three connected aims: to argue that, despite recent feminist criticisms, the ideal of autonomous self-constitution is essential to a feminist account of women's moral agency; to show that, within our philosophical and cultural heritage, we have no adequate ideal of what it is for women *qua* women to be autonomous agents; and to attempt to articulate an ideal of autonomy which can incorporate a recognition both of the embededness of moral agents and of their different bodily perspectives. My argument is that such a recognition does not entail a commitment to a sexually specific ethic. However it does entail that in articulating what it means for women to act as autonomous moral agents in circumstances which are sexually specific we must recognise the specificity of women's bodily perspectives.

The thesis comprises four parts and six chapters. In Part I (Chapter One), I sketch out an initial account of the ideal of autonomy, drawing on both contemporary philosophical analyses and feminist criticisms of the ideal. In Part II (Chapters Two and Three), through a discussion of the ideal of autonomous agency in the work of Simone de Beauvoir, I examine some of the reasons why autonomy has been seen as an achievement which it is difficult for women to attain: because autonomy has often been defined as control over the passive body by the active will; and because women's bodies have become a cultural metaphor for unconscious passivity. I argue however that, despite some of the difficulties with her work, de Beauvoir's idea that subjectivity is constituted in and through both our bodily perspectives and our relations with others, also points in the direction of a more adequate understanding of autonomy.

Part III (Chapters Four and Five) investigates some of the historical origins of the opposition between autonomy and femininity – in the contrasts between public and private; reason and feeling; and reason and nature. Chapter Four consists mainly of a detailed examination of the different ideals of autonomy, but overlapping accounts of women's ethical life, in the works of Rousseau and

Hegel. My argument here is that in their works the contrast between autonomy and women's ethical life arises out of an attempt to resolve deep tensions within the Enlightenment conception of social life. Their attempted resolutions however entail the political subordination of women and give rise to a representation of women's bodies as passive 'natural' bodies. Chapter Five is a reading of the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in which I show that the main concerns of Wollstonecraft's life and writings were to try to articulate what it means for women to act as autonomous moral agents, and to envisage the social and political changes necessary for them to do so. In contrast to some contemporary feminist commentators, I argue that Wollstonecraft does not merely preserve the oppositions between public and private, reason and feeling, and masculine and feminine ethical life but, especially in her later writings, realises that somehow these oppositions must be integrated.

In the Introduction to Part IV I outline a conception of subjectivity as intersubjective and as constituted through the constitution of a bodily perspective. My claim is that this view of subjectivity opens up the space for a conception of autonomy that can recognise the different situations and bodily perspectives of different moral agents. Chapter Six provides an example of what such a recognition might entail, through the example of women's autonomous agency in the context of pregnancy and abortion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis took shape over a number of years, first while I was a graduate student at the Australian National University, then while a staff member at Monash and Macquarie Universities and a visitor at Princeton University. My first intellectual debt is to my undergraduate teachers at the ANU, especially Genevieve Lloyd, Kim Lycos and Richard Campbell, all of whom gave me an abiding interest in the history of philosophy and in the relationship between philosophy and broader cultural concerns. Genevieve Lloyd and Kim Lycos continued to play a large role in my philosophical development as my original PhD supervisors. To Kim I owe thanks for numerous interesting philosophical discussions and for directing my reading and thinking in the area of recent French philosophy. My greatest debt however is to Genevieve Lloyd whose own work has been an inspiration to me, and who has who provided me with constant support, encouragement, friendship and constructive criticism during the whole period in which this thesis took shape and was written. I would also like to thank Moira Gatens whose work has influenced my thinking in many ways. Moira took over as my official supervisor just before I left the ANU and has since had the rather tedious task of acting as my conduit with graduate administration.

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INTRODUCTION

Within contemporary analytical moral philosophy the ideal of autonomy is being revitalised. As Gerald Dworkin notes, appeals to autonomy and questions of paternalism feature significantly in debates in the area of bio-medical ethics, in discussions ranging from the issues of abortion and euthanasia through to medical consent and institutional commitment.[1] Moreover, the alleged failure of utilitarianism to take cognisance of the value of autonomy is seen by many, including some utilitarians, as a major flaw in the theory,[2] while much non-utilitarian moral and political philosophy accords a central role to autonomy. At the same time however, among many feminists autonomy has a bad name as an excessively individualistic and masculine ideal. Rather than aspiring towards autonomy, it is suggested, feminists more appropriately should view it with suspicion.

In spite of this disfavour among feminists, my aim in this thesis is to argue that the ideal of autonomy is an important ideal for women because it must underpin women's claims to moral agency, both with respect to their bodies and with respect to the direction of their lives more generally. It would be foolish therefore for feminists to abandon the ideal as hopelessly masculinist. Nevertheless I also want to show that we have no adequate philosophical account of what it is for women, *qua* women, to be autonomous. By this I mean that our cultural and philosophical conceptions of autonomy either have defined it in terms of certain capacities and values which are associated explicitly or implicitly with masculinity, or else, in assuming a supposedly sexually indifferent or neutral autonomous

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1. Gerald Dworkin, The Theory and Practice of Autonomy (Cambridge U.P. 1988), Ch. 1

2. See for example Jonathon Glover's Causing Death and Saving Lives (Penguin, 1977) in which he argues that utilitarianism is inadequate on its own to deal with the moral issues raised by questions of harm and death.

subject, overlook the significance of bodily difference. As a result, autonomy has been seen as an ideal which is either incompatible with femininity or which it is difficult for women to achieve.

In the thesis I suggest that the main reason for this is that, in our cultural and philosophical 'imaginary',[3] women's bodies have been represented in various ways as passive entities, beyond or resistant to control by the will. Women's bodily existence has therefore been seen as being lived more at the level of mere natural event than at the level of autonomous agency. Now it could be argued that to some extent this representation simply reflects the facts of women's biology – in menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, women just are subject to bodily processes over which they have little control. While not disputing the fact that aspects of both men's and women's bodily existence are not in our conscious control, I want to argue that this representation of women's bodies as passive, heteronomous bodies is more a construction of certain aspects of the modern philosophical tradition than it is a reflection of the 'facts' of women's biology.

Firstly, this representation derives a lot of its force from a conception of autonomy which positions the will in opposition to the body, and reason in opposition to desire and sentiment. These oppositions of course have a long philosophical history dating back to classical thinkers and to Augustine, and re-emphasised in the modern era with Descartes, but their association with the ideal of autonomy is a legacy of Kant. While many contemporary philosophers of autonomy have explicitly distanced

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3. I am borrowing this term from Michèle Le Doeuff who uses it to refer to those images, rhetorical devices, oppositions, and so on, upon which a philosophical system depends in order to constitute itself as a coherent system, but whose constitutive function cannot be registered within the system itself. See her essays in L'Imaginaire Philosophique (Paris, Payot, 1980). This collection includes some works translated into English. English translations include: 'Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and existentialism', translated by Colin Gordon, I&C, no. 6, Autumn 1979, pp. 47-57; 'Women and Philosophy', translated by Debbie Pope, Radical Philosophy 17, 1977, pp. 2-11; 'Pierre Roussel's Chiasmas', translated by Colin Gordon, I&C, no. 9, Winter 1981/82. pp. 39-70.

themselves from this aspect of the Kantian view, it still retains a powerful hold on our contemporary philosophical imagination in a way that is particularly problematic for women.

Secondly, this image of women's bodies must be placed in the broader context of the political philosophies of the Enlightenment, from which our modern picture of the ethical significance of sexual difference has emerged. In the modern era, the ideal of autonomy arose within the political and philosophical discourse of the Enlightenment as an ideal associated with public life. In this context it was defined in association with certain virtues which were characterised as masculine – reason, moral independence, ethical universality. The idea that women have a distinctive ethical life in the family based on feeling, moral dependence and ethical particularity was also a product of the Enlightenment. Autonomy and femininity thus came to occupy mutually exclusive theoretical spaces. The alleged explanation for this gendering of social life – and for women's exclusion from the body politic – was that women's ethical life is grounded in the exigencies of nature, in particular in women's reproductive role which renders them more susceptible to the less rational aspects of human nature, especially the passions. I want to suggest however that the distinction between a masculine public sphere and a feminine private sphere arose more in response to profound tensions within the Enlightenment conception of social life than in response to the exigencies of nature. The image of woman's passive, natural and heteronomous body was produced within this context as a way of supporting this distinction and displacing these tensions.

The challenge in arguing that autonomy must underpin women's claims to moral agency therefore lies in articulating an ideal of autonomy that is free from these associations with the notion of a disembodied rational will and the ideal of masculine ethical and political life. In the thesis I argue that

such an ideal must start from a double recognition: firstly, from the recognition that subjectivity is constituted in relation to specific bodily perspectives; and secondly from a recognition that autonomy is an intersubjective achievement. My claim is that such a recognition does not entail the need to articulate a sexually specific ideal of autonomy or a sexually specific ethic. However it does mean that our ideal of autonomy must be sensitive to the specificity of bodily perspectives, especially in articulating what it means for women to exercise autonomy and bodily autonomy in certain circumstances which are sexually specific – for example in pregnancy and abortion. In the final chapter of the thesis I provide an example of what such an embodied account of autonomy might look like, and what might be its moral impact, through a phenomenological analysis of pregnancy in the context of a defense of abortion. While it must be acknowledged that in doing so I have focused on only one among a myriad of possible bodily experiences that might form the basis for such an account, it seems to me that this experience focuses very clearly on the issues of agency and control raised by the idea of autonomy.

There are a few points that need to be made at the outset about the scope of this thesis, the methods employed in it and the metaphilosophical perspectives which inform it. On the question of scope there are a number of issues central to discussions of autonomy within the analytical literature with which I will not be concerned here. The most glaring omission from this point of view is the whole vexed topic of 'paternalism', that is the question of when, if at all, it is legitimate to interfere with the autonomous decisions of others, either when 'we' consider it is in their best interests for them not to act in accordance with their decisions or when these decisions are allegedly immoral or potentially harmful to others. The main reason for this omission is that I see the debates about paternalism as bound up with conflicting views about justice and about the nature and role of the

state. Although such questions are ultimately relevant to my concerns, the main focus of my attention here is with questions concerning the issue of women and moral agency – why it is that women have been represented as incapable of autonomous agency, why it is important for feminism to hold onto the ideal of autonomous agency, how to develop an ideal that embodies a recognition of sexual difference.

Another glaring omission, this time from the perspective of readers versed in recent French philosophy and psychoanalysis, is my failure to discuss the plausibility of the ideal of autonomous agency. From this perspective it could be argued that recent theoretical developments in the theory of the unconscious, as well as recent analyses of the notion of the 'subject', put into question the very idea of self-conscious and self-directed agency. In this case there are two reasons for my omission. Firstly, one of my main interests in trying to develop an account of embodied autonomy is to develop an adequate feminist analysis of, and response to, the moral issues raised by the new reproductive technologies. While I have found recent work by French feminists on the questions of subjectivity, the unconscious and the body helpful in formulating my views, I am frustrated by the ever-increasing abstruseness of the theoretical discourses generated by this work, and by its failure to address the moral issues raised by bodily difference and by technological changes in the sphere of reproduction. I suspect that one of the reasons for this is that, in giving up on the notion of self-conscious agency, one also undercuts the possibility of being able to address these moral issues. But secondly, to develop this suspicion into a coherent argument is an enormous project in itself, one that, had I pursued it, would have distracted me from my main concerns here.

On the question of method, my discussion is informed by readings of both recent French philosophy and recent ethical work in the so-called 'analytical' tradition of English-speaking philosophy. This is reflected in my approach

to the topic, which tries to integrate, perhaps at times uneasily, the kinds of questions, methods of argument, and analysis characteristic of 'analytical philosophy', with the techniques of textual interpretation and interrogation and the kinds of metaphilosophical questioning characteristic of recent French philosophy. It is usually fairly clear which of these diverse sources informs any particular discussion. Since I do not discuss their work in any detail in the body of the thesis however it needs to be made clear here that my analysis of what I have called our philosophical and cultural 'imaginary' with respect to women's bodies is informed by methods of textual analysis developed especially in the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michèle Le Doeuff.[4] In my readings of various historical and contemporary texts I try to combine an attention to philosophical arguments with an analysis of the way in which certain images, textual metaphors and hierarchical oppositions can disclose the hidden presumptions and assumptions of a text. The philosophical justification for this method is that 'a text is not a text unless it hides itself from the first comer', including its author. No matter how much we may struggle to assert authorial control, texts operate on the basis of assumptions – historical, cultural, political, social – of which their authors may be aware only at an inchoate level, if at all. These assumptions are often manifest in the text in certain rhetorical devices, or in images and metaphors. Although they may function as merely ornamental devices extraneous to the philosophical claims of a text, such metaphors and images do not always do so. What I try to show, with respect to the various metaphors or representations of women's bodies on which I focus in my readings of different texts, is that these cannot be seen as extraneous to the

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4. Of Derrida's voluminous writings I have been most influenced by the following: 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' in Margins of Philosophy, translated by Alan Bass, (Harvester 1982); Of Grammatology, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Johns Hopkins U.P. 1976); and 'Plato's Pharmacy' in Dissemination, translated by Barbara Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

main purport of the texts in which they occur. Rather they reveal what a philosophical view must presuppose, or hide, in order to be coherent. My claim is that what tends to be presupposed, or hidden, by such images is some variant of a dominant cultural and philosophical representation of women's bodies as passive, heteronomous bodies bound to nature.

On the question of metaphilosophical perspectives it should be clear from the preceding discussion that I regard the history of philosophy as entirely relevant to present-day philosophical concerns, because these concerns and our ways of addressing them have partly been shaped by the philosophical tradition. But this statement needs some clarification. It seems fairly self-evident that philosophical views arise in response to, and are a product of, specific political, social and cultural contexts. But there are a number of views about the implications of this claim. On the one hand, historians of ideas argue that for this reason philosophical texts cannot properly be understood unless we have a thorough understanding of this context. It is sometimes also thought to follow from this that philosophical problems and concerns are so tied to this context that the idea of a history of philosophy, that is a history of the development of philosophical problems and concerns, is deluded.[5] As John Passmore and others have pointed out, this view is partly a response to the perception of some philosophers that philosophical problems can be discussed completely independently of the cultural context out of which they arose.[6] It is also a response to the idea

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5 According to Passmore, Collingwood first proposed this view. See John Passmore, 'The Idea of a History of Philosophy', in History and Theory, vol.4, 1964-65, Beiheft 5, The Historiography of the History of Philosophy. Slightly less drastic versions have also been proposed by John Dunn and Quentin Skinner. John Dunn, 'The Identity of the history of ideas', Philosophy, vol. XLIII, April 1968, pp. 85-104. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' in History and Theory, vol 8, 1969, pp. 3-53.

6 See Jonathon Ree, 'Philosophy and the History of Philosophy' in Ree, J, Ayers, M & Westoby, A (eds) Philosophy and its Past (Harvester Press Ltd. Sussex, 1978). See also the

that previous philosophers were not completely clear about either the nature of their problems or their solutions to them, and that the task of contemporary philosophers reading these texts is to engage in a process of 'rational reconstruction'. On the other hand, some contemporary philosophers respond to the inescapable historicity of past philosophical texts by claiming that they are completely irrelevant to present social and philosophical concerns. I would endorse neither of these views. On the first view any feminist reading of a historical text is bound to be illicit because it imports foreign concerns into the text. On the second view feminists are simply wasting their time discussing texts which no longer have any relevance. While not denying that our social life is vastly different from that of the thinkers of the Enlightenment period, nor that philosophy itself has developed in all kinds of new directions, I would want to argue that philosophy has a double role as both representing and providing a critique of broader cultural values and assumptions. To the extent that our social life has been profoundly shaped by the values of the Enlightenment era, the philosophies of the Enlightenment have also shaped our present conceptual and social possibilities. My reading of past philosophical texts is thus what Le Doeuff calls an 'interested' reading, a reading which is focused by present concerns while not claiming to reduce past texts to present concerns.

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papers by Rorty, MacIntyre and others in R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, & Q. Skinner (eds.) Philosophy in History (Cambridge U.P. 1984)

PART I

WOMEN AND MORAL AGENCY

Chapter One

FEMINISM AND THE IDEAL OF AUTONOMY

In her article 'On Psychological Oppression' Sandra Bartky makes the interesting claim that psychological oppression has so severe an effect on the psyches of the oppressed, in this case women, that it should be characterised as a kind of psychic alienation or self-estrangement.[1] This alienation or estrangement has two aspects. Firstly it involves a kind of fragmentation, 'the splitting of the whole person into parts of a person', leading to internal conflict and self-division. Fragmentation is the result of processes of internalisation whereby women come to have perceptions of themselves, or experience desires, or engage in behaviours, with which at some level they do not identify. Secondly it involves mystification, a process whereby the real causes of her situation are obscured to the oppressed person herself, leading her to see her internal conflicts as the result of peculiar failings or incapacities on her part, rather than as the result of oppression. The effects of this fragmentation and mystification are seriously to undermine the autonomy of women.

Bartky argues that while psychological oppression functions partly through mechanisms such as economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement and physical coercion, it also functions through unique modes of psychic alienation which she identifies as stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification. Bartky does not offer an analysis of what she means by autonomy or self-estrangement but her account of the way in which the three modes of psychic alienation function suggests that in the experience of

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1. Sandra Lee Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression' in S. Bishop and M. Weinzweig (eds.) Philosophy and Women, (Wadsworth, 1979).

oppression a woman's sense of herself as a unified self-directed agent is undermined and as a result so is her autonomy.

In the first section of this chapter I want to draw on some of the contemporary philosophical literature on autonomy in order to try to develop Bartky's intuition that there is a link between autonomy and a sense of oneself as a unified self-directed agent. I will attempt to show that this captures something important about our experiences of what it is to be a person and what it is to have one's personhood undermined. In the second section of the chapter I want to explain and clarify the motivations of some of the recent feminist objections to the ideal of autonomy. Although I will not simply endorse these objections, I will suggest that they do point towards difficulties, for an adequate understanding of women's moral agency, in any straightforward assimilation of the idea of autonomy as self-directed, unified agency. However I will also suggest that it is a mistake for feminists simply to jettison this idea.

Section 1: Autonomy and Agency

In broad philosophical usage, the term autonomy remains close to its literal meaning – as derived from the Greek words *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law) – of giving the law to oneself or being self-governing. Implicitly or explicitly it is also contrasted in this usage with 'heteronomy' – from *heteros* (other) and *nomos* (law) – or receiving the law from others, being governed by others. As has been noted by others, the ideal of autonomy was originally, and continues to be, a political ideal referring to the right of sovereign states to political self-determination.[2] In its modern philosophical usage it refers

2. See Dworkin, *op. cit.* See also Robert Young, Personal Autonomy: Beyond Negative and Positive Liberty, (Croom Helm, 1986). I have found Young's account of autonomy the most illuminating of the book-length treatments of the topic and my discussion at some points in the first part of this chapter is indebted to a number of distinctions developed in this book.

by analogy to persons and it is with this ideal of autonomy as a characteristic of persons that I will be concerned.

The apparent simplicity of the concept of personal autonomy conveyed by this broad usage is misleading however, because questions concerning the scope and interpretation of the notions of self-government, or self-determination, and government by others, raise complex philosophical issues about which there is room for a great deal of disagreement. As Dworkin makes clear these issues have at least three overlapping dimensions – political, social and moral. At the political level, at least in pluralist democracies, the ideal of personal autonomy is inevitably bound up with questions about the appropriate relationships between the state or the government, the diverse cultural, religious, racial and other groups within a society, and the individual members of that society. Clearly the notion of personal self-determination presupposes some commitment to the idea that individuals or groups within a society have some liberty to pursue their own conception of the good. But how far should this liberty extend? What is the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate state interference with this liberty? And what should be the role of the state in dealing with conflicts between individuals and the social groups to which they belong? It is in this political context that the question of paternalism versus autonomy arises. As I stated in the Introduction, although my discussion will touch on such questions they will not be its main focus.

The fact that human persons are necessarily social beings whose lives are shaped and lived within a particular social and cultural context raises questions at the social level about the extent, even the very possibility of personal autonomy. On the one hand there are questions concerning socialisation. To what extent does the ideal of autonomy presuppose that we can or should free ourselves from the influences and forces – familial, educational, cultural – which have shaped us? To what extent does it

disavow what it presupposes – socialisation, parental care, dependencies? What is the difference between the kinds of socialisation which make autonomy possible and those which subvert it? Do individuals have any political rights to, or at least defensible expectations of, the kinds of social conditions which are conducive to personal autonomy? On the other hand there are questions concerning the relationship between autonomy and other social values such as commitment, obligation, loyalty, solidarity, obedience. What moral weight should be given to autonomy versus these values? How much does autonomy presuppose and how much does it conflict with them? And, connected with the political issues mentioned above, are political structures which promote and place high value on personal autonomy morally preferable to those which place more importance on one or some of these other values? The pertinence of some of these questions to the issue of women's moral agency will become clear later in this chapter.

There are two different kinds of question raised by the ideal of personal autonomy as a moral ideal, both of which will be relevant to my discussion. Since Kant writers on autonomy have often run these questions together, as does de Beauvoir, but it is useful to distinguish them from one another. One kind concerns the nature of moral agency. As I will be arguing, it seems that the very idea of persons as responsible moral agents presupposes that people have some degree of autonomy over their choices and actions. But what does this view presuppose about the extent of our control over, and self-awareness of, our own desires, motivations and character? And how much control do we have to have over the outcomes or contexts of our actions in order to be considered responsible? The second kind of question concerns the nature of morality and moral decision making. Does self-determination mean that it is up to each individual to invent her own moral code? Does it mean that ultimately it is individuals who alone are

responsible for the moral choices that they make? What is the role of moral authority or advice in moral decision making?

As I will show in the second section of this chapter, what underlies the various feminist objections to autonomy are objections to the ways in which some of these questions are answered, whether explicitly or not, by particular accounts of autonomy. But more importantly what is also at issue in debates about autonomy, both in the feminist objections and in the differences between various interpretations of the notion of self-government, are different views about the self and about the character of our moral, social and political relations with others.

In order to bring out the sense of autonomy implicit in Bartky's intuition I want to begin by distinguishing very roughly between two ways in which the notions of autonomy, or self-determination, and heteronomy, or government by others, have been understood. I will call these the 'thin' and 'thick' senses of the terms. In its first minimal or 'thin' sense, autonomy is understood simply as freedom from the interference of others. Autonomy is thus equated with what Berlin calls negative liberty.[3] Heteronomy by contrast arises when an individual's choices are illegitimately restricted or constrained by the interference of others. Understood in this 'thin' or minimal sense the ideal of autonomy is closely aligned with the liberal political tradition, in particular with its more libertarian tendencies, and has been the target of much justified feminist criticism.[4]

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3. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in his Four Essays on Liberty, (Oxford U.P. 1969).

4. I have in mind here liberal thinkers more in the tradition of Hobbes than in the tradition of Mill. In contemporary political philosophy the names associated with this view of autonomy are those of Robert Nozick and David Gauthier. I discuss some of these feminist objections later in this chapter.

In the second 'thick' sense, self-governance is understood more positively as both a precondition for personhood and as a character ideal. The idea here is that the chief characteristic of persons is that they have the capactiy to be originators of their own life-plans. The exercise of this capacity is what constitutes autonomy, which is the process of shaping for oneself, through one's own choices and activities, an identity and a conception of the kind of person one wants to be. Heteronomy by contrast is characterised as a lack of control over the shape and direction of one's life. It is clear that autonomy in the 'thick' sense presupposes to some extent the 'thin' notion of autonomy, for it is difficult to see in most cases how a person could shape their identity without some degree of liberty. Some sort of notion of non-interference must therefore be presupposed in any critique of oppression. However the notion of non-interference is incapable of explaining how the kind of self-estrangement which seems to characterise the experience of oppression can undermine autonomy. The notion of self-estrangement thus seems to invoke the idea of autonomy as a character ideal, and it is with an analysis of this concept that I want to begin.

In his article 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' Harry Frankfurt develops a notion of *identification* which goes some way towards capturing the notion of unified agency that is implicit in the idea of shaping for oneself an identity.[5] Frankfurt sees identification as the chief characteristic of 'freedom of the will', which he defines in contrast to 'freedom of action'. Free action is the ability to do what one wants or to get what one wants, that is to be able to translate one's desires into actions, or to

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5. Harry Frankfurt; 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', Journal of Philosophy, LXVIII, no. 1 (January, 1971). Frankfurt does not claim to be providing an analysis of autonomy but the account of agency that he proposes provides the basis for such an analysis. My claims below about the ways in which Frankfurt's notion of identification falls short of a complete account of autonomy should be read as claims about what is needed to supplement the notion of identification, rather than as a criticism to the effect that Frankfurt did not achieve what he never set out to do.

act according to one's intentions. Freedom of action, in other words, requires that we have at our disposal certain resources and capacities and that we are not constrained in acting on our desires or intentions. Given these conditions, both humans and non-human animals are capable of free action even if in many circumstances they are not able to act freely. Freedom of the will however is a capacity that, according to Frankfurt, is both peculiar to persons and essential to our conception of what it is to be a person.

Frankfurt's account of the will involves a distinction between first-order desires, second-order desires and second-order volitions. First-order desires are desires relating to action, desires to do or not to do something – wanting to have a bath, wanting to eat something, wanting to go for a walk. Our first-order desires are often conscious wants, but they do not need to be. First-order desires may also include desires of which we are not conscious or desires which we think we do not have – we can be self-deceived about our first-order desires. Freedom of action involves being free to translate these first-order desires into action.

Frankfurt's suggestion about the will is that a person's will is identical with the first-order desire that moves her to action. In other words, although we have many first-order desires, we do not translate them all into actions. Our will, on any particular occasion, coincides with the first-order desire which is effective in moving us to action. There are a couple of points to note about this conception of the will. Firstly there is an important difference between a person's intentions and their will. Quite often we intend to do something which we don't end up doing. Thus our intention to realize a desire often does not coincide with the desire that we actually act upon. Secondly the desire which ends up being our will does not have to be a desire of which we were conscious beforehand. Sometimes we only find out

what our will is, what it is that we want, when we find ourselves performing some action.

Frankfurt argues that in addition to our first-order desires we also have second-order desires and second-order volitions. A second-order desire involves wanting or not wanting to have a first-order desire. A second-order volition involves wanting or not wanting one of our first-order desires to be our will, that is, wanting or not wanting one our first-order desires to be the one that moves us to action. For example, a frustrated parent may have a strong first-order desire to lose her temper and shout at her child. She also has a second-order desire not to have this desire. Her second-order volition is that the desire to remain calm and be tolerant is the desire that prevails and moves her to act. However our second-order volitions do not always coincide with our will. Sometimes the first-order desires that we act upon are the desires that we wish we will not act upon.

In Frankfurt's view it is this capacity to have second-order volitions that specifically characterises personhood. This is because to have a second-order volition is essentially to engage in a reflective act. It is only persons, he wants to say, that are capable of such acts of reflection, and it is only persons that care which of their first-order desires move them to action. Beings that do not have the capacity for having second-order volitions, that is, beings who either cannot reflect upon their first-order desires or do not care which of their first-order desires will move them to act, cannot be persons. According to Frankfurt they are wantons. He includes under this category infants and non-human animals, because the capacity for self-reflection involves a certain degree of rationality, although Frankfurt is not committed to arguing that self-reflection is a highly intellectual or self-

conscious act. [6] Often for example we become aware of our volitions through feelings and emotions.

Only persons then have second-order volitions, that is, desires that one of their first-order desires will be their will. For this reason only persons have freedom of the will. But what exactly is freedom of the will? Firstly, a person who has freedom of the will is able not only to evaluate her first-order desires and decide which of them she wishes to act upon, that is, which of them she wishes to be her will. She is also able to translate her second-order volitions into actions. Thus she is able to exercise control over her will. Secondly, whereas lack of freedom of the will involves some kind of discrepancy between a person's will and her second-order volitions, freedom of the will is characterised by an accord between a person's second-order volitions and her will. The person who enjoys freedom of the will is thus able to act in accordance with the first-order desires with which she identifies, with the desires which she sees as expressive of what she most wants, or how she most wants to be.

On Frankfurt's account then the notion of identification with one's desires, that is, regarding one's desires as one's own, is central to the idea of freedom of the will. I want to take Frankfurt's notion of identification as the starting point for an account of autonomous agency, but I want to expand the account to include the beliefs, values and motives which inform our desires. This expanded notion of identification also seems to be important in trying to provide an explanation of how oppression can undermine a person's sense of herself as an autonomous agent. For if autonomy is the

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6. In 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' Frankfurt considers the possibility that some adults may also be wantons, but in his later article 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' he rejects this idea. Harry Frankfurt; 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' in Schoeman, F.D. (ed.) Responsibility, Character and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology, (Cambridge U.P. 1987).

capacity to shape and direct our lives according to our conception of what kind of person we want to be and how we want to live, then a person who is unable to act in accordance with her volitions, a person who at some level is estranged from, and cannot identify with, what she does, believes or desires, cannot be autonomous. But the notions of identification with, or estrangement from, one's desires need some further amplification. For what exactly is involved in identification? Young provides a useful clarification of this notion.[7] He characterises the process of reflection involved in having second-order desires or valuations as primarily an activity of the imagination by means of which a person imagines herself acting upon a certain first-order desire, or being the kind of person who has a certain belief, value or desire. Identification involves endorsing what is imagined, regarding it as consistent with one's sense of oneself. Estrangement from a belief, value or desire, by contrast, involves regarding it as in some sense alien to oneself.

However the notion of identification developed so far cannot yet provide the basis for an adequate account of autonomy as unified and self-directed agency. Firstly it leaves open the possibility that a person's second-order volitions may be locally consistent but globally inconsistent – as in cases of anomie. In such cases, although on any given occasion a person may identify with her desires, she does not seem to be deciding and acting autonomously because her life as a whole does not seem to be self-directed. Young's distinction between *occurrent* and *dispositional* autonomy captures this intuition. Young argues that a person may exhibit occurrent autonomy, autonomy with respect to certain decisions or actions, without exercising dispositional autonomy, that is autonomy with respect to her life as a whole. A person who exercises dispositional autonomy might thus be

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7. Young, *op. cit.* Chapter 4.

described as a person whose second-order volitions exhibit certain overall or global patterns of consistency, patterns commensurate with, or expressive of, or constitutive of, their conception of how they want to be. Bartky's claim about oppression seems to be that it can rob women not only of occurrent autonomy, but also of dispositional autonomy, because while it can cause a woman to act upon particular desires with which she may not identify, it can also prevent a woman from determining the direction of her life as a whole.

There is a second and further problem with the notion of 'identification' however, even if it is understood in this dispositional sense. For it seems to appeal to the idea that we each have a 'true self' which our wills either express or fail to express. But this idea raises two questions – an epistemological and a metaphysical one. The epistemological question is 'How do we know what our true self is?' In some cases it may be fairly clear to a person which desires or aspects of herself she wants to identify with, even if she may be unable to act on these volitions, for example if she is suffering under a compulsion of some kind. But it is also a fairly common experience to be unable to form a second-order volition concerning certain first-order desires because we are unsure with which of our desires we want to identify. This raises the problem of ever-ascending orders of desire.[8] The metaphysical question is 'How should the notion of the true self be understood?'

In his article 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' Frankfurt addresses the epistemological question by suggesting that in cases of such conflict

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8. This is the most common objection in the literature to Frankfurt's account of 'freedom of the will'. Gary Watson for example endorses Frankfurt's notions of identification and commitment but rejects all talk of different levels of desire. See his article 'Free Agency', Journal of Philosophy, LXXII, no. 8, (April 1975). Similar criticisms are also raised by Susan Wolf in her article 'Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility' in Schoeman (ed.) Responsibility, Character and the Emotions *op. cit.*

ultimately there are three possibilities. One is that we never resolve the conflict; we find ourselves forever unable to identify with one or the other desire. In such cases, he suggests, the autonomy of the person is seriously impaired in this aspect of her life, if not in others. Another possibility is that we resolve the conflict by losing interest in it or, like the wanton, by becoming indifferent to its outcome, for example by seeing the matter as out of our control, letting events simply take their course and so on. In such a case the conflict will be resolved but arbitrarily and non-autonomously. The third possibility is that we make a 'decisive commitment' to identify ourselves with one or the other desire. This commitment involves making the desire our own, deciding that this is the desire which we want to be our will. This decision, which might be reached in a number of different ways, does not of course immediately lessen the conflict. But the decision changes the nature of the conflict so that it now becomes a conflict between what we most want and other desires with which, however strong, we no longer want to identify. The salient characteristics of such a decision are that it involves separating out those desires with which we identify from those from which we wish to distance ourselves, and ordering our desires in some kind of hierarchy. Frankfurt's suggestion is that it is through such decisions and commitments that we constitute ourselves as selves, that we work out what we care about and what we value. This response also answers the metaphysical question. Talk about a person's 'true self' should not be understood as referring to some inaccessible and intangible metaphysical entity. Rather it designates what might be called the process of self-constitution, a process of defining for ourselves those values, ideals or projects that we regard as constitutive of the kind of person we want to be or of the kind of life we want to live. This is not to say that in making such decisions we cannot make mistakes about what we want. But making mistakes about what we want to do or what we want to be is an unavoidable aspect of exercising freedom of the will.

I think Frankfurt's notion of self-constitution captures an important aspect of what is involved in autonomous agency. But the idea of autonomy as unified self-determination seems to involve more than self-constitution as Frankfurt characterises it. Firstly, it seems to involve some sort of capacity for critical evaluation of the self which a person constitutes through her various decisions and commitments. Secondly, it requires that a person has open to her a certain range of options.

On the question of critical evaluation Frankfurt assumes that, in cases where a person seems to be exercising freedom of the will, that is in cases where a person is not suffering under some kind of compulsion, is not weak-willed or addicted and so on, her second-order volitions and decisions are expressive of her true self. But it is not difficult to imagine cases where it is someone's first-order desires, rather than her second-order volitions, which seem to express most of all what she wants, however aberrant these desires might seem to her and however much she may want to identify with her second-order volitions. Now in cases where a person does not straightforwardly reject these first-order desires Frankfurt might respond to this by saying that there is a sense in which, because such a person is not wholehearted about her attempted identifications, she is internally divided against herself and so her second-order volitions involve a certain kind of self-deception or self-denial. But what about a case where someone does genuinely and wholeheartedly identify with her second-order volitions and yet does not seem to be leading a fully autonomous life because her second-order volitions are themselves just a product of that person's socialisation? In other words a person may be happy and may exhibit psychic unity but not be autonomous because, as Young puts it, her desires, values, decisions are not her own.

In response to this problem Taylor argues that self-constitution or 'responsibility for self' must involve a process of 'radical self-evaluation',

which he characterises as a kind of moral evaluation.[9] In contrast to the kind of prudential reflection that goes on when we simply weigh competing but morally neutral alternatives (for example, when I ask myself whether I should I take my holidays in Queensland or Tasmania), radical self-evaluation involves a thoroughgoing and critical evaluation of our desires, beliefs and motives, of the sort that is involved when we ask ourselves for example whether our desires are noble, courageous, honest and generous, or whether they are base, cowardly, dishonest and mean. The example Taylor discusses in this context is Sartre's example of the young man who cannot decide whether to stay with his mother or join the resistance.[10] An important aspect of the kind of critical self-evaluation that Taylor talks about involves trying to work out why we have the motives, desires and beliefs that we do. That is, it involves working out whether they arise simply as a result of our socialisation, or because we have a strong independent commitment to them.

Now it may sound as though socialisation and independent commitment are in some sense mutually exclusive. But this need not be the case. It may be that, although many of our desires, beliefs and motives are in some way determined by our socialisation, we nevertheless come to identify with

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9. Charles Taylor 'Responsibility for Self' in Amelie Rorty (ed.) The Identities of Persons (University of California Press, 1976).

10. Taylor's claim is that Sartre's discussion of the young man example is ultimately incoherent because his notion of radical choice conflates simple weighing with radical self-evaluation. On the one hand Sartre wants to say that moral decisions are ultimately contingent, that we just have to plumb for one course of action or the other, like the simple weigher. On the other hand the decision can only have the force that Sartre wants it to have because it clearly involves more than simple weighing, that is because there are compelling but irreconcilable moral considerations going each way. While I think that Taylor might be right about Sartre's notion of radical choice, I will argue in the next chapter that de Beauvoir's notion of autonomy is in fact very like the notion of self-constitution or responsibility for self.

them as a result of processes of critical assessment.[11] We thus make them our own or take responsibility for them. The ideal of autonomy or self-constitution therefore does not presuppose that we have to create ourselves, our desires, beliefs, motives and so on *ex nihilo*. This would indeed be a ridiculous presupposition, although the idea of responsibility for self is commonly misunderstood to imply just this. Nevertheless a commitment to the ideal of autonomy does presuppose that persons have the capacity to engage in some kind of independent assessment of their beliefs, values and desires, and that such critical assessment is essential for autonomy.

On the question of options, it is obvious that freedom of action, understood as freedom from coercion or restraint, is important for autonomy. For in cases where a person is physically coerced or restricted it is clear that their autonomy will be severely impaired. Frankfurt of course would not deny this. There is however another sense of freedom of action which also seems to me to be crucial for autonomy but which is underplayed in Frankfurt's discussion of freedom of the will. This sense of freedom of action has to do with a person's options and the problem with Frankfurt's view is this. On Frankfurt's account of freedom of the will it would seem possible for a person to have freedom of the will simply because they have very few desires and because they only desire to have the desires which it is possible for them to realize. In other words, on Frankfurt's view a person with extremely narrow horizons and expectations might still be considered to exercise freedom of the will. Now in some cases a person may deliberately narrow their expectations as a way of coping with a terrible situation. In such a case we might say that this person in fact exercises a high degree of autonomy. I would want to argue however that in most cases having a

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11. There is a considerable literature on both sides of the debate concerning this compatabilist solution to the free will vs. determinism question, but the issues raised in this debate are not immediately relevant to my broader concerns here.

narrow range of expectations and desires is not consistent with the exercise of autonomy. This is because the kind of critical self-evaluation that is essential for autonomy requires that a person has, or can conceive of, a range of different expectations and desires, many of which may be realisable (it is important that they are not just fantasies). Critical self-evaluation involves working out which of these different expectations and desires one values most highly. But in order to have a range of expectations and desires a person normally needs to have open to them a number of different possible options for action, in relation to which they can evaluate their values, desires and beliefs. Now too many options can of course undermine a person's autonomy. On the other hand, certain people are able to achieve a remarkable degree of autonomy in circumstances in which they have very few options. However in most cases it is difficult either to engage in radical self-evaluation or to exercise autonomy when one has few options for conceiving of, or acting upon, alternatives. It thus seems that in a significant number of cases where people do not enjoy freedom of the will and do not exercise autonomy it is because their options are severely restricted. Autonomy thus requires not only freedom from coercion, but freedom of action in the broader sense of having available a number of options for action.

To sum up, we might characterise autonomous agency as the capacity to constitute for oneself, through one's decisions and projects, an identity based on a conception of the values and commitments that one regards as most important. This process of self-constitution requires the capacity for critical self-evaluation on the basis of having available certain resources and a number of different possible options for action. Given this, Bartky's claim about oppression is that oppression impedes women's capacity for critical self-constitution not only by drastically restricting the resources and options available to women, but by stereotyping women as incapable of this capacity.

Her claim that one of the effects of oppression is to undermine women's self-esteem also suggests that there is a link between self-esteem and the freedom and ability to exercise autonomous agency.

I want to stress that I regard the notion of autonomous agency, thus understood, as crucial for feminism to retain as the basis for an understanding of women's claims to moral agency. Having said that I want now to suggest why there are problems for women in any straightforward assimilation of this view. To begin to get a handle on the first difficulty I want to take Sartre's example but to imagine that the young person faced with such a dilemma is not a young man but a young woman. How might this change our perception of the dilemma? Or, to bring the example a bit more up to date, why is it that newspaper pictures of women soldiers farewelling their children on the way to the Persian Gulf call forth a different emotional response from similar pictures of male soldiers? A simple answer to these questions is that, until recently, women's traditional moral role meant that most women could not even pose the dilemma posed by Sartre's young man. It would have been obvious where the young woman's moral responsibilities lay in this case. But there is more to the issue than this. For in our cultural context the notion of autonomy has been fairly clearly bound up with only one of the two choices facing the young man – namely the choice of going to the resistance. Young suggests one response to this kind of difficulty by arguing that although autonomy is intrinsicially valuable it should be regarded as a defeasible value. That is, in cases where it conflicts with other values such as happiness, love, loyalty to a person or cause and so on, then the autonomous choice is not necessarily the morally preferable choice.[12] But the problem is precisely that autonomy has been defined in opposition to such values and that in our culture these

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12. Young, *op. cit.* Chapter IV.

values have a different meaning for women than they do for men. One proposed solution to this problem is to try to de-gender the opposition between autonomy and other values by extricating it from the opposition between masculinity and femininity. While this may be part of the solution it does not address the deeper problem, which is that an ideal of autonomous agency which involves a contrast between autonomy and values such as love and loyalty is problematic, not only but especially for women.

The second difficulty I want to raise concerns the idea of the 'true self'. As I have made clear, I think there is something correct about the notion of self-constitution. However, in the lack of any indications to the contrary, it might be assumed that this 'self' is sexually indifferent. But would this assumption be justified? Can we simply assume that we can appeal to a neutral idea of the 'person' or the 'self', regardless of their sexually specific embodiment?[13] Such an assumption is particularly problematic given a historical context in which autonomous agency and selfhood have often been defined in opposition to desire and the 'passive' body, and where the female body has become a cultural metaphor for passivity and for those aspects of humanity that tie us to our animal natures. What it means is that, for women, to exercise autonomy has come to mean, in subtle and not so subtle ways, to transcend their bodily specificity. In Part II I will argue that de Beauvoir's account of autonomous agency is seriously vitiated by this difficulty.

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13. Some contemporary feminists are unhappy with the term 'embodiment', arguing that it evokes a dualistic image of the body as the mode of incarnation of a signifying immateriality. Judith Butler for example expresses this view in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (Routledge, NY, 1990), p. 152, footnote 15 of Ch. 1. While I agree that the term does retain traces of such dualism, I regard the proposed alternative term 'corporeality' as a term which downplays the notion of autonomous agency to such an extent that it gives rise to a reductionist view of bodily life as lived at the level of merely natural event.

The third difficulty focuses on the question of critical self-evaluation. Most contemporary writers are careful to stress that critical evaluation need not be thought of as a highly intellectual activity. Young suggests for example that self-evaluation may occur through feelings of regret, remorse, admiration for others and so on.[14] Nevertheless it is clear that some distinction needs to be made between those procedures of evaluation which simply confirm a person's socialised prejudices and those which enable the person to make an 'independent' evaluation of her values and desires.[15] In other words while no evaluation procedures are ideologically neutral, we can distinguish between those procedures which encourage critical appraisal of the prevailing ideology and of our own socialisation within it, from those which encourage mere subservience to it. It seems that some such distinction needs to be made. The problem is that it tends implicitly to be assumed that critical self-evaluation is a purely intrasubjective rather than intersubjective process, that is one which occurs within the interiority of the ego, rather than in and through our concrete relations with others.

In the next section of this chapter I want to consider some of the objections to the ideal of autonomy that have been raised recently by feminist critics. The extent to which the three concerns I have just expressed echo some of these criticisms will become clear in the course of the discussion. The task of the rest of the thesis is to provide a fuller elaboration of the worries I have raised and to sketch out an account of women's moral agency which might begin to address them without abandoning the ideal of autonomy.

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14. Young, *op. cit.* Ch. V.

15. Dworkin, *op. cit.* Ch. 1 calls this the requirement of 'procedural independence'.

Section 2: Feminist Critiques of Autonomy

Feminist objections to autonomy can be separated into at least two different but related clusters of concern. The first set of objections is grounded in feminist critiques of liberalism and the tradition of social contract theory and centres on the way in which the ideal of autonomy is articulated within certain forms of liberal individualism.[16] The second set of objections is directed against rationalist versions of moral autonomy which are historically associated with Kant. These objections draw mainly on Carol Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg's neo-Kantian account of moral development.[17]

I

Feminist critics of the liberal political tradition have argued that the ideal of autonomy which emerges from this tradition is masculinist, because it emphasises independence over connectedness and individualism in opposition to reciprocity and community. Although some of these claims may also be applicable to Kantian interpretations of the 'thick' conception of autonomy, it is clear that one of the principal targets of this attack is the 'thin', minimal account of autonomy as non-interference. The question of the extent to which liberalism is committed to this minimal notion, and to the libertarian and extreme contractarian views which underpin it, is the subject of a vigorous and extensive debate among liberals, communitarians

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16. See for example: Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, (Harvester, 1983), Ch. 3; Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract (Polity, 1988); Marion Tapper, 'Can a Feminist Be a Liberal?' AJP vol 64, June 1986, Women and Philosophy supplement, ed. Janna Thompson; Naomi Scheman, 'Individualism and the Objects of Psychology' in Sandra Harding & Merrill Hintikka (eds.), Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Ontology, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of Science (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1983); Lorraine Code, 'Simple Equality is Not Enough' AJP Supplementary volume *op. cit.*. My account of this objection is a reconstruction from a variety of views presented by these and other writers.

17. Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice (Harvard, 1982). See also the articles in E. Kittay & D. Meyers (eds.) Women and Moral Theory (Rowman & Allanheld, 1987).

and feminists. I do not want to enter into this debate here except to note that there seems to be an unfortunate tendency within the feminist literature simply to conflate liberalism with libertarianism.[18] In my discussion below of feminist critiques of liberalism I am using the term 'liberalism' to refer mainly to the libertarian and contractarian tendencies within liberalism, while not denying that some of the feminist objections are also applicable to a liberal like Mill. My use of the masculine pronoun in this discussion is deliberate.

There are a variety of different ways in which this minimal conception have been articulated but they share at least the following features. Firstly, the 'good' cannot be given any *a priori* concrete content but can only be specified in terms of the particular desires and interests particular individuals happen to have. This carries with it the implication that autonomy itself is not intrinsically but only instrumentally valuable and that a person may choose to forsake it if he perceives that it is in his interests to do so.[19] Secondly, persons are discrete, separate existences whose moral and political interactions with one another can only arise through consensual contracts.

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18. A notable exception is Carole Pateman. In The Sexual Contract she is careful to distinguish the views while nevertheless arguing that, despite the attempts of many liberals to dissociate liberalism from libertarianism, on many issues involving women, such as prostitution, pornography and surrogate motherhood, the liberal view collapses into libertarian contractualism. It will become evident later in this thesis that I think Pateman's analysis of the sexual-social contract does a great deal to illuminate the tensions in women's situations within contemporary liberal societies. Also I find her criticisms of the liberal position with respect to prostitution, pornography and surrogacy persuasive. But I am not fully persuaded by Pateman's claim that ultimately liberalism cannot coherently be distinguished from libertarianism. (For further discussion of this issue see my review of The Sexual Contract in AJP, vol 68, no 4, December 1990.)

19. This point is connected with the whole vexed issue for liberals of slavery contracts. Some libertarians are quite happy to argue that persons should be free to enter into slavery contracts if they so desire. Liberals like Mill want to rule out this possibility. Among feminists, Pateman (*op. cit.*) has argued that Mill's position is theoretically inconsistent and that the libertarian position is a logical consequence of the liberal theory of the social contract. Again it is beyond the scope of my concerns here to enter into this dispute.

Thirdly, the moral obligations between individuals are purely negative obligations to refrain from harming, or interfering with the interests of, others. Fourthly the only legitimate function of government is the function of ensuring that conditions are appropriate for individuals to pursue their interests free from interference – including interference by the state itself. Here the idea of appropriate conditions is spelt out in terms of protection from harm to one's life, liberty or property.

The feminist objections to the notion of liberty or autonomy as non-interference arise from a number of interconnected claims about the conceptions of subjectivity and of moral and political relations which are said to underlie it. On the question of subjectivity it is claimed that the idea that freedom amounts to freedom from interference is based on two questionable assumptions about human nature: that human beings are discrete, separate, independent and self-sufficient existences each motivated by the pursuit of their own separate self-interests; and consequently that conflict between the interests of these separate existences will be an inevitable feature of the interactions between them. It is these assumptions which make the fictional 'states of nature' of liberal social contract theory coherent and imaginable fictions. In connection with morality, feminists argue that the idea of freedom as non-interference is supported by a number of further questionable assumptions of liberalism: that personhood is defined in terms of the abstract liberty and capacity for rationality of each individual; that our moral relations with others can only arise out of respect for their liberty and capacity for rationality; and that the function of morality is to act as a curb on self-interest, so ensuring that the pursuit of individual self-interest does not compromise the liberty of others. In conjunction, these two sets of assumptions underpin the main political presumptions of liberal theory: that the fundamental problem of human social life is to work out a way of ensuring that each individual is able to

pursue his own self-interested ends without thereby preventing others from doing likewise and so giving rise to conflict; that the form of social life which is best (most rationally) able to achieve this end is one founded as if on an imaginary contract between the separate individuals that together make up the social body; and that this contract involves an agreement on the part of each individual to refrain from interfering with the interests of others in exchange for which he will be guaranteed an inviolable space within which to pursue his own interests.

The starting point for feminist criticisms of the idea of non-interference is to point to the discrepancy between some of these assumptions and many other dimensions of human life. The idea that personhood can be defined in terms of an individual's capacity for reason, for example, downplays the importance of a host of other human characteristics, especially physical abilities and attributes, and emotional capacities, such as the capacity for love. But if we recognise the importance of such capacities many of the liberal assumptions about human subjectivity and social life look much less plausible. This is because these capacities are necessarily social capacities and so point to the fundamental interdependence, rather than separateness, of human interests. The assumption that human beings are discrete, separate existences motivated primarily by the pursuit of their own self-interest for example overlooks the extent to which human beings, at various times and stages of life and to varying extents, are dependent upon the care of others and supportive of the needs of others. This fact also calls into question the assumption, implicit in the notion of non-interference, that others represent a possible threat to our freedom, rather than the condition of its possibility. Further the idea that social life should be thought of as founded upon convention or contract makes little sense of relations between friends, lovers, parents and children, the elderly and those who care for them and so on. The kinds of moral obligations and commitments which arise from

such relationships also suggest that the liberal view of the function of morality is severely impoverished.

According to feminists, these discrepancies arise from the implicit masculinism of liberal theory. The argument is that whereas women's social experience, which historically has revolved around care and responsibility for others, is founded upon a recognition of the emotional, physical and social connections and interdependencies between human beings, the claims of liberal theory seem applicable, if anywhere, only to relations among men in the public sphere. Consequently an emphasis on the importance of autonomy understood as non-interference devalues the importance of many of the activities, values and capacities which have been, and continue to be, associated with women. More than this, it also presupposes what it disavows. In response to the reply that the idea of non-interference only characterises relations between contracting adults and that women equally may be parties to such contractual relations, feminists point out that rational, independent makers of contracts who respect one another's liberty and who refrain from harming others or interfering with their interests, do not spring into life fully formed. They are the products of a process which involves extensive and intensive training, a training which forms the right kinds of habits, inculcates the right kinds of moral attitudes and teaches the right use of reason. Such training cannot be acquired without 'interference', neither can it be acquired without the expenditure of a great deal of emotional and other kinds of labour, much of which is performed by women. Furthermore such training presupposes the existence of social relations which are very different in kind from relations based on contract and consent – relations of trust, care, love, loyalty and so on. The 'minimal' notion of autonomy as non-interference is therefore minimal only because it excludes what underpins it.

My view of autonomy endorses and supports the spirit of this critique of the 'minimal' notion of autonomy. In particular I agree that any account of autonomy which defines it in opposition to relations of dependence and interdependence and which presupposes that the only autonomous relations are contractual relations between (usually male) adults is extremely problematic for women. However I want to distance myself from some of the implications which are *sometimes* thought to follow from this critique. Firstly, although I regard it as fairly damning of the 'minimal' account of autonomy, my discussion in the first part of this chapter should make it clear that I do not think this critique entails the rejection of the ideal of autonomy *per se*. To assume that it does is to slide between a rejection of individualism and a rejection of the concept and value of individual self-determination. Certainly liberalism itself is also guilty of such slippage. But it is important for feminists to attempt to disentangle these notions and to defend some form of the latter. Secondly, and in connection with this first point, it is important to show both that relations based on care, trust, love and so on are the unacknowledged underside and support of the 'autonomous' (minimal) contractual relations of 'liberal individualism', and that the distinction between these different kinds of relations is gendered. But this is not a reason for women either to repudiate the value of individual self-determination or to locate women's ethical life primarily in the realm of affective relations with others. Nevertheless, this critique echoes some of the concerns I raised earlier, alerting us to the need for a conception of autonomous agency which is not implicitly contrasted with certain values which historically have been associated with women, and which sees autonomy not just as an individual but as an intersubjective achievement.

The feminist critique of the abstract individualism of liberal theory echoes the second of my concerns raised above. Feminists have argued that

liberalism promotes a view of human subjectivity which fails to appreciate the significance of the bodily, cultural and social dimensions of human life. Now liberal theorists of course do not deny that our capacities are shaped by our environments and by the socialisation process. In fact it was liberalism's stress on the importance of education and environment that made it such an amenable theory for feminism. What contemporary feminists object to is the Lockean *tabula rasa* conception of subjectivity that is associated with the liberal view of human nature, as well as the image of the 'socialisation process' as a kind of inscription upon this *tabula rasa*.[20] Feminist critics of liberalism argue that a person's specific historical, cultural and bodily location is not simply an accretion upon a somehow invariant 'consciousness' or capacity for reason, but that consciousness itself is always constituted within a particular context as a specific historical, cultural and embodied consciousness.[21] Because the liberal notion of autonomy as non-interference is premised upon a view of persons which abstracts from this context and regards everybody's position as in all important respects equivalent, it leaves no room for a recognition of the concrete differences between individuals and groups which arise from their specific situations. The result of this, feminists argue, is that the ideal of autonomy promotes a view of persons as disembodied and disembedded. While agreeing with this claim with respect to the notion of autonomy as non-interference, it is important not to conflate this 'minimal' account of autonomy with the notion of self-constitution. Thus the conclusion that should be drawn from this argument is that the notion of non-interference is seriously flawed and

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20. They also point out how, through devices such as the state of nature or, more contentiously, some analogue such as Rawls' 'original position', this historically specific conception of human beings gets reified into a given of human nature.

21. Spelling out exactly what this claim means and what are its implications is the subject of a complex and sometimes confusing debate among feminists. In the Introduction to Part IV I try to articulate my understanding of this idea.

that the ideal of autonomy as self-constitution must be re-articulated in various ways. However this argument does not provide grounds for rejecting the idea of autonomous agency.

II

While the 'thin' account of autonomy is associated with libertarian liberals, the 'thick' account has its origins in the work of Kant. For Kant although negative liberty or freedom from interference is important, the notion of autonomy is a much loftier ideal than this. For it consists in the freedom of a rational being to determine its own laws in accordance with the universal demands of reason itself. The differences between the two accounts of autonomy arise from the differences between Kant's ideals of freedom, morality and reason, and the way these notions are understood in the traditions to which the libertarian account is heir – the traditions of Hobbes and utilitarians like Bentham. Whereas these philosophers regarded freedom as 'natural liberty', that is the ability to pursue one's desires free from external constraint or from other obstacles, for Kant freedom can only arise from reason, which transcends merely natural desire and all empirical determination. Thus whereas under the notion of non-interference, autonomy simply amounts to being at liberty to pursue one's own self-interested ends, for Kant actions motivated by self-interested concerns are paradigmatically heteronomous. Only actions performed in accordance with universal reason can be autonomous. Kant argues that the reason why earlier philosophers were unable to see this was because they equated reason with instrumental reason. Hence they thought that while reason can help us in achieving the ends set by our desires and inclinations it has no role in determining these ends.[22] On the Kantian view this dissociation of action

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22. The debate, within contemporary moral philosophy, between proponents of the so-called 'Humean' and 'Kantian' theories of motivation, continues this earlier debate.

from reason can provide no basis for morality, since morality is necessary and universal and so cannot be grounded in our own subjective and contingent ends. Morality must therefore be grounded in something which has unconditioned worth as an end in itself, namely 'rational nature'.

It is this notion of 'rational nature' as an end in itself that links Kant's view of autonomy inextricably to morality and that explains the apparent paradox in his account of autonomy – that the autonomous person both legislates and is subject to the universal laws of reason. If rational nature is an end in itself then it alone can be the only proper and moral end of all our actions. This gives rise to the practical principle: 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means'.[23] From a subjective view this principle enjoins us to abstract from our own particular subjective ends and to take as our end ourselves as rational beings. But this principle must be the same for all rational beings and hence from an objective view it enjoins us to regard all other rational beings as ends in themselves. In taking as our end ourselves as rational beings we therefore also take as our end all rational beings. But what is involved in taking as our end ourselves as rational beings? For Kant it is to have a good will, that is a will which legislates to itself only those actions grounded in respect for rational nature and hence only those actions in accordance with pure practical reason. Autonomy is the property of a good will because a will which acts only in accordance with its own self-given laws is free from all external determination, including determination by the desires and inclinations of the human being to whom that will belongs. For Kant autonomy is thus not only intrinsicially valuable, it is also the supreme

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23. Immanuel Kant; Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by James W. Ellington (Hackett, 1981), p. 429. Page numbers are to the standard German edition (Menzer, Berlin, 1911).

value, the ground of all human dignity and worth and the foundation of morality.

It is against the Kantian and neo-Kantian conception of autonomy that the second set of feminist objections is directed. These objections focus on two principal and related aspects of Kantian moral theories. The first is Kant's universalisability criterion and associated notions such as duty and the moral law. The second is the Kantian conception of reason and the distinction between the 'true self' of practical reason and the 'natural self' of inclinations, sense and desire.[24]

II. i.

The central tenet of Kant's moral theory is that the commands of morality are universal commands of reason holding for every rational being and admitting of no exceptions. The categorical imperative stated as universal law enjoins: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'.[25] Duty is action in conformity with this law and for Kant the only moral and hence autonomous action is an action performed solely out of duty. This is because a moral action is an action performed solely for its own sake, that is because it is unconditionally good, not for any other purpose. But the only actions performed for their own sakes are those which accord with pure practical reason, for only reason has the good as its necessary end. No matter how much they may seem to coincide with moral actions therefore, all actions which are motivated by other purposes make the good conditional upon these purposes and so have no moral worth. As we have seen what underlies this conception of morality is the idea of rational

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24. My discussion of Kant focuses only on the aspects of Kant's moral theory against which these objections are raised.

25. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 421.

nature as an end in itself. This idea still retains a powerful hold on the modern moral imagination, and for good reasons, but it entails a number of implications which recent writers have found troubling.[26] Firstly it entails that what is of moral worth is not the outcome of an action, but the principle in accordance with which the action was performed. Secondly it means that actions performed out of other motives than reason, even out of apparently virtuous motives such as benificence, sympathy, love or care, can have no moral worth. According to Kant these virtues only have worth to the extent that they arise out of duty, not sentiment. Thirdly it implies that where there is a clash between the universal commands of morality and the claims made upon us by particular sentiments – claims of loyalty or love for example – the only possible moral course of action is the action performed in accordance with the universal demands of reason.[27] Fourthly, and in connection with this last point, it characterises autonomous action as action in accordance with a moral law which 'abstracts from the personal differences of rational beings and also from the content of their private ends'.[28] Autonomy is thus defined in opposition to sentiment. It is these implications which trouble feminist critics of Kantian and neo-Kantian notions of universalisability.

The catalyst for these criticisms has been the work of Carol Gilligan which arose as a response to Lawrence Kohlberg's neo-Kantian theory of moral development. In order to clarify the concerns expressed by these criticisms I want briefly to outline the salient features of Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg.

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26. In his article 'Moral Luck' (Mortal Questions, Cambridge U.P. 1979), Tom Nagel has questioned the coherence of the first two of these implications.

27. Note however that the duties demanded by reason may include duties arising out of particular relations to others. Kant's point however is that actions connected with such relations can only be moral to the extent that they are motivated by these duties, rather than by sentiment.

28. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 433.

Gilligan's complaint against Kohlberg's theory is that it assumes that moral maturity and hence moral autonomy coincide with the ability to resolve moral dilemmas through the application of universal rational principles to particular situations. On Kohlberg's view the autonomous moral agent is the person whose moral judgements are formed independently of the historical, psychological and personal factors involved in any given individual situation and by reference to universal principles alone. Kohlberg identifies these principles as rights-based principles of justice. Gilligan points out that as a consequence of this assumption he regards all other forms of moral decision making as either steps on the road to moral maturity or as morally deviant. But by starting from these two premises Kohlberg could only conclude that women are morally deficient because in his empirical research he found that the majority of the women subjects that he interviewed did not in fact appeal to universal principles in response to the abstract moral problems which were presented to them. Apart from expressing dissatisfaction with the level of abstraction of the dilemmas to which they were asked to respond, they tended to try to find solutions to these problems at an interpersonal and hence, given Kohlberg's framework, less morally autonomous, level.

In reply to Kohlberg, Gilligan suggests that rather than concluding that women are morally deficient we might conclude that women approach moral problems from a <u>different</u> perspective than men and with a different set of concerns. She characterises this perspective as an 'ethics of care' and attempts to develop a theory of moral development, parallel to Kohlberg's, within this ethic. In contrast to Kohlberg's rights-based justice ethic, which sees moral decision-making as a process of abstraction both from the particular concerns of the agents involved and from the particularities of the specific context, Gilligan sees the 'ethic of care' as a way of thinking about morality which focuses on such particularities as necessary determinants of

the moral situation. The 'ethic of care' is thus an agent-centred moral perspective which is based on the presumption that moral problems are always bound up with the particularities of context and with our conceptions of ourselves and our relations with others. Morality in other words cannot be divorced from the attachments, responsibilities and obligations arising from our particular affective relations with others. To the extent that this ethic can be characterised as having an overriding concern it is a concern with 'care', that is with avoiding hurt and preserving and maintaining the connections between people.

Since the publication of her book Gilligan's work has sparked a great deal of debate among feminists and some moral philosophers. The debate has centred on questions relating to the implications of her work. Is Gilligan suggesting that men and women think and reason differently about morality or is she suggesting that men and women have different moral priorities? Does Gilligan's work imply that women's moral thinking is and should be completely contextual, without regard to universal principles, or does it imply that in any given situation adequate moral appraisal must involve a dialectic between universal principles and an agent-centred perspective?[29] What is the relationship between justice and the 'ethic of care'? And, most pertinently here, should we conclude from Gilligan's analysis of the 'ethic of care' that the ideal of autonomy is a masculine ideal?

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29. The literature on this topic is increasing at an exponential rate, but there is a clear discussion of these questions in Jean Grimshaw's book Feminist Philosophers (Harvester, 1986), Chs. 7&8. Grimshaw argues that Gilligan's work should be interpreted as implying that men and women have different moral priorities, arising out of their different social experiences, rather than as implying that women think differently about morality. She also suggests that 'care' should itself be regarded as a moral principle. In his article 'Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory' Ethics 98 (April 1988), Lawrence Blum attempts to characterise what is distinctive about Gilligan's approach to moral theory by means of a useful comparison between Gilligan's work and other philosophical critiques of impartiality.

In response to this last question there has been a tendency among some feminists to assume that Gilligan's work entails that autonomy is a masculine ideal and to argue that rather than emphasising the importance of autonomy feminists should instead be trying to promote, at both an individual and a more global level, the values of connection, love and responsibility for others that are associated with care and with activities such as mothering.[30] While I do not deny either the significance of these values or the fact that they have been culturally and ethically devalued, I would endorse Grimshaw's cautionary remarks about any too-ready identification of such values as feminine. As Grimshaw reminds us, it is important to situate the ideal of care in the context of the history of the split between the private domestic world of the family and the public realm of political life and to remember that certain conceptions of care have functioned in an oppressive way for women. A celebration of care in the absence of a thoroughgoing critique of the public/private distinction is therefore politically problematic. In Part III I will raise similar points in the context of a discussion of Carol McMillan. The point I want to make here however is somewhat different. I want to suggest that the problem with this construal of Gilligan's work, as entailing that the ideal of autonomy should be de-emphasised, is that it conflates the notion of autonomous agency with a rationalist universalist ethical perspective. This conflation is not philosophically groundless given that for Kant, as we have seen, to be an autonomous agent just is to act in accordance with universal laws. However I think Gilligan should be read as attempting to disentangle the notion of autonomous agency from rationalist ethical universalism and to

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30. See for example Sara Ruddick 'Maternal Thinking' and 'Preservative Love and Military Destruction: Some Reflections on Mothering and Peace' in Joyce Trebilcot (ed.) Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory (Rowman & Allanheld 1984), and 'Remarks on the Sexual Politics of Reason' in Women and Moral Theory *op.cit.* See also Nel Noddings, Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984).

articulate an intersubjectively-grounded account of what I have been calling self-constitution. Putting it another way if 'care' is not to collapse into what Gilligan calls 'conventional femininity', that is a self-denying care for others, then an 'ethic of care' must presuppose some conception of self-constituting agency.

This claim might be clarified by thinking of Gilligan's work as in some ways analogous to Bernard Williams' critique of utilitarianism.[31] What I am suggesting is that at one level Gilligan's 'ethic of care' is a reflection on the nature of moral motivation which functions as a critique of the conception of agency implicit in universalist, rationalist moral theories. Like Williams and other contemporary critics of universalist moral doctrines[32], whether Kantian or utilitarian, Gilligan is suggesting that when people engage in moral reflection they must do so from the perspective which constitutes their point of view, that is from the perspective of their personal commitments and projects. For it is only by having such a perspective that a person can be an agent at all. Certainly this 'point of view' may partly be shaped by certain principles, but these principles only motivate our actions to the extent that they are part of our sense of what is important to us. Yet universalist doctrines stipulate that the moral point of view is a point of view abstracted from all such perspectives.[33] But this gives rise to an incoherent conception of moral agency because it means that to take the moral point of view requires that we strip ourselves of the very motivations which make moral reflection and agency possible. It is for this reason that

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31. Bernard Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism' in Smart & Williams Utilitarianism: For and Against (Cambridge U.P. 1973). Also Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1985).

32. See for example Michael Stocker, 'Agent and Other: Against Ethical Universalism', AJP, vol.54, no.3, 1976 and Andrew Oldenquist, 'Loyalties' J.Phil, vol. 79, no. 4, 1982.

33. An exception is Hare's 'role reversal' notion of universalizability. See for example R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, (Oxford University Press, 1963).

the idea of autonomous agency must be extricated from a Kantian or neo-Kantian view of autonomous action as action in accordance with universal principles.

However whereas Williams' characterisation of a person's 'point of view' puts most stress on notions like personal integrity and the importance to a person of their projects and goals, Gilligan characterises the kind of 'point of view' embodied in the 'ethic of care' as a point of view focused mainly on a person's sense of their responsibilities to others and to themselves, and on a sense of their concrete relations with others. What is emphasised therefore by the perspective of the 'ethic of care' is that our points of view and our decisions about what we value or regard as important do not arise merely from abstract reflections about principles, nor even from processes of introspection. Rather they are constituted intersubjectively. But how should this notion be understood, and what are its implications for an ideal of autonomous agency?

Firstly, a recognition of the significance of intersubjectivity involves a recognition of the developmental aspects of subjectivity, that is it involves a recognition of the fact that the development of the capacity for autonomous agency is an achievement which occurs partly in the context of a child's relationship with those adults who have primary responsibility for its well-being.[34] In this context autonomy and dependence on others are not opposed. Rather it is these relationships of dependency which provide the basis in an individual for both the capacity for autonomy and the capacity for reciprocal relations with others.[35] Although the significance of these

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34. It is Nancy Chodorow's work which has done most to emphasise the importance of this fact. See especially The Reproduction of Mothering (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978). Also 'Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective' in Hester Eisenstein & Alice Jardine (eds.) The Future of Difference (G.K. Hall, Boston, 1980)

35. This is not to deny that there is a difference between psychically healthy and unhealthy dependencies. Nor is it to claim that these relationships are always successful in achieving

early relationships does not go unrecognised in the philosophical literature on autonomy, it is usually recognised negatively in that the influence of these relationships gets bracketed under the 'socialisation' from which a person must in some senses free herself in order to achieve autonomy. Thus it seems as though individuals achieve autonomy despite, rather than because of their early emotional dependencies on others. If the significance of these dependency relations is recognised however autonomy does not need to be seen as opposed to dependence but rather as existing in dialectical relationship with it.

Secondly, but following from this point, the idea that self-constitution is possible only in intersubjective relations means that the pursuit of autonomy must also involve reciprocal recognition of the autonomy of others. In the absence of such recognition the pursuit of autonomy is likely to be associated with the domination of others.[36] Now it could be argued that the Kantian ideal of autonomy, which enjoins respect for rational nature as an end in itself, embodies a similar view. But the feminist claim is significantly different. In fact feminist criticism of contemporary neo-Kantianism – as exemplified in Kohlberg and Rawls – echoes Hegel's criticism of Kant.[37] Seyla Benhabib, extrapolating from Gilligan's work, has argued that neo-Kantian notions of universalisability cannot in fact ground

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these ends. Chodorow's argument is that in patriarchal societies these capacities are unlikely both to be adequately developed within the one individual precisely because autonomy and dependence are defined in opposition to one another and associated with different genders.

36. As I will argue in Part II, this point was first made by de Beauvoir in the light of Hegel's stress on the philosophical significance of recognitive relations. Most recently the point has been developed by Jessica Benjamin in 'The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination' in Eisenstein & Jardine (eds.) The Future of Difference *op. cit.* and also in her book The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination (Virago, 1990)

37. G.W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, translated with notes by T.M. Knox, (Oxford University Press, 1967). First Part: 'Abstract Right' & Second Part: 'Morality'. I discuss this criticism briefly below in Chapter 4 Section 3.

the respect for others which they take as the foundation of justice.[38] This is because neo-Kantians misconstrue the notion of respect. She suggests that if we understand respect for others as respect for 'rational nature' or as respect for others as bearers of abstract rights, as what she calls the 'generalized other', then we are not really coming to terms with the different perspectives of others, with the ways in which their points of view are fundamentally different from ours. Rather we are abstracting away from everything about them that is different and reducing everybody's perspective to one common perspective. Thus we are stripping down the self to the point where what grounds agency – a person's point of view – disappears. Benhabib suggests however that if we do this we cannot respect the autonomy of others. Such respect can only arise from a recognition of the different points of view of others, a recognition which Benhabib refers to as seeing the other as a 'concrete other'. Benhabib suggests that unless our conception of justice embodies a conception of others as 'concrete others' then we will not in fact be able to treat them justly at all. This claim does not deny the need for a critical appraisal of the points of view of others, nor of our own. But it suggests that critical appraisal requires an intersubjective context as well as principled reflection.

At the level of considerations of justice, and in contrast to some feminist commentators, I do not think a stress on intersubjective recognition will eliminate the possibility of conflicts between different points of view, nor will it overcome the fact that in some contexts there will be inevitable ethical tensions between universality and particularity, individuality and

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38. Seyla Benhabib; 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other' in Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell (eds.) Feminism As Critique (Polity Press, 1987). Benhabib's argument is a response to Kohlberg's claim that Gilligan conflates 'justice' and the 'good life'. According to Kohlberg, whereas justice is concerned with dealing with conflicts in public life and so must be centred around impartial principles and notions of rights, considerations pertaining to the 'good life', that is pertaining to people's commitments and projects, are really aspects of their private selves which should be irrelevant to considerations of justice.

community, love and justice, an agent-centred perspective and an act-evaluative perspective. But like Benhabib and Pateman I think that a concrete recognition of the differences which ground these tensions puts them more into dialectical relationship with one another, rather than pitting them in opposition.[39] I also agree that the idea that we can eliminate these tensions simply by abstracting away concrete differences in fact ensures that one perspective will dominate. At the level of articulating an adequate conception of autonomous agency I want to suggest that the kind of critical self-evaluation that characterises autonomy is best achieved through intersubjective recognition. To give an example which gets back to the issue of socialisation and procedural independence, the kind of critical reflection on one's own socialised racism that arises from a genuine reciprocal encounter with other racial groups, is of an entirely different order than the kind of reflection prompted by reference to universal principles. In Chapter Six I give a fuller elaboration of what is involved in this kind of reflection in the context of the example of abortion decisions.

II.ii

What is so powerful about Kant's moral system is that it seems to unite the individual point of view with the moral point of view, and autonomous agency with respect for others. This unity is achieved however only by means of the distinction between the noumenal, rational self and the phenomenal self of inclination, desire and the body. I said earlier that for Kant autonomy is action of the will in accordance with its own self-given laws and hence free from all external determination, including determination by the desires and inclinations of the human being to whom that will belongs. Central to this conception of autonomy is the Kantian

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39. Benhabib, *op. cit.* Carole Pateman, 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy' in Benn, S. & Gaus, G (eds.), Public and Private in Social Life (Croom Helm, London & Canberra, 1983)

distinction between the intelligible and the sensible realms. The sensible realm, the realm of appearance, is subject to the causal laws of nature. Beings which are subject to such laws are subject to empirical determination. As such they cannot be regarded as free, nor can they be regarded as ends in themselves. Rather their value is relative and they are called 'things'.[40] The intelligible realm by contrast is the ground of all appearance and is subject only to the laws of reason. Kant makes it clear that the idea of such a realm is of course beyond the bounds of experience. It is rather an idea which reason must presuppose in order to explain the possibility of freedom of the will, 'a something that remains over when I have excluded from the determining grounds of my will everything that belongs to the world of sense'[41] or 'a point of view which reason sees itself compelled to take outside of appearances in order to think of itself as practical'.[42] Freedom itself is also an idea of reason, an idea that must be presupposed in order to explain 'the activity of rational beings endowed with a will'.[43]

According to Kant it is the nature of morality itself which necessitates these presuppositions. This is because moral action, as we have seen, is action which is motivated by duty alone, that is action in accordance with universal principles. But such action in accordance with principles requires reason, that is, practical reason. Only rational beings therefore can act out of duty. Further, only rational beings can have a will. The reason for this is that all effects presuppose some causality. But if reason is unique, a faculty

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40. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 428.

41. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 462.

42. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 458.

43. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 448.

which distinguishes rational beings from all other things,[44] then action in accordance with reason cannot be the effect of any natural causality. Rather it must be the effect of a rational causality, namely the will. Now all causality presupposes the existence of universal laws regulating the relation between cause and effect. The laws governing rational causality cannot however be empirical laws but must be laws of reason. In order to act in accordance with laws of reason the will therefore must be free from all empirical determination. Consequently such a free causality can only be determined by itself, that is, it can only be a 'law to itself'.[45]

Kant is explicit that this idea of freedom of the will is derived not from the experience of *human* nature but rather from the idea of *rational* nature itself. The necessity for the categorical imperative arises because human nature is not perfectly rational. For a perfectly rational being, what is objectively necessary is also subjectively necessary. The actions of such a being therefore *'would* always accord with the autonomy of the will'.[46] But for human nature what is objectively necessary is subjectively contingent– hence the necessity of the categorical *ought*. This lack of accord between human actions and what is demanded by reason arises, according to Kant, because human beings are both rational beings and sensible beings, both members of the intelligible realm and affected by the sensible world, including by themselves as sensuous beings. In so far as human beings belong to the intelligible realm they must be regarded as free, insofar as they belong to the sensible world they are subject to empirical determination.

Once again Kant is explicit that in human *experience* the moral agent does not experience herself as divided between the intelligible and the sensible

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44. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 452.

45. Kant, *op. cit. p.* 447.

46. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 454.

realms. It is thus never possible in any actual decision to separate out the motives of duty from the impulses of sentiment or desire. Nevertheless because Kant's ideal of autonomy presupposes the idea of a perfectly rational being, he is committed to the view that, from the perspective of such a being, any actions arising from sensuous inclinations, desires or impulses are heteronomous. Further, to the extent that human beings are regarded *qua* rational beings, the proper (noumenal) self must be identified with the rational will and cannot be held responsible for the sensuous inclinations and impulses arising from human nature or the phenomenal self. The will is responsible however for indulging such impulses, that is, for allowing them to hold any sway over its actions.[47] For Kant then, for human beings the exercise of autonomy is bound up with the will's authority and control over those aspects of the self that are associated with bodily desires and inclinations.

Contemporary accounts of freedom of the will and autonomy explicitly dissociate themselves from the metaphysical aspects of this Kantian picture. Nevertheless the echoes of Kant's account of autonomy still resound in the contemporary distinction between different aspects of the self, and in the idea that autonomous agency is bound up with a person's ability to exercise control over their will. I think there is something correct about these ideas. The kind of self-evaluation involved in autonomy involves not only reflection on whether one's values, desires, inclinations and so on are truly one's own, but also an ability to exercise a certain degree of control over those desires and inclinations in the interests of what one values, or in the interests of longer-term goals and projects. However in the contemporary literature, as I also indicated earlier, the bodily and intersubjective nature of the self that constitutes and is constituted in this process tends to get

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47. Kant, *op. cit.* p. 458.

understated. In the wake of the Kantian account of autonomy this can invoke the idea of an isolated and disembodied or at least sexually neutral self, which has freed itself of its social determination, exercising control over an unruly (neurotic, compulsive, addicted and so on) self still enchained by social and bodily determination.

Now while there is no *a priori* reason to associate this unruly self with women, in the context of a social and philosophical split between the public and the private spheres, femininity has become a metaphor for those feelings, inclinations and desires which autonomous reason must transcend.[48] As I shall show in Parts II and III, this metaphor has functioned through a representation of the female body as a heteronomous body which in some ways always represents a threat to reason and to the will. As a result, for women the autonomous self has become the self which can transcend its feminine embodiment.

In Part I, I have developed two interconnected strands of argument. Firstly, through a review and analysis of the contemporary philosophical literature, I have given an account of autonomous agency and have shown the importance of the ideal of autonomy, thus characterised, for understanding and condemning the phenomenon of oppression. On the basis of this account I have upheld the value of autonomy as an important ideal for women. Secondly, I have analysed and assessed the two main lines of contemporary feminist critique of the ideal of autonomy – those

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48 The most sustained argument to this effect is given by Genevieve Lloyd in The Man of Reason (Methuen, 1984)

based on critiques of liberal individualism, and those developed out of critiques of contemporary neo-Kantian moral psychology. While I have rejected the claim, made by some feminists, that these critiques reveal autonomy to be an irredeemably masculinist ideal, I have argued that these critiques do raise serious worries, both for women and more generally, about the way in which the ideal of autonomy has been understood within our culture. The two aspects of this cultural and philosophical understanding which concern me most, and on which I will be focusing in this thesis, are the twin conceptions of the ideally autonomous individual as self-enclosed and self-sufficient, and of autonomy as an exercise of control by the purely rational will over the unruly body of desires, inclinations and sentiments. In contrast to this kind of view of autonomy, I have argued the need for an understanding of autonomous agency which is based on a recognition of the fundamentally embodied and intersubjective nature of human subjectivity.

My aims in the rest of the thesis are firstly, to try to develop an account of autonomy which builds on the account given in the first section of Part I, but which also incorporates the insights of the feminist critiques considered in the second section of Part I. Secondly, I aim to show why our dominant cultural conceptions of autonomy have made it such a fraught ideal for women, and hence why an adequate account of autonomy must take as its starting point a recognition both of the significance of human embodiment and of intersubjectivity.
In Part II, I show how some of the implicit assumptions of our cultural and philosophical conceptions of autonomy create insuperable tensions in the work of Simone de Beauvoir. In particular, I examine the way in which the Kantian notion of autonomy as transcendence of empirical determination re-emerges in a different guise in de Beauvoir's implicit

distinction between the immanent and the transcendent body, in such a way as to pit an allegedly sexually neutral autonomous self in opposition to female embodiment. But I also argue that, despite its problems, de Beauvoir's work nevertheless suggests a different way of thinking about autonomy, or the activity of self-constitution, as an activity which occurs, in intersubjective relations with others, through the body and through the constitution of the body image. From the infant's earliest attempts at co-ordination through to the experience of the elderly and infirm in coming to terms with bodily incapacity, we constitute ourselves in interaction with bodily changes and processes and through the way in which those processes are represented by ourselves and by others. Seen from this perspective, there can be no sexually indifferent self because there is no sexually indifferent body. Seen from this perspective, autonomous agency is also inextricably bound up with shaping for oneself, always in a social context and always in interaction with others, an integrated bodily perspective. In Part IV, I try to develop these suggestions in de Beauvoir's work into an account of autonomy which preserves some of her insights about embodiment and intersubjectivity, but which avoids the tensions arising from her view of autonomy as an exercise of a disembodied will.

Between the discussion of de Beauvoir in Part II, and my own account of embodied autonomy in Part IV, Part III reconstructs the historical origins of our contemporary understanding of autonomy and in doing so shows why autonomy has been such a fraught ideal for women. This part of the thesis focuses principally on the social and political philosophies of Rousseau and Hegel. It aims to show the systematic interconnections within their work between their rather different accounts of autonomy, but highly similar

views about the appropriate social roles of women. My argument is that these views about women cannot be dismissed as superficial sexism, but underpin Rousseau and Hegel's different solutions to what they perceive as the fundamental moral and political problem of the modern age, the problem of how to reconcile individuality with community. Part III concludes with a chapter on the ideal of autonomy in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. Contrary to the dominant feminist interpretations of Wollstonecraft's work, which regard her as simply attempting to appropriate a masculine ideal of autonomy for women, I argue that Wollstonecraft was in fact wrestling with the problem of how to articulate an ideal of autonomy which recognises the significance of both human embodiment and intersubjectivity.

PART II

A CERTAIN LACK OF SYMMETRY: DE BEAUVOIR ON AUTONOMOUS AGENCY AND WOMEN'S EMBODIMENT

> The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity...just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. (The Second Sex, p. 15)

Introduction

In the Introduction to The Second Sex de Beauvoir lays out for the reader the conceptual grid which will be employed in her analysis of woman's situation. A number of interconnected categories and oppositions feature significantly in this grid, categories and oppositions which de Beauvoir claims she derives directly from Sartrean existentialism. Distinctions such as subject/object, transcendence/immanence, authenticity/bad faith and concepts such as 'freedom' and 'the project' are thus introduced from the outset. In the body of the text these are supplemented by others such as self-consciousness/Life. Chief among these interpretive categories is the opposition essential One/inessential Other. This opposition, in particular the category of the Other, de Beauvoir asserts, is 'as primordial as consciousness itself', figuring in all mythologies and cultures.[1] Primordial or not, if we are to believe de Beauvoir, it seems that an understanding of the philosophical implications of this category had to wait for the phenomenology of Hegel and the ontology of Sartre. It is their understanding of the self/other opposition that de Beauvoir claims she is using to throw light on the situation of women.

Given the extent of authorial guidance as to how the text should be read The Second Sex should by rights present the conscientious reader with no major interpretive obstacles. So what is to be made of the fact that the text is knotted with tensions? In recent criticism one tendency has been to argue that these internal difficulties arise as a result of de Beauvoir's application to woman's situation of the very categories, including that of the Other, which she regards as facilitating her analysis.[2] These arguments suggest that these

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1. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, translated by H.M. Parshley, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 16. Hereafter cited as S.S.

2. See for example: Genevieve Lloyd, 'Masters, Slaves and Others', Radical Philosophy 34, Summer 1983, Special issue on Women, Gender and Philosophy; Elizabeth Spelman, 'Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views', Feminist Studies, vol. 8, no. 1, 1982, pp. 109-131;

categories in their original Hegelian and Sartrean contexts are inextricably connected with a fundamental hierarchical opposition between masculine and feminine in which the feminine is associated with whatever is devalued and to be transcended. De Beauvoir's ability so strikingly to illuminate the situation of women is thus all the more remarkable. It is an achievement despite rather than because of her philosophical framework.

Another view, suggested by Moira Gatens, is that de Beauvoir's assessment of her own philosophical approach in The Second Sex has the effect of making her contribution to philosophy invisible.[3] Michèle Le Doeuff has argued that in their relationship to philosophy women historically have acted as vestals, preserving, commemorating and commenting upon the work of the great philosophers but adding no words of their own to the text of philosophy.[4] Gatens argues that it is not that women add no words of their own, it is rather that they claim no words as their own. De Beauvoir's analysis of the situation of women is an instance of just this syndrome, since she herself tells the reader that her analysis is entirely consonant with Sartrean existentialism. However her text belies this claim. To take de Beauvoir at her word and hence to regard the internal contradictions of The Second Sex as arising chiefly out of the philosophical constraints de Beauvoir has imposed on herself is thus to underestimate the complexity of both de Beauvoir's project and her text.

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and my article 'Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophy and/or the Female Body' in Elizabeth Gross & Carole Pateman (eds), Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory, (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986).

3. Moira Gatens, 'Feminism, Philosophy and Riddles without Answers' in Feminist Challenges *op. cit.*

4. Michèle Le Doeuff, 'Women and Philosophy', translated by Debbie Pope, Radical Philosophy 17, 1977, pp. 2-11. However, despite the fact that, in keeping with this argument, Le Doeuff calls The Second Sex 'a morganatic wedding-present' and a 'labour of love', in her own article on de Beauvoir Le Doeuff's main aim is to show how de Beauvoir actually transforms Sartrean existentialism in applying it to the situation of women. See Michèle Le Doeuff; 'Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and existentialism', translated by Colin Gordon, Ideology & Consciousness, no. 6, Autumn 1979, pp.47-57.

My argument in this part of the thesis assumes that both of these approaches to The Second Sex are correct. I want to show how de Beauvoir's analysis of woman's situation simultaneously uses, is limited by, and reveals the limitations of, some of the philosophical presuppositions from which she begins. In particular, I want to show how her account of the way in which oppression structures the psyches and the bodies of women, is both constrained by and calls into question the account of autonomous agency, derived from themes in the work of Hegel and Sartre, which also provides the philosophical perspective from which she develops her analysis of oppression.[5] As a result, while de Beauvoir's conception of autonomy opens up the theoretical space for an analysis of oppression, it also commits her to the problematic view that women's embodiment makes ethical authenticity, or autonomy, more difficult for women to achieve than it is for men.

I begin Chapter Two by arguing that what specifically characterises de Beauvoir's philosophical project is an ethical concern. That this is the primary concern of de Beauvoir's philosophical work becomes evident once The Second Sex is read in conjunction with The Ethics of Ambiguity, de Beauvoir's more explicitly ethical text which was written at about the same time as The Second Sex and which is concerned primarily with questions of freedom, choice and ethical responsibility.[6] De Beauvoir's concern with ethics has a double aspect. On the one hand she is interested in articulating the conditions of possibility for ethics in general; on the other hand she seeks to understand the difference between autonomous, authentic ethical agency and ethical failure or heteronomy. In particular she is interested in

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5. De Beauvoir rarely uses the term 'autonomy'. My discussion uses the term 'autonomy' and de Beauvoir's preferred terms 'transcendence', 'freedom' and 'authenticity' interchangeably.

6. Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, translated by Bernard Frechtman (Citadel Press, Secaucus, NJ, 1975). Hereafter cited as E.A.

investigating the reasons for ethical failure or heteronomy. It is this investigation in The Ethics of Ambiguity which gives rise to her analysis of women's oppression in The Second Sex.

My discussion of de Beauvoir's accounts of autonomy and oppression focuses in particular on her notion of woman as Other. I argue that if we situate the notion of woman as Other within the broader context of de Beauvoir's ethical concerns three distinct though related notions of the other emerge: others; the Inessential Other or 'object'; the Absolute Other. In the first of these uses, that is as referring to others, the notion of the other is central to de Beauvoir's account of autonomy. For she thinks that genuine autonomy requires a commitment to the autonomy of others. Understood in this first sense de Beauvoir's use of the notion of the other implies that reciprocal recognition between transcendent or autonomous subjects is not only possible but ethically required. In this context de Beauvoir's view of our relations with others is closer to Hegel's more optimistic version of the self/other distinction in the master/slave dialectic than to Sartre's version of this distinction in Being and Nothingness.[7]

This ethical requirement to recognise the freedom of others provides the moral framework within which de Beauvoir can condemn oppression as an evil. Oppression arises when, instead of recognising that others are the condition of possibility of our own freedom, we regard them either as an intolerable limit to our freedom or else as expendable in the interests of our freedom. In contrast to the reciprocal recognition which characterises a genuinely ethical relation to others, oppression is thus defined as an

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7. G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller, with an analysis of text and foreword by J.N. Findlay. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977). Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel Barnes (Philosophical Library, N.Y. 1972), hereafter cited as B.N.. Marion Tapper has proposed a similar view, with respect to de Beauvoir's analysis of love, in her article 'Sartre and de Beauvoir on Love' in Critical Philosophy, vol. 2, no. 1, 1985.

asymmetrical and ossified relation in which the other is treated not as a self-determining subject but as a thing, or 'object', an Inessential Other. This is the second of de Beauvoir's interpretations of the self-other distinction which is closely aligned with that of Sartre. But whereas the Sartrean version of this relation is a pessimistic account of interpersonal relations between individuals, de Beauvoir's ideal of an ethical relation to the other based on reciprocal recognition enables her to transform Sartre's account into an analysis of oppressive and distorted social relations structured by relations of domination and subordination. Here once again de Beauvoir's impetus is ethical – de Beauvoir's use of the notion of the other as Inessential Other is used to account for the failure of oppressed persons to realise their possibilities as autonomous agents. The great strength of this account of oppression lies in the way it is able to explain the process of 'internalization', that is the way in which the oppressed come to think of themselves as less than autonomous subjects.[8] However de Beauvoir's understanding of 'internalization' is limited by her adherence to the Sartrean conception of the subject as radical freedom. This explains why her text oscillates between the notions of 'oppression' and 'bad faith' in explaining women's complicity with their situation.

In her readings of myth and literature de Beauvoir uses the third sense of the notion of the other, the other as Absolute Other, to identify an extreme expression of the process of objectification – the myth of 'femininity'. Here de Beauvoir can be taken to show how 'Woman' as Absolute Other functions as a metaphor of whatever is repressed or excluded in the self-constitution of phallocentric systems of signification.[9] De Beauvoir shows

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8 The term 'internalization' is not actually used by de Beauvoir herself. However I think it appropriately captures, without distorting, her view.

9 The term 'phallocentrism' is used to characterise discourses, texts and systems of signification which are structured around a hierarchical opposition between masculinity and

in her analysis that the term 'Woman', as designating some essence of femininity, thus does not refer in any direct sense to women, considered either individually or collectively, as concrete empirical subjects. Rather it is a projection of masculine 'bad faith' which functions to 'naturalize' the oppression of women. Her deconstruction of the signifier 'Woman' or of woman as 'Absolute Other' is intended to reveal the complete unjustifiability of women's oppression.

What is particularly striking about de Beauvoir's analysis of oppression is that it locates the effects of internalization not merely in the beliefs of the oppressed but in their bodies and body-images. This makes clear the connection between the truncated ethical possibilities of the oppressed and their bodily situation. But de Beauvoir's presentation of women's bodily situations exhibits the same tensions that are in evidence elsewhere in her work. In Chapter Three I suggest that her characterisation of the significance of women's embodiment can be read in two incompatible ways. On the one hand, de Beauvoir's descriptions of female embodiment as passive and limiting can be read as descriptions of women's lived experience, as that experience is constructed by oppression. Further, if this reading is conjoined with de Beauvoir's analysis of woman as 'Absolute Other', what emerges is the view that just as the category 'Woman' bears no necessary connection with women, so too the passive 'female' or 'feminine' body bears no necessary connection with women. Rather it is itself an effect of oppression. On the other hand de Beauvoir also seems to suggest that the facticity of the female body itself is an obstacle to autonomous agency. Whereas for men the body is an active instrument of the will, women's problem is that their bodies function more as a resistance to or constraint on the will.

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femininity and in which femininity is defined solely in relation to an already defined masculinity, as either the same as, or a deviation from, it.

My argument is that these two incompatible views about the significance of women's embodiment both arise from a distinction between the immanent and the transcendent body. While this distinction provides the theoretical framework for de Beauvoir's analysis of oppression, it is also problematic because in The Second Sex the ideal of the transcendent body is defined in opposition to the reproductive body. In other words, de Beauvoir's ideal of the transcendent body associates the transcendent body with the masculine body. I argue that what this reveals is that the very notion of the body as transcendent presupposes a problematic view of autonomous agency as control over the body by a supposedly sexually neutral 'will' or consciousness. This view is problematic not only because this supposedly sexually neutral 'will' turns out implicitly to be associated with masculinity, but also because it involves an inadequate conception of embodied subjectivity and hence of autonomous agency. As a consequence, there seems to be a fundamental tension, within de Beauvoir's philosophical project as a whole, between her call for a relation to the other founded on a genuine recognition of the radical otherness of the other, and the fact that her analysis of woman's situation leaves de Beauvoir unable to provide an ideal of autonomous agency that is capable of incorporating a recognition of both the specificity and the variety of women's bodily perspectives.

It would be a mistake however to think that the problems in de Beauvoir's account of autonomy arise solely from her philosophical framework. While part of the problem does indeed lie with this framework, which commits her to the idea that autonomous agency involves control over the body by a sexually indifferent will, a further source of trouble, as I shall argue in Part III, is that in a dominant strand of our cultural history ideals of autonomy and representations of femininity have been defined as mutually exclusive.

Chapter Two

FREEDOM AND OPPRESSION

Section 1: Ethics, Ambiguity and Others

De Beauvoir's project in The Ethics of Ambiguity is not to formulate a set of abstract and fundamental moral principles by means of which a person can determine how she should act in a given situation. It is rather an argument against an abstract moral code and in favour of an ethics of the 'situation', an ethics of action. That is, it is an ethics which stresses the particularity of each moral agent and each moral situation and which argues that moral choice is a question of individual action in response to the specificity of each situation. No prior determination of value, in other words, can indicate how a person should act in any particular situation. Ethics is rather a question for each individual of deciding how s/he wants to live. But because human freedom is the condition of possibility of ethics, this question must be posed again and again, at each moment.

De Beauvoir's ethics thus locates the source of moral value in the moral autonomy of each individual. But her conception of autonomy nevertheless sanctions neither ethical inconsistency nor ethical anarchy. According to de Beauvoir, our choices are always made in the context of our previous and possible future moral choices and, more importantly, in the context of relations with others. These factors both structure our ethical possibilities in specific ways and mean that with the freedom to make choices comes also the responsibility for the choices we make. For de Beauvoir this responsibility is not merely responsibility for oneself. Responsibility for self also involves responsibility to recognise the freedom of others to the extent that our choices create or close off the ethical possibilities of others and vice-versa. Thus although de Beauvoir rejects the idea of an absolute moral code, she nevertheless thinks that we can

distinguish good actions from bad, that is authentic from inauthentic. The Ethics of Ambiguity is an account of the requirements for authentic, autonomous action – namely taking responsibility for our freedom – as well as an explanation of some of the reasons for ethical failure. The Second Sex is an extended analysis of one of these reasons – sexual oppression.

De Beauvoir's central claim in The Ethics of Ambiguity is that it is the fundamental and inescapable ambiguity of the human situation that both makes possible and gives rise to the need for ethics. She characterises this ambiguity in terms of a series of interconnected oppositions: between nature and consciousness; subject and object; life and death; externality and internality; the present and the future; the individual and the collectivity; particularity and impartiality. Echoing Kant's idea that human beings belong to both the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds, her view is that human life is situated ambiguously between these oppositions. For example, as embodied natural beings human beings are both part of the natural world (inescapably immersed in it, we might say), and yet distanced from it by virtue of the fact that we are conscious and self-conscious beings. We are subjects amidst a universe of objects, yet we are ourselves objects in that universe. This distance cannot be transcended but in fact opens up the space for meaning and signification. We do not just inhabit the world, we constitute it as meaningful for us. Similarly, the mortality of human beings gives rise to a fundamental sense of ambiguity. Like the rest of the natural world we will all die, but unlike the rest of the natural world we are conscious of our own deaths. Our lives are thus inhabited by and structured around consciousness of our own deaths. But it is in virtue of this consciousness of death that life is valuable: 'every living moment is a sliding towards death...but...every movement towards death is life'.[1] And

1. de Beauvoir, E.A. p. 127.

while the distance between the present and the future is a source of anguish, it is only as conscious beings aware of our own temporality, of ourselves as beings with past histories and future possibilities, that we exert ourselves beyond the immediate desires of the present to make the future possible: 'it is in the interval which separates me today from an unforeseeable future that there are meanings and ends towards which to direct my acts'.[2]

De Beauvoir grounds her analyses of ambiguity, freedom, authenticity and choice in certain epistemological and ontological doctrines of Hegel and Sartre. From Sartre she derives the claim that ambiguity arises from the structure of human consciousness, specifically from its non-coincidence with, or lack of, Being and as a consequence from the fact that the meaning of human existence is never fixed. To Hegel she owes the insight that self-consciousness arises not in the interiority of the Cartesian cogito but in intersubjective recognition.[3]

I. Freedom

Sartre's ontology distinguishes two distinct modes of being, the being of the in-itself or transcendent object and the being of the for-itself or consciousness. While the in-itself coincides with its being, is identical with itself, "full of itself", consciousness exists rather as a relation to Being: 'consciousness in its inmost nature is a relation to a transcendent being'.[4] All consciousness is 'positional' consciousness of the world and

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2. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 121. Thomas Nagel's characterisation of the tension in ethics between the external and the internal perspectives recalls, without the underlying Sartrean ontology but with the common Kantian heritage, de Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity. See for example the essays in Mortal Questions (Cambridge U.P. 1975) and The View From Nowhere (Oxford U.P. N.Y. 1986)

3. My presentations of the views of Sartre and Hegel in this chapter focus only on those aspects of their work that are salient to an understanding of De Beauvoir's appropriation of certain themes in their philosophies.

4. Sartre, B.N. , p. lx.

consciousness, though not identical with its intentional object, nevertheless has no being apart from the being of this object. It exists as a 'lack' or 'nihilation' of Being. The being of consciousness is thus to exist at a distance from itself, a 'being-in-the-world' that is always projecting itself toward the in-itself or Being, but never coinciding with Being.

For Sartre it is this distance internal to consciousness that is the source of both human freedom and value. Like Kant, Sartre thinks that human freedom is possible only if human consciousness is not subject to empirical causality. It is only because it exists as a 'lack' of Being, that is as a mode of being that is able to disengage itself from immersion in the world and to choose its mode of relation to the world, that reflective consciousness can escape causal determination. Freedom is thus constitutive of human consciousness. It is also the source of all value. Sartre defines value as the ideal towards which consciousness surpasses itself but which it can never attain. As 'lack', consciousness is haunted by the desire to be what Sartre calls an 'impossible synthesis of for-itself and in-itself', that is to be itself as totality, a being which coincides with Being and yet maintains the translucency of consciousness.[5] This totality, the end towards which consciousness surpasses itself, is value or the meaning of existence. It is also the inapprehensible 'self' from which the for-itself is separated. The meaning of the for-itself is thus neither prior to nor independent of consciousness, nor is it ever realised by consciousness. Rather, value is consubstantial with consciousness, insofar as it is what consciousness perpetually lacks.

For Sartre it is only because consciousness does not coincide with itself that it is open to possibility, that is to the possibility of being otherwise. While the in-itself is thus defined by what it is, being-for-self is a being defined by

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5. Sartre, *op. cit.* p. 96.

what it is not, that is by its own possibilities in the mode of not yet being them. According to Sartre this makes consciousness being in the form of an 'option on its being', a being which can choose its mode of relation to the world.[6] But if consciousness is a being which is constantly escaping itself towards its own possibilities then the meaning of its existence is not fixed but chosen: 'consciousness is a being whose existence posits its essence and inversely, it is consciousness of a being whose essence implies its existence'.[7]

For my purposes here it is not important to enquire into the veracity of Sartre's account of consciousness. What is salient however is de Beauvoir's claim in The Ethics of Ambiguity that, as it stands, this ontology opens up but does not itself provide an ethical perspective. Her intention is thus to extrapolate from the Sartrean analysis of consciousness a number of implications about the nature of value, freedom, choice and action that will provide the basis for an existential ethic. The first requirement of any such ethic is a recognition that the negativity or lack which constitutes consciousness must be positively affirmed as the foundation of all signification. Value arises only insofar as there is a consciousness which is able imaginatively to disengage itself from immersion in the world and, in defining its own relation to the world, posit the world as meaningful: 'By uprooting himself from the world, man makes himself present to the world and makes the world present to him'.[8] In other words, although consciousness does not bring Being into existence, in constituting itself it structures the world as a synthetic and organised totality. In de Beauvoir's terminology consciousness is the 'disclosure of Being'. What this means is

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6. Sartre, *op. cit.* p. 99.

7. Sartre, *op.cit.* p.lxii

8. de Beauvoir, E.A. p. 12.

that value is not given *a priori*. Rather it arises from the relationship between consciousness and the world.

It is of course Hegel's insight that meaning and value are grounded in reflective awareness of the dialectical relationship between ourselves as subjects and the world which is the object of our consciousness. For Hegel, however, because the development of self-consciousness occurs within the process of the dialectical unfolding of Spirit, the dialectical oppositions between subject and object and between Spirit and self-consciousness are eventually reconciled or *aufgehoben* in Absolute Knowledge. Thus the totality which self-consciousness seeks to articulate is universal and Absolute. By contrast for de Beauvoir, who rejects the concept of Spirit, no such reconciliation between consciousness and its objects and between the for-itself and value are possible. Rather ethics is the attempt to live the ambiguous tension between these oppositions. Neither can there be a universal totality. This is why for de Beauvoir it is not 'impersonal, universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves towards ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and irreducible as subjectivity itself'.[9]

Following Sartre, de Beauvoir also claims that the negativity which characterises consciousness is the source of freedom. It is only because consciousness exists as a 'disclosure of Being', and hence because the meaning of existence is not given *a priori*, that I am free to determine my mode of relation to the world. For de Beauvoir however although it is the structure of human consciousness which makes freedom possible, freedom is not a given. Rather it must be willed and won. The authentic ethical

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9. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 17.

agent is the individual who, rather than attempting to coincide with Being, actively seeks to disclose Being and thus wills their own freedom.

De Beauvoir's very Kantian notion of 'willing' freedom or 'transcendence' is best explicated through the notions of facticity – freedom's 'other' in opposition to which it defines itself – and the 'project'. Sartre and de Beauvoir use the term 'facticity' to refer to the cluster of contingent yet inescapable factors which affect both human existence in general and individual existences. Human facticity would include such factors as the fact of human embodiment and the morphology of the human body, our mortality and finitude, 'the staggering dimensions of the world about us, the density of our ignorance, the risks of catastrophes to come'.[10] Individual facticity includes our historical, social and geographical location, our race, sex, colour and ethnicity, our individual handicaps and strengths and so on. Facticity for de Beauvoir is thus understood in terms of the resistance which the world opposes to our wills, but it is a resistance without which freedom could not function. Like Kant's dove, I exert my will, I exercise choice in relation to a world structured by facticity. To will my freedom just is to achieve autonomy within the inescapable limits imposed by facticity and thus to transcend or surpass facticity.

If facticity is the ground from which freedom takes off, the 'project' is the means by which freedom is concretely realised. For unless freedom can express itself in action, in the choice of particular ends and activities, it remains a purely abstract notion. The term 'project' has two connected senses. In its first sense a project is any willed activity by means of which an individual consciously acts upon the world, thereby both transforming the world and defining herself in terms of her future possibilities. Considered separately from one another however, as discrete choices, such

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10. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 159.

projects cannot constitute authentic action. For a project could be chosen one moment and abandoned the next, in which case the notion of choice would be indistinguishable from impulse while the ambiguity of existence would become indistinguishable from absurdity. In order for action to be the realisation of freedom therefore, it must exhibit a unity which unfolds in time. An action can only be authentic to the extent that it is founded upon past actions and projected towards future actions. The possibility of ethics thus arises only for a being conscious of its own historicity and temporality. This gives us the second sense of the term 'project', the project as original project or choice. A project is original not in the sense that it is temporally prior to or separate from particular projects but in the sense that it justifies them.[11]

Once again the status of this original project attests to the ambiguity of the human situation. On the one hand an individual existence can only be justified to the extent that the individual defines herself through such a project. On the other hand, human freedom means that this original project cannot itself be justified or determined by anything other than itself. It is fundamentally contingent. Similarly, although this project is only concretely realised to the extent that it is affirmed by and enacted in particular projects and choices, it cannot causally determine the future actions of that individual. Rather it must be freely chosen at each moment. This is why the original choice must be constantly re-made in each action: 'The drama of original choice is that it goes on moment by moment for an entire lifetime, that it occurs without reason, before any reason, that freedom is there as if it were present only in the form of contingency'.[12]

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11. De Beauvoir's distinction between individual and original projects, and her claim that a person can only be said to be acting authentically if her individual projects are united by an original project, echoes both Young's distinction between 'dispositional' and 'occurrent' autonomy and Taylor's distinction between the 'simple weigher' and the 'strong evaluator'.

12. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 40.

The fact that our freedom can only become concrete through these freely chosen but fundamentally contingent projects thus means that there is an inescapable tension in our perspective on and attitudes towards our projects. Viewed from an external perspective they are arbitrary and without justification. Viewed from an internal perspective they confer meaning upon our existence.

At this point I wish to digress briefly from this exegesis just to indicate an aspect of de Beauvoir's account of the project the significance of which will become salient in the next chapter. This is that de Beauvoir explicitly denies certain activities the status of projects. Significantly these activities include bodily functions, as well as activities of self-preservation and reproduction. Thus pregnancy, giving birth and childcare are not individual projects and cannot justify existence. Rather they are unconscious activities serving the interests of the species.

II. Others

The existentialist notion of the project as the concrete realisation and unfolding of freedom echoes one of the founding themes of Hegelian metaphysics - the theme of externalisation.[13] But for both Sartre and de Beauvoir Hegel's greatest insight is his account of self-consciousness in the Phenomenology of Spirit, which charts the development of subjectivity as a process of intersubjective relations. In the master-slave dialectic Hegel shows how self-consciousness arises only in relation to another self-consciousness. It is only through their confrontation with one another, through a recognition of their identity in difference, that subjects constitute themselves as subjects and that self-consciousness becomes concrete. This

13. In Hegel's system Spirit remains merely an abstract notion unless it becomes concrete by externalizing itself in Nature and in human self-consciousness. Similarly in the master/slave dialectic, the slave's self-consciousness assumes concrete content when he externalizes himself in labour.

insight is incorporated into de Beauvoir's ethics in the view that freedom can only be realized in the context of relations with others. It is transformed into the basis of a theory of oppression by the claim that the actions of an individual can only be considered ethical, or authentic, to the extent that they embody a recognition of the freedom of others. The following analysis of de Beauvoir's discussion of our relations with others thus begins my examination of her three uses of the notion of the other.

De Beauvoir's characterisation of our relations with others manifests her typical preoccupation with ambiguity. She stresses the tension in our dealings with others between a concern for justice, which requires that we treat individuals impersonally and impartially, and the ethical importance of the particular attachments and affections between particular individuals, affections and attachments which often conflict with the demands of justice. She points to a similar tension between a Kantian demand that we treat persons as ends in themselves rather than as means, and a utilitarian concern to minimise total suffering. Further, while violence against persons is an inexcusable atrocity in which the other becomes for us a mere thing, violence against certain individuals is in some instances necessary to preserve the freedom of the collectivity. By now it should come as no surprise that de Beauvoir's account of our relations with others does not offer a solution which will either dissipate these tensions or reconcile them. Once again, ethics is necessary because these tensions are endemic to human social life. It is inconceivable to imagine a future in which individuals will not make opposing and irreconcilable choices, in which our projects will not compete with the projects of others, in which the diversity of our particular interests can be finally harmonized.

De Beauvoir locates the ambiguity inherent in our relations with others in the plurality of human consciousness, in the fact that though related to one another human beings are nevertheless separate from one another. Thus

although from an external perspective our situations are similarly conditioned by our finitude and mortality, as lived those situations are irreducibly different. From one perspective this irreducible difference and the conflict to which it often gives rise might make it appear that for each subject the existence of others appears as a threat to her own projects. De Beauvoir argues however that this perspective misunderstands the nature of freedom: 'to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my freedom'.[14] It is only insofar as there are others who, by exercising their freedom in projects disclose and transform the world, that there can be a world at all in relation to which the individual defines herself. Others therefore open out possibilities for us in relation to which or against which we define our possibilities.

But others can only open out our possibilities if they themselves can create their own possibilities, that is if their possibilities for transcendence are not frustrated by their situation. In The Ethics of Ambiguity de Beauvoir distinguishes two ways in which our undertakings may be frustrated by our situation. On the one hand we often confront natural obstacles and disasters as well as the ever-present risk of death. But these factors, cruel and contingent though they may be, are not limitations on our freedom. Rather they define our human condition. To the extent that we resign ourselves in the face of them and give up hope then we have failed to come to terms with that condition. On the other hand, because our freedom is exercised only in the context of relations with others, our undertakings can be frustrated by their refusal to recognise that freedom. 'Only man can be an enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs to him alone to confirm it in

14. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 91.

its existence, to recognize it in actual fact as a freedom'.[15] It is this situation which defines oppression which is therefore never 'natural' but always arises in the context of relations between subjects.

In the next section of this chapter I will discuss de Beauvoir's characterisation of oppression in more detail. Before turning to this however I want to make it clear exactly how de Beauvoir defines oppression in contradistinction to the ethical demand that we recognise the freedom of others. In the discussion so far I have indicated that de Beauvoir thinks that mutual recognition between subjects is not only possible but is also ethically required. This point will become clearer by a consideration of the way in which de Beauvoir is applying to the realm of ethics the insights of the master-slave dialectic.[16]

The master-slave dialectic traces the development of self-consciousness out of a confrontation between two subjects. The point of the dialectic is epistemological: knowledge requires self-knowledge of oneself as a rational being, but self-knowledge is only possible firstly in intersubjectivity, ultimately in knowledge of Spirit. In the initial stages of this confrontation the quest for self-knowledge or self-certainty takes the form of a desire in which each subject seeks to establish its own identity, that is gain recognition of itself as a subject, by attempting to appropriate or incorporate the other, that is annihilate the independent existence of the other. This mode of seeking self-certainty is contradictory however. A subject can only gain recognition from another whose existence is independent. The

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15. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 82.

16. My reading of the master-slave dialectic at this point is strongly influenced by the interpretations of Kojève, Hyppolite and Gadamer. Kojève's interpretation is of course the one that was available to de Beauvoir. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies, translated by P. Christopher Smith, (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1976); Jean Hyppolite, Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1974); Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (Cornell U.P., Ithaca, N.Y., 1980).

attempt to incorporate the other involves treating the other not as a subject but as a mere thing. But any independent subject will resist this attempt at incorporation. Desire thus becomes transformed into the life-and-death struggle in which each subject attempts to gain self-recognition by destroying the other. Again however the death of either subject will frustrate the desire for recognition. One cannot be recognised by a corpse. The attempt to achieve recognition thus results not in the death of the other but in the other's subjection. What is attractive to the masterly consciousness about the slave's subjection is its ambiguity. For it involves a simultaneous recognition and denial of the slave's subjectivity. On the one hand the slave is another subject but he is a subject who has agreed to become a thing for the other rather than risk death. The slave thus holds out the promise of recognition without the requirement that that recognition be reciprocated. For Hegel however this promise is an illusion. Recognition requires equality between subjects, but in the recognition of the slave the master gains recognition not from another subject but from a subordinate consciousness whose trepidation in the face of death shows that he attaches no value to self-certainty. The slave would rather live a life whose sole meaning is survival than risk life in the pursuit of value.

De Beauvoir's condemnation of oppression and her claim that freedom requires that we guarantee the freedom of others alludes to this idea that recognition cannot be achieved in relations of domination and subordination. What then is involved in genuine recognition? In brief remarks on love and friendship in both The Ethics of Ambiguity and The Second Sex de Beauvoir suggests that genuine recognition of the other requires an equality and symmetry between subjects. This involves renunciation of any attempt either to merge our subjectivity with that of the other or to subsume the other under our own projects. We affirm ourselves as subjects only by accepting the freedom and independence of

the other. Recognition therefore requires recognition of the otherness of the other, of their difference from ourselves:

> It is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes. Love is renunciation of all possession, of all confusion. One renounces being in order that there may be that being which one is not.[17]

De Beauvoir makes it clear in The Second Sex that although our relations with others cannot always involve such reciprocal recognition, love and friendship 'are assuredly man's highest achievement, and through that achievement he is to be found in his true nature', that is, as a being which in renouncing *mere being* also renounces possession.[18]

These remarks, in which de Beauvoir clearly indicates that reciprocal recognition is possible and requires simultaneous recognition of the other, as both like ourselves, as a transcendent subject, and as irreducibly other, make a rather sharp break from the ontology of Being and Nothingness. For while Sartre also acknowledges that self-consciousness only arises in the context of our relations with others, he explicitly precludes the possibility of mutual recognition between transcendent subjects. As Genevieve Lloyd has argued, for Sartre the self as revealed by the other is not the transcendent self of the for-itself which is always escaping towards its own possibilities.[19] It is rather being-for-others, a self experienced through the emotions in which I experience myself not as transcendent but as objectified by the Other. Although for Sartre the very structure of human consciousness means that I cannot ever become this object which I experience myself as being, relations with others are nevertheless a

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17. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 67.

18. de Beauvoir, S.S. p. 172.

19. Genevieve Lloyd, 'Masters, Slaves and Others', Radical Philosophy 34, Summer 1983. Special issue, Women, Gender and Philosophy. For Sartre's discussion of the Look, see B.N., pp. 252-282

perpetual struggle in which, in the Look, each subject either objectifies the other or tries to resist objectification by the other. In other words for Sartre de Beauvoir's ideal of mutual recognition by each subject of the other as a free being is not possible. As I have argued however it is this ideal which, for de Beauvoir, opens up the theoretical space for an analysis of oppression.

III. Authenticity, Bad Faith and Oppression

From the preceding analysis the requirements for autonomous agency should be reasonably clear. The authentic agent is the individual who seeks neither to evade nor overcome the fundamental ambiguity of the human situation, but rather accepts this ambiguity and wills the freedom of which it is a consequence. To will freedom or seek transcendence is to justify one's own existence through a disclosure of Being, that is to freely create or constitute oneself as a relation to the world and in so doing to confer meaning and value upon the world. In 'projects' which are the concrete realization of her freedom the authentic subject creates herself as a relation to the world by transcending the fixed givens of facticity, so opening up new future possibilities for herself. Further while the pursuit of these possibilities inevitably gives rise to conflict between individuals, our relations with others can only be authentic to the extent that, in mutual recognition, we guarantee their freedom as the condition of our own.

Such heroism however is not easy to sustain. If freedom must constantly be won we face every moment an existential choice between accepting freedom and its attendant anguish or, in 'bad faith', attempting to flee that anguish by refusing freedom. Although 'bad faith' can manifest itself in an infinite variety of ways, the chief characteristic of 'bad faith' is that it is an attempt to deny either the ambiguity of existence or the fact that consciousness exists only as 'lack'. Thus in 'bad faith' the subject attempts

to coincide with, rather than to disclose Being; rather than opening up possibilities for herself she attempts to foreclose them. For both Sartre and de Beauvoir the privileged zone of 'bad faith' is our relations with others. In this instance 'bad faith' involves an attempt to escape the struggle between subjects for recognition. The subject who is acting in 'bad faith' fails to resist the other's attempt to objectify him. He allows himself to be objectified by the other and identifies himself with the object to which the other has reduced him, that is, he becomes the Inessential Other against which the subject defines himself as the Essential One.

'Bad faith' in our relations with others is thus the supreme example of heteronomy or failure of ethical will. But whereas Sartre identifies every failure to achieve authentic subjectivity with 'bad faith', for de Beauvoir not all cases of failure to achieve autonomy are instances of 'bad faith'. For what the notion of 'bad faith' fails to explain is the phenomenon of systematic oppression, that is the case when the other systematically refuses my freedom and closes off my possibilities: when, instead of understanding that my freedom is the guarantee of his own, he sees my freedom only as a threat and limit to his own; when, instead of recognising me as a subject he permanently reduces me to the status of object or Inessential Other:

> ...my freedom, in order to fulfill itself, requires that it emerge into an open future: it is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future; but if, instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive moment, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain, if they keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing.[20]

For Sartre every time an individual loses his/her grip on transcendence it is because s/he has allowed it to happen. Thus every instance of subordination, limitation, failure of will, in relations with others is an

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20. de Beauvoir, E.A. pp.82-3.

instance of 'bad faith' on the part of the individual subject. Furthermore because the 'bad faith' of one or other of the parties in any encounter between subjects is unavoidable, there is no possibility of genuine reciprocity between subjects. By contrast for de Beauvoir failure to achieve transcendence cannot always be explained in terms of individual 'bad faith' but is often a function of certain forms of social relations which she characterises by means of the opposition Essential One/Inessential Other. Her use of this opposition is thus significantly different from Sartre's use of the same opposition.[21] While for Sartre it designates the structure of all of our individual relations with others, for de Beauvoir it comes into play when human relations are distorted by social relations of domination and subordination. I have tried to establish that it is because she upholds the ideal of genuine reciprocity that de Beauvoir's account of our relations with others is able to illuminate the phenomenon of structural oppression in a way that the Sartrean account of 'bad faith' cannot.

Section 2: Woman as Inessential and Absolute Other

De Beauvoir's analysis of women's situation works by playing off against each other the two notions of the other which I have identified so far. Her claim is that social relations between the sexes preclude mutual recognition between two free subjectivities. Rather these relations are structured as an ossified and asymmetrical opposition between Essential One and Inessential Other, an opposition in which one social group, men, are always the essential, transcendent subjects, while another, women, are permanently reduced to the status of the Inessential Other or object:

> Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of women is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures –

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21. This point is also made by Michèle Le Doeuff and Moira Gatens. Michèle Le Doeuff, 'Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism', translated by Colin Gordon, Ideology & Consciousness, no. 6, Autumn 1979, pp. 47-57; Moira Gatens, 'Feminism, Philosophy and Riddles without Answers' in Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory, ed. by Elizabeth Gross & Carole Pateman, (Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1986).

> nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment?[22]

This curtailment of freedom in social relations is mirrored and reinforced by, and also helps set up, a series of constraints on women's ability to exercise their freedom in 'projects'. These constraints, which are variously legal, economic, historical, physical, psychological and so on, are such that they close off to women the social space required for transcendence or autonomy. Much of The Second Sex is taken up with making visible and documenting these coercive social structures which foreclose women's options. However while many of de Beauvoir's insights into the workings of these structures are startling, my discussion of her analysis of women's situation will focus more on her account of the way in which the two main aspects of oppression – the structure of social relations between the sexes and the foreclosing to women of the social space in which freedom is exercised – work to structure women's psyches and bodies in particular ways.

As Michèle Le Doeuff has argued, de Beauvoir's analysis of women's oppression takes as its starting point the Sartrean account of consciousness as 'lack' and the critique of the notion of 'human nature' which follows from it.[23] If consciousness exists only as possibility, that is as 'a being whose existence posits its essence', then human consciousness and its possibilities cannot be defined prior to the specific determinations that arise out of

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22. de Beauvoir, S.S. p. 29.

23. Michèle Le Doeuff, *op. cit.*

existence in the world. Some of these determinations are inescapable – the contingent givens of 'facticity'. But 'facticity' only defines the limits of our possibilities, it does not determine them. As a consequence the curtailment of women's freedom cannot be explained or justified by reference to 'women's nature'. But if this is true what de Beauvoir's analysis needs to account for is how oppression can foreclose the possibilities of a free being in such a way that that being becomes unfree. In other words she needs to explain how and why women come to submit to their oppression. De Beauvoir oscillates between two different answers to this question, answers which are often in tension with one another. The first answer explains how oppression becomes 'naturalised' by being 'internalized'. The second answer is given in terms of the notion of 'bad faith'. In the following analysis I want to explain how de Beauvoir arrives at these answers but also to show how her analysis of 'internalization' is constrained by, but also reveals the limitations of, the Sartrean account of the subject as radical freedom from which it starts.

As we have seen, oppressive social relations arise when one social group fails to recognise the members of another group as free subjects and systematically closes off the possibilities of members of that group, that is when they regard the group as a whole or its individual members as 'objects'. De Beauvoir clusters a number of connected meanings around the term 'object'. The central meaning is that when a person is regarded by the other as a mere object she is regarded as a being who lacks the freedom, the capacity and the will for self-determination and for autonomous choice. She is regarded as a being the meaning of whose existence is overdetermined by her facticity, rather than a being able to transcend facticity and to exercise her freedom in self-chosen projects. Spelt out less abstractly, oppressive social relations turn an individual into an object for the other because the mere fact that she is a woman, or black, or poor, or all

three, is seen as an inherent obstacle to her capacities. A more insidious aspect of oppression than this however is the way in which certain characteristics of the oppressed group, characteristics which arise as a result of and in response to oppression – that is, in response to being treated by the other as an 'object', in response to severely restricted social opportunities – come to be seen as 'natural', inescapable facts which are then used to explain and justify the social relations from which they arise. The central task of de Beauvoir's account of women's oppression, and this might also be considered one of the central tasks of feminism, is to 'denaturalize' or, to use Marx's phrase, to 'demystify' this situation, to show that these supposedly 'natural' facts about women are actually a product, rather than the cause of, certain forms of social relation.

But oppression cannot work if the oppressed refuse to identify with the oppressor's definition of themselves. Such refusal would signal the onset of hostilities between oppressor and oppressed. Oppression works best when the process of 'naturalizing' oppression actually structures both the oppressed's beliefs about themselves and their modes of relation to the world, that is when the oppressed constrain their own possibilities while believing that these possibilities are constrained by some natural, inescapable facts about themselves. In other words the hallmark of oppression is its invisibility to the oppressed.[24] This is why oppression gives rise to a cruel double bind. On the one hand, the social relations between the sexes and the coercive mechanisms which simultaneously enforce and give rise to those social relations make it very difficult for women to achieve autonomy or transcendence. On the other hand, women's failure to achieve transcendence has been rationalized, even by

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24. Bernard Williams, in his article 'The Idea of Equality' expands some of these insights into a philosophical defence of the ideal of equality. Bernard Williams, 'The Idea of Equality' in H. Bedau (ed.) Justice and Equality (Prentice-Hall, 1971).

women themselves, as a failure arising from natural incapacity or natural constraints:

> Many of the faults for which women are reproached - mediocrity, laziness, servility simply express the fact that their horizon is closed. It is said that woman is sensual, she wallows in immanence; but she has first been shut up in it.[25]

It is clear that de Beauvoir's attempt to account for the phenomenon of internalization puts a great deal of pressure on the Sartrean account of consciousness from which both her ethics and her feminism start. For from my earlier discussion of Sartre it should be clear that this idea of 'internalization' cannot be explained by a Sartrean account of our relations with others, nor can it be expressed within the language of 'bad faith'. For Sartre, although the other can regard me as an object and although I can experience myself as an object for the other I can never actually become an object for myself. Even in 'bad faith' when I allow the other to limit my possibilities, this is ultimately just a pretence; my subjectivity is always transcending itself towards its own possibilities. However de Beauvoir's recognition of 'internalization' as a psychological phenomenon which structures women's relation to the world and to others requires that women do not just play at being the Inessential Other, they actually become inessential, that is, they become objects even for themselves. In fact, according to de Beauvoir, the result of oppression is that women are both subjects and objects for themselves simultaneously. This analysis raises two questions. Firstly, what exactly does de Beauvoir mean by saying that the oppressed person is both subject and object for herself? Secondly, how does de Beauvoir reconcile her conclusion with the Sartrean premise that consciousness is a being continually surpassing itself toward its own future possibilities?

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25. de Beauvoir, S.S. p. 614.

In answer to the first question, de Beauvoir seems to understand the process of 'internalization' as a kind of psychic alienation which alienates women from their subjectivity. 'Internalization' is a process of becoming for oneself less than an autonomous human subject, becoming for oneself an 'object'. As I will argue in more detail in the next chapter, for de Beauvoir this process of becoming for oneself an object is of necessity a process which takes hold in and through a person's body and body-image. A person becomes an object for herself when she experiences her body as alien to her subjectivity, rather than as the direct expression of her subjectivity.[26] But what is this subjectivity from which woman is alienated? In answering this question we can see how de Beauvoir's account of oppression, though it clearly marks a break from the Sartrean account of consciousness, also remains within the orbit of Sartre's views – thus answering the second question raised above. For de Beauvoir the subjectivity from which woman is alienated is the human subject as sexually undifferentiated freedom. This subject, the consciousness which is always surpassing itself toward its own future possibilities, exists prior to and in some sense outside of the social relations of domination and subordination. Thus as her dictum 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' indicates, de Beauvoir wants to say that women's subjectivity is constructed in and by relations of power; but she also wants to posit a residual, sexually indifferent subjectivity which somehow escapes the determinations of power.[27] On the one hand this enables her to give an

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26. Sandra Lee Bartky's theory of psychological oppression, as we saw in Chapter One, is an elaboration of this conception of 'internalization' as alienation.

27. More recent analyses of the operations of power, such as that of Foucault, have questioned this notion of a residual subjectivity that somehow escapes the determinations of power. See especially Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley, (Vintage Books, Random House, NY 1980); Power/Knowledge, edited by Colin Gordon, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1980) ; Discipline and Punish, translated by Alan Sheridan, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1982). According to Foucault, the subject is not alienated from him or her self by oppression but is rather constituted as a subject within and by the network of practices through which power operates. Applying this analysis to the situation

account of resistance, which is understood as the revolt of a free subject against the forces which work to cut her off from her freedom. On the other hand it requires an analysis of complicity as a form of 'bad faith'. More disturbingly, as I shall argue in the next chapter, the tensions within de Beauvoir's account of women's embodiment also reveal that de Beauvoir's dream of a sexually undifferentiated human subject is actually premised on a masculine conception of the subject.

De Beauvoir argues that women become objects even for themselves not just because their possibilities are foreclosed by social relations and structures of domination and subordination but also because they are actually complicit with their oppression. Not only do women just accept men's constructions of the world and of themselves, they actually go about turning themselves into the creatures that men expect them to be. Another way of putting this would be to say that women turn femininity into a project; they make the sorts of choices that, instead of aiming towards transcendence, actually close off their own possibilities. As de Beauvoir details in 'Justifications', Part VI of The Second Sex, in their dreams of romantic love, in their own narcissistic preoccupation with their appearances, in their various rejections of rationality, women turn themselves into 'objects' and so systematically give up their claim to be regarded as autonomous subjects.

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of women it might be argued that there is no residual sexually undifferentiated subjectivity which escapes the operations of power. Rather within patriarchal social relations subjects are always already sexually differentiated subjects whose subjectivity is bound up with their sex in such a way that the one cannot be extricated from the other. In other words, as Marilyn Frye has argued, patriarchal social relations require a rigid sexual dimorphism in which subjectivity is only intelligible as sexually differentiated subjectivity; to be a subject is necessarily to be a sexed subject. See Marilyn Frye, 'Sexism' in The Politics of Reality (The Crossing Press, 1983). While I find Foucault's suggestion that subjects are constituted within and by relations of power illuminating, my concern is that the individual subject of experience tends to disappear in his account of the operations of power, as well as in his notion of 'resistance'. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that it is important for feminism to provide an adequate account of women as subjects of experience. Some interesting appraisals of the implications of Foucault's work for feminism can be found in some of the articles in Irene Diamond & Lee Quinby (eds.) Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, (Northeastern U.P., Boston, 1988). In the Introduction to Part IV I provide somewhat different reasons for rejecting the idea of a sexually neutral subjectivity.

While the phenomenon of complicity certainly presents a challenge to any theory of oppression, the problem with de Beauvoir's analysis is that, because she retains the Sartrean notion of subjectivity as radical freedom, she has to explain complicity as a question of 'choice', that is as a question of women's collective 'bad faith': 'If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change'.[28] This analysis thus undercuts what de Beauvoir gains by transforming the individualist Sartrean Essential One/Inessential Other distinction into an account of social relations of domination and subordination. De Beauvoir's claim is that although it is true that women are oppressed, they have furthered their own oppression because complicity is easier than the arduous task of resisting oppression and accepting responsibility for one's own freedom. In 'bad faith' women have sought to escape this responsibility by simply accepting the world as men present it to them, rather than asserting their own subjectivities and so creating value. Even so-called 'feminine' values are masculine constructions which have served simply to further women's oppression: 'In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is man who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, has invented that divergence'.[29] The question that needs to be asked however is why women's 'bad faith' takes this rather than the reverse form. Why is it men rather than women who have set themselves up as transcendent subject?

In the next chapter I will show that, despite its productivity for an analysis of oppression, de Beauvoir's ideal of autonomy actually commits her to the view that the only values worth having are masculine values. That is to say, one reason why women have accepted the world as men present it to them is because the only thing that really differentiates them from men,

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28. de Beauvoir, S.S. p. 19.

29. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 96.

namely their bodies, cannot actually be sources of value at all. Thus it looks as though women's 'bad faith' is an inevitable outcome of their facticity. Before turning to this argument however I want to examine de Beauvoir's third use of the category of the other – as designating the Absolute Other. Here de Beauvoir uses the notion of 'bad faith' in a surprising and illuminating way to condemn man's role as oppressor.

The experience of alterity, de Beauvoir suggests, is an inescapable feature of consciousness: in its relationship both with the world and with others consciousness is defined as a being which exists at a distance from itself, it is a being whose mode of existence is to be other than itself. This alienation manifests itself in the ambiguity of the human situation. Human beings are both part of nature, yet distanced from it; death represents an absolute limit to our possibilities, yet it is only our awareness of death that enables us to constitute life as meaningful; it is only in relation to others that our freedom is defined, yet our relations with others are necessarily conflictual, and so on. De Beauvoir's suggestion seems to be that the category of the Absolute Other is a projection of our anguish in the face of this ineradicable alterity and the ambiguity which is its consequence. We attempt to escape ambiguity by projecting it onto the Absolute Other, we define ourselves as transcendence of the Absolute Other which we posit, but this Other can also be the repository of our hopes and ideals. In short, the Absolute Other is whatever the subject is not, whatever he hopes to escape or whatever he aspires towards. As such, the category of the Absolute Other is dialectically necessary to the subject who posits it.

De Beauvoir's claim is that while many signifiers have been used to represent the Absolute Other, the signifier 'Woman' is privileged among them as 'the material representation of alterity'.[30] 'Woman' is a signifier

30. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p.211.

which represents whatever fear, desire, hope, ideal it is the projection of. This is why, as de Beauvoir shows, 'Woman' can support so many contradictory predicates and why 'femininity' gets defined as essentially mysterious and contradictory. Understood in this third sense de Beauvoir's employment of the notion of the Other is thus closely aligned with the way in which the category of the Other has been understood in those feminisms strongly influenced by Derridean deconstruction.[31] But although the signifier 'Woman' is referentially ambiguous, the problem for women is that 'Woman' is a masculine construction by means of which men seek to define and limit women. Rather than recognizing women as free subjectivities, men compel women to live out their own myths of 'femininity'. The motivation for this is 'bad faith'. What men seek in condemning women to the status of Absolute Other is what the masterly consciousness seeks from the slave – non-reciprocal recognition from a being who will mediate for him his ambiguous relationship to the world and to others: '...caught between the silence of nature and the demanding presence of other free beings, a creature who is at once his like and a passive thing becomes a great treasure'.[32] By identifying women with the Absolute Other, men therefore simultaneously affirm and deny women's

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31. Here I am thinking particularly of Michèle Le Doeuff's reflections on women and the metaphor of femininity in the context of her analyses of the philosophical imaginary. Le Doeuff's readings of the way in which the metaphor of femininity functions in certain philosophical discourses are an elaboration of de Beauvoir's point that 'femininity' as myth or metaphor is dialectically necessary to those systems of signification which define themselves in opposition to it. See Michèle Le Doeuff, L'Imaginaire Philosophique (Paris, Payot 1980). Kristeva's view that the 'feminine' designates a position of critical marginality with respect to phallocentric discourses also echoes this view. See especially her articles reprinted in E. Marks & I. de Courtivron (eds.) New French Feminisms (Harvester Press, 1981): 'Woman Can Never Be Defined', pp. 137-41; 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial', pp. 165-7. See also 'Women's Time', pp. 187-213 in Toril Moi (ed.) The Kristeva Reader, (Columbia U.P., N.Y., 1986) and 'Talking About Polylogue' in Toril Moi (ed.) French Feminist Thought: A Reader, (Blackwell, 1987). See also Jacques Derrida, 'Choreographies: An Interview with Christie V. McDonald', Diacritics, 12, pp. 66-76.

32. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 739.

subjectivity; women become both subject and object, the other but the other who can be possessed:

> Treasure, prey, sport and danger, nurse, guide, judge, mediatrix, mirror, woman is the other in whom the subject transcends himself without being limited, who opposes him without denying him; she is the other who lets herself be taken without ceasing to be the other, and therein she is so necessary to man's happiness and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have invented her...They did invent her. But she exists also apart from their inventiveness. And hence she is not only the incarnation of their dream, but also its frustration.

In other words:

> '...woman is necessary in so far as she remains an Idea into which man projects his own transcendence; but...she is inauspicious as an objective reality existing in and for herself'.[33]

It is because women are free subjectivities who resist or subvert in various ways as well as comply with these myths, that coercive social structures limiting their possibilities are necessary.

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33. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 218.

Chapter Three

WOMEN, TRANSCENDENCE AND THE FEMALE BODY[1]

> 'Her body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world, it must not be the promise of things other than itself: it must end the desire it arouses'.[2]

According to de Beauvoir, the opposition which, in addition to that between Subject and Other, quintessentially characterises the ambiguity of the human situation, is the duality of body and consciousness. Characteristically, de Beauvoir regards this duality as irreducible. She thus rejects both mentalist and materialist explanations of the mind/body relation. In fact her position, like that of Merleau-Ponty, reverses the order of priority of Cartesian interactionism. Human beings are not essentially a *res cogitans* somehow conjoined to a *res extensa* . Rather, existence is necessarily embodied existence. Our bodies define our situation in the world; consciousness is a relation to the world from a particular bodily perspective: 'To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards this world'.[3]

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1. My argument in this chapter builds upon an earlier discussion of de Beauvoir which is published in my article entitled 'Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophy and/or the Female Body', in E. Gross & C. Pateman (eds.) Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory, (Allen & Unwin, Sydney; Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1986). My later formulation of this argument in this chapter is however indebted to Iris Young's critique of the distinction, within existential phenomenology, between the body as transcendent and the body as immanent. See Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Subjectivity and the Limits of Existential Phenomenology' in Don Ihde & Hugh J. Silverman, (eds.) Descriptions (State University of New York Press, Albany N.Y. 1985).

2. de Beauvoir, S.S. p. 189.

3. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 39.

This duality of body and consciousness entails, according to de Beauvoir, that the significance of the body itself is also fundamentally ambiguous. On the one hand, as a material 'thing' the body is continuous with the rest of the natural world. Hence it is subject to causal laws and represents merely one moment in the life of the species. Considered as such the body is pure immanence. On the other hand, as the perspective of an individual consciousness, the body is the concrete expression of that individuality, the instrumentality of the will. It is with this transcendent body that the subject undertakes projects and interacts with others. The ambiguity of embodiment means therefore that while our bodily situations and capacities limit our possibilities they also open out possibilities for us.

But if the body defines our situation then it becomes sensible to ask whether sexually different bodies perceive the world from different perspectives, whether they limit or open out different possibilities for the embodied subject. This question is perhaps the motivating question of The Second Sex, and de Beauvoir's answer to it is affirmative. Her claim is that the perspectives and possibilities made available by women's embodiment are not only different from those made available by men's embodiment but also drastically more limited. But the reasons for her answer are not clear. In fact she seems to give several complex and interesting, but ultimately incompatible, reasons for this answer.

This chapter is an attempt to disentangle these reasons as well as to show how the tensions within de Beauvoir's account of women's embodiment reveal difficulties with her understanding of autonomous agency. My argument is that at least two different reasons for de Beauvoir's answer can be discerned in The Second Sex. The first explains women's different bodily perspectives and possibilities in terms of their oppression and suggests that if women were not socially subordinate then their embodiment would not be experienced as so much more limiting than men's. The second reason

seems to ground the limitation of women's embodiment not just in their oppression but also in their reproductive capacities. I want to show that although these two answers are incompatible they both arise from the distinction between the body as immanent and the body as transcendent. What makes a feminist appropriation of this distinction problematic is that the very ideal of the transcendent body is defined in opposition to the reproductive body. This becomes clear when we disentangle the connection between de Beauvoir's characterisation of the female body and the Hegelian distinction between life and self-consciousness which she appropriates in order to articulate the ideal of transcendence.

I. Oppression and the 'Female' Body as Immanence

De Beauvoir's analysis of women's bodily situation is crucial to the success of her argument against women's social subordination. She is explicit that one of the main ways in which this subordination has been naturalized is by recourse to the supposed 'facts' of female biology, which are said to explain women's passivity and dependence, and which bind women to the care of children. This is why woman's 'body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence'. In order to counter this view, de Beauvoir needs to show three things. Firstly she needs to show that women's bodies, like the bodies of men, are transcendent bodies. That is, she needs to disconnect women's subjectivities and their bodies from this image of the female body as inherently immanent. Secondly she needs to show why this conception of the female body as immanent is instrumental in maintaining women's oppression. Thirdly, she needs to explain why this connection is so readily made, why it is that women's bodies are 'not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality'.

De Beauvoir undertakes the first two tasks concurrently by means of a series of phenomenological descriptions of women's lived experience of their bodies. These descriptions, which occupy most of Parts IV and V of The Second Sex, begin with the young girl's experience of her body in childhood and then proceed to characterise the way in which that experience changes from puberty through sexual initiation, marriage, motherhood and old age. De Beauvoir's central argument, which emerges during the course of these descriptions, is that the process of becoming a woman is a process of coming to experience one's body less and less as transcendent and more and more as signifying immanence. In early childhood, she claims, girls as well as boys experience their bodies as transcendent, as 'the instrument that makes possible the comprehension of the world'.[4] This experience of the body is primarily neither sexual nor sexually differentiated; the body is rather experienced by both sexes primarily as a motility in which the child is not aware of his/her body as a physical thing. While this experience of the body continues in some ways for girls until puberty, it is simultaneous with an increasing awareness of their bodies as sexually marked bodies, that is as passive 'objects'.

De Beauvoir is explicit that this experience of the body as passive object arises as a result of women's situation, in particular as a result of their differential treatment which begins in early infancy. Although both sexes experience the loss of unity with the maternal body at the mirror-stage,[5]

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4. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 295.

5. De Beauvoir's discussion here refers to Lacan's analysis of the mirror-stage as crucial in the formation of the ego. According to Lacan, the child first experiences its body as fragmentary, a body in 'bits and pieces'. The constitution of the ego requires the formation of a unified body-image. This occurs for Lacan when the infant identifies its body with an 'object', paradigmatically with its own reflection in a mirror, or in the gaze of the mother. Identification of itself with this object is an attempt by the infant to regain its lost unity with the maternal body. See Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience.' in Ecrits: A Selection, translated by Alan Sheridan (Tavistock, London, 1977).

later experiences of separation are more and more marked for boys because mothers withdraw their physical affections from boys more quickly than they do from girls. De Beauvoir's claim is that this differential treatment begins the girl's experience of passivity because it extends the girl's identification with the maternal body for far longer than the boy is able to identify himself with the mother.[6] As childhood progresses, this differential treatment becomes more and more marked. The girl is directed towards passivity, especially by her mother; she is given dolls, taught to become aware of her appearance and manner, and discouraged from participating in active pursuits and developing her strength. Thus while the boy becomes 'aware of his body as a means for dominating nature and as a weapon for fighting'[7], the girl, by contrast, rather than seeing her body as instrument, is taught to make herself and her body into an object. This difference is reinforced by everything around her: by educational differences, by literature and other representational media, by the structure of the family, by her awareness that she is destined for motherhood and child-bearing, all of which teach her that power and transcendence are the privilege of the male sex. As a result, by the time the child reaches puberty, she 'feels that her body is getting away from her, it is no longer the straightforward expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same time she becomes for others a thing: on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show her flesh'.[8]

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6. More recently Nancy Chodorow has of course developed this psychoanalytic insight into an explanation of the differential psychic development of boys and girls. See Nancy Chodorow; The Reproduction of Mothering, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978).

7. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 305.

8. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 333.

However de Beauvoir also seems to suggest that the differences between male and female anatomy conspire to reinforce these socially-produced differences. For instance she seems to accept the weight given by psychoanalysis to the difference between the visibility of the male penis and the invisibility of the female vagina.[9] Thus she claims that the difference in the structure of their sexual organs encourages the boy's experience of his body as transcendent and the girl's experience of hers as immanent. This is because the very visibility of the penis means that it can become for the boy not only a plaything and compensation for the lost maternal object, but also an objective expression of his subjectivity, an *alter ego*. By this means even bodily acts like urinating, in which the body seems most thing-like, can become a means for transcendence – hence those competitions between little boys to see who can urinate the furthest. By contrast, the invisibility of the girl's vagina, the fact that it is inside her body, means both that she is 'from the start much more opaque to her own eyes, more profoundly immersed in the obscure mystery of life, than is the male' and that 'the little girl cannot incarnate herself in any part of herself'.[10] Instead she identifies herself with a passive substitute like a doll which she sees as both her whole self but also as an external object. This simply reinforces the child's narcissism, unlike the penis which directs attention away from the self, so accounting for the precocious narcissism of little girls and its tendency to remain throughout women's adult life.

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9. Juliet Mitchell argues that de Beauvoir's interpretation of psychoanalysis misreads Freud in a crudely determinist way, and that her account of the psychical significance of sex differences is derived mainly from the conservative woman psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch. See Juliet Mitchell, 'Simone de Beauvoir: Freud and the Second Sex' in Part Two, Section II of Psychoanalysis and Feminism, (Penguin, 1975). I tend to agree with Mitchell on this point, but my interest here is mainly in the philosophical use to which de Beauvoir puts her reading of psychoanalysis.

10. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* p. 306.

Now de Beauvoir makes it clear that it is not this anatomical difference *per se* which gives rise to the difference between the girl's and the boy's experiences of their bodies, but rather the social significance of that difference, the fact that the penis is a symbol of a socially valorized masculinity. Thus the girl experiences her body as immanent because it is a socially devalued body. At the same time however de Beauvoir's characterisations of the girl's body as 'more profoundly immersed in the obscure mystery of life' suggests that she also gives some credence to the idea that the female body is inherently more immanent than the male body. This ambivalence is particularly evident in some of de Beauvoir's descriptions of women's lived experiences of menstruation, sexuality, pregnancy and maternity. There are passages for instance which characterise female sexuality as at once passive and voracious, passages which claim that the female body is an hysterical body, passages which describe menstruation as a heavy burden, humiliating and shameful, and passages which describe pregnancy and maternity as alienation – the obliteration of the individual by the demands of the species. This point is illustrated quite graphically in the four passages from different parts of The Second Sex which I cite below.

The first passage describes the young girl's experiences of menstruation, which de Beauvoir calls 'the untidy event that is repeated each month':

> There are children who weep for hours when they realize that they are condemned to this fate. And what strengthens their revolt still further is the knowledge that this shameful blemish is known also to men; they would prefer at least that their humiliating feminine condition might remain shrouded in mystery for males. But no; father, brothers, cousins, all the men know, and even joke about it sometimes. Here disgust at her too fleshly body arises or is exacerbated in the girl. And though the first surprise is over, the monthly annoyance is not similarly effaced; at each recurrence the girl feels again the same disgust at this flat and stagnant odour emanating from her – an odour of the swamp, of wilted violets –

> disgust at this blood, less red, more dubious, than that which flowed from her childish abrasions.[11]

The second passage is an account of the girl's experience of the body at puberty:

> Apprehended through this complaining and passive flesh, the whole universe seems a burden too heavy to bear. Overburdened, submerged, she becomes a stranger to herself because she is a stranger to the rest of the world. Syntheses break down, moments of time are no longer connected, other people are recognized but absent-mindedly; and if reasoning and logic remain intact, as in melancholia, they are put to the service of emotional manifestations arising from a state of organic disorder.[12]

The third passage is an account of the difference between men's and women's experiences of their genitalia:

> The sex organ of a man is simple and neat as a finger; it is readily visible and often exhibited to comrades with proud rivalry; but the feminine sex organ is mysterious even to the woman herself, concealed, mucous, and humid, as it is; it bleeds each month, it is often sullied with body fluids, it has a secret and perilous life of its own. Woman does not recognize herself in it, and this explains in large part why she does not recognize its desires as hers. These manifest themselves in an embarrassing manner. Man 'gets stiff', but woman 'gets wet'; in the very word there are childhood memories of bed-wetting, of guilty and involuntary yielding to the need to urinate. Man feels the same disgust at involuntary nocturnal emissions; to eject a fluid, urine or semen, does not humiliate: it is an active operation; but it is humiliating if the liquid flows out passively, for then the body is no longer an organism with muscles, nerves, sphincters, but is rather a vessel, a container, composed of inert matter and but the plaything of capricious mechanical forces. If the body leaks – as an ancient wall or a dead body may leak – it seems to liquefy rather than to eject fluid: a horrid decomposition.
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> Feminine sex desire is the soft throbbing of a mollusc. Whereas man is impetuous, woman is only impatient; her

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11. de Beauvoir, *op.cit.* pp. 337-8.

12. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 353.

> expectation can become ardent without ceasing to be passive; man dives upon his prey like the eagle and the hawk; woman lies in wait like the carnivorous plant, the bog, in which insects and children are swallowed up. She is absorption, suction, humus, pitch and glue, a passive influx, insinuating and viscous: thus, at least, she vaguely feels herself to be.[13]

The final passage is an account of how, according to de Beauvoir, women experience pregnancy and maternity:

> The transcendence of the artisan, of the man of action, contains the element of subjectivity; but in the mother-to-be the antithesis of subject and object ceases to be; she and the child with which she is swollen make up together an equivocal pair overwhelmed by life. Ensnared by nature, the pregnant woman is plant and animal, a store-house of colloids, an incubator, an egg; she scares children who are proud of their young, straight bodies and makes young people titter because she is a human being, a conscious and free individual, who has become life's passive instrument.
>
> Ordinarily life is but a condition of existence; in gestation it appears as creative; but that is a strange kind of creation which is accomplished in a contingent and passive manner...With her ego surrendered, alienated in her body and in her social dignity, the mother enjoys the comforting illusion of feeling that she is a human being *in herself, a value.*
>
> But this is only an illusion. For she does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her; her flesh engenders flesh only...Creative acts originating in liberty establish the object as value and give it the quality of the essential; whereas the child in the maternal body is not thus justified; it is still only a gratuitous cellular growth, a brute fact of nature as contingent on circumstances as death and corresponding philosophically with it.[14]

It will become clear a bit later why I have quoted these passages at such length. But what seems to emerge from these descriptions are a number of recurring motifs. These are that the female body is passive, that it is

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13 de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 407.

14 de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* pp. 512-14.

experienced by women as a burden that stands between them and their individuality and that it subjects women to the demands of nature. Thus, unlike man's body which he experiences primarily as transcendent, the female body is experienced by women mostly as immanence.

The question we need to address then is this. How can these motifs be reconciled with de Beauvoir's analysis of oppression? I want to argue that de Beauvoir's text presents us with two answers to this question. The first answer also provides the first reason for her answer to the question posed at the outset, namely the question of why women's embodiment opens up more limited perspectives and possibilities than men's embodiment. This answer is suggested by some fairly explicit instructions de Beauvoir gives as to how we should interpret passages like those which I have just quoted. They are, she says, accounts of how women experience their own bodies as a result of oppression. Thus in her discussion of menstruation she says:

> In a sexually equalitarian society, woman would regard menstruation simply as her special way of reaching adult life; the human body in both men and women has other and more disagreeable needs to be taken care of, but they are easily adjusted to because, being common to all, they do not represent blemishes for anyone; the menses inspire horror in the adolescent girl because they throw her into an inferior and defective category. This sense of being declassed will weigh heavily upon her. She would retain her pride in her bleeding body if she did not lose her pride in being human.[15]

In other words, these descriptions, far from proving problematic for de Beauvoir's analysis of oppression, in fact provide powerful proof of women's oppression. What they show is that oppression constructs women's subjectivity by marking the body as a passive, sexual object. The oppressed subject comes to see herself as object because she experiences her own body as an object, as a physical thing, rather than as transcendent. As a result of oppression her body is not just an object for others, but an object for

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15. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 340.

herself. Thus although she is a subject she becomes an object for herself because she does not experience her body as the instrumentality of her will, but rather as the plaything of forces over which she has no control. This analysis explains my claim in Chapter Two that for de Beauvoir the oppressed person is both subject and object for herself because she experiences her body as alien to her subjectivity.

It could also be argued that the phenomenological experiences which de Beauvoir describes are symptoms of rebellion. The girl's disgust at the smell of menstrual blood, the fact that her vaginal emissions provoke in her an experience of abjection,[16] are her means of revolt against her oppression. In other words, since she has no other means of fighting her situation, her distress with the passivity to which she is condemned manifests itself in a self-destructive disgust at her own body. This analysis of de Beauvoir would place her much closer to contemporary psychoanalytic feminist interpretations of such 'feminine' disorders as anorexia and hysteria than is often credited.[17]

This interpretation is certainly supported by a strong strand of thought in The Second Sex. It also conforms to the explicit logic of the text, namely the logic of existence preceding essence. Moreover if this interpretation of de

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16 In Powers of Horror Kristeva characterises abjection as a feeling of disgust at the incorporated/expelled object (food, faeces, vomit, menstrual blood etc.). According to Kristeva this disgust both signals the subject's recognition, and protects it from the recognition, that the expelled object is never fully expelled. Rather, it is 'something rejected from which one does not part' (p.4), reminding the subject of its corporeality and threatening its stability and unity. Abjection is caused by whatever 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, systems, rules' (*ibid*). See Julia Kristeva; Powers of Horror, translated by Leon Roudiez, (Columbia U.P., N.Y. 1982). For a brief outline of Kristeva's account of abjection see Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions, (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989).

17 For an example see Grosz' analysis of the case of Dora, pp. 134-9 in Sexual Subversions, *op. cit.*

Beauvoir's analysis shows that not only is gender a cultural construct, so too is sexual difference.[18] Just as there is no necessary connection between women and the myths of femininity, so too there is no necessary connection between women as transcendent or autonomous subjects and the immanent 'female' or 'feminine' body. Like 'femininity', the 'female' body is itself just a cultural artifact. Men's and women's bodies are equally subject to bodily processes and they are equally both the expression of a free individuality and mere moments in the perpetuation of the species. It is the cultural construction of femininity alone that signifies woman's body as immanent in its relation to reproduction and to its bodily functions. Thus, once women are given the space to exercise their autonomy, women's bodies will no longer be seen as 'feminine' bodies, that is, as bodies sunk in immanence. Rather they will be both perceived and experienced as the expression of a sexually undifferentiated and transcendent subjectivity.

While I think that de Beauvoir is certainly making a claim such as this she also seems to suggest that the connection between women and the immanent 'female body' is not completely arbitrary. Rather it is insofar as women's bodies are reproductive bodies that they are connected with this immanent 'female body'. This is the second reason for her answer to the question posed at the outset, namely that women's bodies open out fewer possibilities than men's bodies because they are reproductive bodies. Thus, in the passages I quoted above, it is insofar as she experiences her body as a reproductive body, that woman feels alienated from herself.

The problem is that on de Beauvoir's analysis the 'female' or 'feminine' body has become a metaphor for immanence or heteronomy – explaining the rather disturbing similarity between some of de Beauvoir's

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18. Judith Butler argues this case in her article 'Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir and Wittig' in Benhabib, S & Cornell, D. (eds.) Feminism as Critique (Cornell University Press, 1987).

phenomenological descriptions and Sartre's holes and slime metaphors of Being and Nothingness.[19] This is why the images de Beauvoir uses to describe this body are images which associate it with nature at its most inert; the 'female' body is 'fleshly', 'stagnant', swamp-like, 'mucous' and leaky like a dead body, smelling like 'wilted violets'; it is an 'involuntary' body. It is also why it is insofar as she experiences her body as a 'feminine' body that the young girl experiences it as shameful and humiliating. But if the 'female' body is a metaphor for immanence then on de Beauvoir's analysis reproduction can only ever be culturally signified as passivity, as immanence, which explains why she regards technological interventions into the reproductive process as essential for the liberation of women. Ironically, it also explains how de Beauvoir is able so successfully to criticize the patriarchal equation of women with their reproductive capacities. If reproduction signifies immanence, this gives added strength to the claim that women have been oppressed insofar as their possibilities have been seen to be limited to reproduction.

But de Beauvoir could argue that these two reasons explaining the limitations of women's embodiment are not as incompatible as I have suggested. In fact the idea that reproduction itself is limiting can be made compatible with the oppression thesis through the notion of 'facticity'. If it is a biological 'fact' that reproduction ties women more to the species than men, that their physiology renders their sexuality more passive and their bodies weaker than men's, then this is simply a question of 'facticity' and

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19 See Being and Nothingness, pp. 606-615. Some feminist interpreters of Sartre have argued that these metaphors do not render Sartre's whole philosophy irredeemably sexist because they function in his text merely as metaphors. See Christine Pierce and Margery Collins, 'Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis.' in Carol Gould & Marx Wartofsky (eds.); Women and Philosophy (Perigree, 1976). As I argued in the Introduction to this thesis, the idea that one can always distinguish the metaphorical aspects of philosophical texts from their conceptual content has been radically questioned by many recent writers, most notably by Jacques Derrida. Derrida's analysis aside, in what follows I intend to show that in The Second Sex the very notion of the body as transcendent is defined in opposition to the immanent reproductive body.

there is no point rebelling against it. What is important is the way we signify our facticity, and constitute ourselves as a transcendence of it. The rejection of oppression is a rejection of a particular way of signifying women's facticity. This is the second answer suggested by de Beauvoir's text to the question of how the passages cited above can be reconciled with her account of oppression. It is a neat answer. But it isn't satisfactory because the distinction between 'facticity' and 'value' is not quite as neutral as it appears. As I will show, neither is de Beauvoir's presentation of the biological 'facts'.

In the next section of this chapter I will argue that de Beauvoir's account of female biology is founded upon the oppositions between life and self-consciousness, and species and individual. These oppositions implicitly define transcendence or self-constitution in opposition to reproduction. Thus despite the fact that de Beauvoir manages to use the distinction between the body as immanent and the body as transcendent to illuminate women's oppression in a most remarkable way, the distinction itself is deeply problematic. My claim is that in de Beauvoir's text the ideal of the transcendent body is in fact premised upon a certain ideal of the masculine body which is defined in opposition to the reproductive 'female' body. Women's bodies can therefore only be 'the radiation of a subjective personality' to the extent that they do not signify reproduction.

II. Life, Self-Consciousness and the Transcendent Body

According to de Beauvoir, at a biological level the lives of both male and female individuals are to a certain extent subject to the dictates of the life of the species. As individual biological organisms they embody the species insofar as their individual lives maintain the species. And they are involved, or can be, in the reproduction of the species. But for de Beauvoir there is a crucial difference between man's subjection to the species and

woman's. Man's individuality is thoroughly integrated into the life of the species. He senses no contradiction between his own individual projects and the demands of the species. Woman's individuality, on the contrary, 'is opposed by the interest of the species; it is as if she were possessed by foreign forces – alienated'.[20]

At this same biological level, the genitalia and sexual experiences of male and female also differ. The penis is animated, a 'tool', the vagina an 'inert receptacle'.[21] For the male, although intercourse represents the transcendence of the individual towards the species, it is simultaneously 'an outward relation to the world and to others', and a confirmation of his own individuality. For the female, intercourse can only be 'an interior event', a renunciation of her individuality for the benefit of the species. The asymmetry between the single moment in which the male transcends himself towards the species in the ejaculation of sperm, and the lifelong servitude of the female to her offspring accounts for this difference. The result is:

> From puberty to menopause woman is the theatre of a play that unfolds within her and in which she is not personally concerned. Anglo-Saxons call menstruation 'the curse'; in truth the menstrual cycle is a burden and a useless one from the point of view of the individual...Woman, like man <u>is</u> her body; but her body is something other than herself.[22]

Now de Beauvoir presents 'the enslavement of the female to the species' as though it is a simple question of biological 'fact'.[23] Actually this

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20. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 54.

21. de Beauvoir, *ibid.*

22. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* pp. 60-61.

23 Recent feminist critiques of science and the philosophy of science have uncovered the extent to which some biological accounts of sex differences are structured on sexist assumptions about female sexuality. See for example Ruth Hubbard's article 'Have Only Men Evolved?' in Harding, Sandra & Hintikka, Merrill (eds.) <u>Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Ontology, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of Science</u> (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1983).

presentation of female biology is structured by a distinction between life and self-consciousness which derives from de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel's account of the origin of self-consciousness in the section of the Phenomenology entitled 'The Truth of Self-Certainty'.[24]

For Hegel, human self-consciousness is defined as transcendence of the natural world: the quest for self-consciousness is what lifts human existence out of the realm of the merely natural and into the realm of the spiritual. Transcendence of the natural world means transcendence of itself as a natural being: the quest for self-consciousness stands opposed to the desire for self-preservation – both of the individual and of the species in general. This is because self-consciousness arises when consciousness simultaneously recognizes itself merely as a moment in the life and death cycle and revolts against its immersion in this cycle. The attempt to achieve self-consciousness signals the refusal of the individual to identify its interests with the interests both of the species and of itself *qua* species-being. As such it signifies a recognition that human identity, unlike animal identity, is not to be found in mere Life, in the perpetual cycle of life and death – in which the species exists through the individual and the individual exists for the sake of the species. Rather, human self-consciousness asserts a value more important to it than life – its own value as self-consciousness, as individual.

It should now be clear why, for de Beauvoir, the body *qua* reproductive body signifies immanence and why reproduction alienates women from their individuality. If human self-consciousness defines itself in opposition to

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24. My account here is deliberately partial, concentrating only on those aspects of Hegel's discussion which are picked up by de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel, a reading which, as I mentioned earlier, is very much influence by Kojève. Paul Redding, in an as yet unpublished paper entitled 'Hermeneutic or Metaphysical Hegelianism? Kojève's Dilemma', has recently argued convincingly that Kojève's reading presents a very dualistic, metaphysical reading of Hegel.

the desire for self-preservation, and if consequently the interests of the individual must be defined in opposition to those of the species, then any bodily process which is associated with the maintenance and preservation of species-life seems to undermine the autonomous self-constitution of the individual subject. Such processes therefore cannot be represented as *activities* of an agent. Rather, they are merely passive *events* in nature, events in which the individual must submit unconsciously to the dictates of nature – explaining why, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, de Beauvoir denies such processes the status of projects:

> The woman who gave birth, therefore, did not know the pride of creation; she felt herself the plaything of obscure forces, and the painful ordeal of childbirth seemed a useless or even troublesome accident. But in any case giving birth and suckling are not *activities*, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence – she submitted passively to her biologic fate.[25]

This analysis also explains why, in the lengthy passage quoted above on the significance of pregnancy, the pregnant woman is 'ensnared by nature', she is 'plant and animal', 'life's passive instrument'.

What remains unexplained however is <u>why</u> self-consciousness is defined in opposition to the maintenance and preservation of life. Again de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel is relevant here, for she argues that human individuality defines itself only through conscious confrontation with death, through the real or metaphorical risk of life. As I argued in Chapter Two, for Hegel the attempt to give concrete content to self-consciousness requires intersubjective recognition which, in the life-and-death struggle, entails confrontation with the possibility of death. Although in the final outcome of the dialectic of lord and bondsman it is the servile consciousness who finally achieves true self-consciousness by externalizing

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25. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 94.

himself in labour, this outcome is only possible because the slave has lived through the fear of death and because 'in that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.'[26]

De Beauvoir uses this analysis both to define the ideal of transcendence and to explain the emergence of male supremacy:

> The warrior put his life in jeopardy to elevate the prestige of the horde, the clan to which he belonged. And in this he proved dramatically that life is not the supreme value for him, but on the contrary that it should be made to serve ends more important than itself. The worst curse that was laid upon woman was that she should be excluded from these warlike forays. For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to the sex which kills.
>
> Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive repetition of all value...[woman's] misfortune is to have been biologically destined for the repetition of Life, when even in her own view Life does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than life itself...
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> The female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species; and the human race has always sought to escape its specific destiny. The support of life became for man an activity and a project through the invention of the tool; but in maternity woman remained closely bound to her body, like an animal. It is because humanity calls itself in question in the matter of living– that is to say, values the reasons for living above mere life – that, confronting woman, man assumes mastery. Man's design is not to repeat himself in time: it is to take control of the instant and mould the future. It is male activity

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26 G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller, with an analysis of text and foreward by J.N. Findlay. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977), Part B, Section IV. A 'Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage', p. 117.

> that has prevailed over the confused forces of life; it has subdued Nature and Woman.[27]

What is to be made of this explanation? Its resemblance to contemporary sociobiological explanations has led some commentators to regard it as a deliberate non-explanation on de Beauvoir's part. Michèle Le Doeuff for instance argues that by acting as a non-explanation the purpose of this explanation is to show that women's oppression arises without reason, that it is completely arbitrary – hence this story of the origin of women's oppression is quite consistent with the oppression thesis.[28] I disagree. If my analysis of the way in which de Beauvoir's interpretation of male and female biology is structured by the oppositions between life and self-consciousness, and species and individual, is correct, then this passage is crucial for understanding de Beauvoir's views on the significance of women's embodiment. For it makes it clear why, oppression aside, women's bodies are not and cannot be perceived as 'the radiation of a subjective personality': because woman's body *qua* reproductive body or *qua* 'female' body not only signifies but immerses woman in 'Life' as repetition, against which transcendence as value is defined. But this in turn makes it clear that the distinction between the body as immanent and the body as transcendent is itself sexually marked. In the above passage, the reproductive body as immanence implicitly defines the ideal of the transcendent body. In contrast to the reproductive body which, in its passive functioning, dooms the subject to repetition and immerses her in nature, the transcendent body, by means of which the autonomous subject is able to surpass the brute givens of facticity, is a pure instrumentality of the will, an active body which surpasses itself as material thing. Clearly de

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27. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* pp. 94-6.

28. Michèle Le Doeuff; 'Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism', translated by Colin Gordon, I&C, no. 6, Autumn 1979, pp. 47-57.

Beauvoir is aware that no human body can always be transcendent; both male and female bodies are subject to processes which are beyond the voluntary control of the subject. Nevertheless the implicit contrast between the transcendent body and the reproductive body makes the reproductive 'female' body the paradigmatic metaphor of the body as passive and involuntary. By contrast, the transcendent body presupposes a certain idealized conception of the male body as a body which is, in principle at least, under the voluntary control of intellect and will.

This explains why de Beauvoir's appropriation of the distinction between the body as immanence and the body as transcendence to illuminate women's situation gives rise in her text to two incompatible accounts of the significance of women's embodiment. On the one hand, this distinction enables her to account for oppression as an experience in which, because she feels her body as alien to her subjectivity, as immanent, the oppressed subject is both subject and object for herself simultaneously. On the other hand, because the ideal of the body as transcendent is defined in opposition to the reproductive body, woman's body *qua* reproductive body will always be alien to her *qua* autonomous subject.

The implication of this argument is that de Beauvoir associates autonomous subjectivity with masculinity. I argued in the previous chapter that de Beauvoir's analysis of oppression posits a residual, sexually undifferentiated subjectivity which remains somehow untouched by the mechanisms of oppression and which is the locus of the subject's resistance to her oppression. We have also seen that there is an intimate connection between the notion of the autonomous subject and the ideal of the body as transcendence. The subject asserts herself as freedom in and through her body which, as transcendent, is the instrumentality of her will. But if the ideal of the transcendent body presupposes a masculine body then the human subject as freedom is not sexually undifferentiated at all. De

Beauvoir's residual subjectivity is in fact a masculine subjectivity. What this means is that women can only exercise their autonomy, in projects and in relations with others, to the extent that they transcend their bodies *qua* reproductive bodies. In other words, women can only be authentic subjects by denying the ethical significance of their sexually specific bodily perspectives. De Beauvoir makes this clear when she argues, in the passage on the emergence of male supremacy quoted above, that the value created by men deprives the reproductive body – which merely repeats rather than transcends Life – of all value: 'Woman aspires to and recognizes the values that are concretely attained by the male. He it is who opens up the future to which she also reaches out'.[29]

But how does all this square with de Beauvoir's claim that a genuinely ethical relation with others requires that we recognize the other in 'his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes'? How does it square with de Beauvoir's claim that ethics must start from the recognition that human beings are irreducibly plural? For from the preceding analysis it seems that de Beauvoir's conception of autonomous subjectivity requires a fundamental sameness of the human being which underlies and transcends sexual differentiation. Mutual recognition is a recognition of the otherness of the other only insofar as s/he is the same as me. I want to suggest that the problem with de Beauvoir's account of autonomous agency, and the reason why she is unable to incorporate within it a recognition of the differences between bodily perspectives, is that the distinction between the immanent and the transcendent body commits her to the view that transcendence, or autonomous agency, is achieved through an exertion of will by means of which the subject gains self-mastery by exercising control over his/her immanent body. But given this conception of autonomy it is

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29. de Beauvoir, *op. cit.* p. 96.

almost inevitable that women's bodily processes will be represented as passive, natural *events* and that women will appear as merely subject to these processes, rather than as active agents with respect to them.[30, 31]

My aim in Part II has been to uncover the source of the tensions in de Beauvoir's analysis of women's situation, between her insistence, on the one hand, on women's capacity for autonomy, and her representation, on the other hand, of women's bodies as obstacles to autonomy. I have shown that the source of this tension must be located in her implicit appeal to the distinction between the immanent and the transcendent body. The consequence of this appeal, for de Beauvoir's account of autonomous agency, is that, despite her awareness of the significance of embodiment, she ends up defining autonomy as an exertion of the will, (as embodied in the transcendent body), over the immanent, passive, material body.

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30 In Chapter 6 I will argue that this representation of women's bodily processes also informs much of the contemporary ethical debate over the issue of abortion. One of my arguments in that chapter is that an adequate appraisal of the moral issues raised by abortion requires a radical questioning both of this representation and of the idea that autonomous agency is associated with control over passive bodily processes by the active will.

31. I want to make it clear at this point that my argument in this thesis does not deny the importance for women of self-determination with respect to the reproductive process, nor does it deny the significance of some technological developments – especially in the area of contraception – in increasing women's capacities for self-determination in this respect. However, technological intervention into the reproductive process has not only had the positive effect of increasing women's capacity for bodily self-determination in certain respects, in some ways it has also helped reinforce both the representation of women as passive with respect to their bodily processes and the idea that self-determination involves control over the body. Given this, it seems to me that an adequate appraisal of the benefits and disbenefits for women of the new technologies of reproduction, as well as of the moral issues raised by these technologies, must also involve a challenge to this kind of conception of autonomous agency.

In the Introduction to Part IV, I shall outline a conception of embodied autonomy which tries to preserve de Beauvoir's insistence on women's self-determination, as well as some of her insights about the way in which oppression functions through representations which latch on through the body and the body-image, but which tries to circumvent de Beauvoir's dualistic opposition between the active, autonomous agent and her passive, natural body. In the next part of the thesis however, I want to substantiate the claim, with which I concluded this discussion of de Beauvoir, about the inevitability, given a view of autonomy as control by the will over the body, of women's bodies being represented as passive obstacles to autonomous agency. My claim is not of course that this inevitability is a function of biology, but rather that it is the product of a certain intellectual heritage. My discussion in Part III shall show that the difficulties faced by de Beauvoir, in providing an adequate account of women's autonomy and in adequately representing women's embodiment, can be better understood through an analysis of the broader context within which modern ideals of autonomy and modern conceptions of femininity have arisen. Through a consideration of ideals of autonomy and conceptions of femininity in the social and political philosophies of Rousseau and Hegel, we shall see that, at crucial points in the development of modern views of autonomy, citizenship and political participation, women's bodies came to be represented as unruly, purely natural bodies, as bodies which are potentially subversive of the social order because they are deaf to the voice of reason. This irrational body of woman rendered women unfit subjects for political participation, and hence for fully autonomous agency. As a result, autonomy and femininity came to occupy mutually exclusive theoretical spaces.

PART III

A PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Introduction

In her book Women, Reason and Nature, Carol McMillan is highly critical of de Beauvoir's postulation of a sexually undifferentiated subjectivity.[1] Her view is that if human subjectivity is necessarily embodied, then the differences between male and female embodiment must give rise to sexually different subjectivities. She also argues that these differences must give rise to sexually specific forms of ethical agency. On McMillan's view the whole project of feminism is based on a fundamental conceptual confusion because it has failed to recognize this fact.

McMillan's book suffers from some serious confusions and exhibits a profound ignorance of feminism.[2] Nevertheless her analysis provides a useful point of entry into the issues I will be discussing in this part of the thesis for two reasons. Firstly, McMillan makes some important observations about the ways in which moral reflection and moral agency are bound up with our ways of life, our relations with others and our bodily perspectives. But secondly, the conclusions she draws from these observations, as well as her attempt to articulate an ethical perspective founded on what she considers to be the 'facts' of women's embodiment, reveal the extent to which, since the Enlightenment, the question of the

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1. McMillan, Carol; Women, Reason and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982).

2. For example, McMillan's obvious lack of familiarity with the diversity of feminist perspectives on the significance of reproduction, let alone with feminism more generally, leads her to identify the views of Shulamith Firestone as paradigmatic of 'feminism'. Firestone's feminism is based on a rather crude reading of de Beauvoir's discussions of the female body. Her view is that women have been vulnerable to oppression because their biology is inherently limiting and keeps women at the level of animal life. Liberation thus requires liberation from this biology: Firestone looks forward to an era when all reproduction will be artificial and controlled through technology. See Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (Bantam Books, New York, 1970). Firestone's feminism has very little credibility within contemporary feminist theory. It is thus somewhat startling to find that McMillan takes her views as paradigmatic of feminism. To distinguish McMillan's peculiar understanding of feminism from my own I insert quotation marks around the term feminism when discussing McMillan's views.

relationship between women's embodiment and ethical agency has been, and still is, caught up within a series of hierarchical oppositions between public and private, reason and feeling, culture and nature. These oppositions have constructed the political and conceptual matrix out of which our contemporary understandings of masculinity and femininity have grown. Within this matrix, sexual difference is represented as an ahistorical, 'natural' difference, which necessitates and underpins a sharp division within social and political life between the ethical possibilities of men and women, and which supposedly grounds the claim that woman's ethical life is restricted by her embodiment.

The principal aims of Chapter Four are firstly, to sketch out the historical origins of this matrix and to locate the ethical and political problems which underlie it; and secondly, to show how, within the context of the oppositions between public and private, reason and feeling, and nature and culture, femininity and autonomy came to occupy mutually exclusive theoretical spaces.

Chapter Four is divided into three main sections. The first section focuses on McMillan's critique of 'feminism', in the light of her analysis of Rousseau and Hegel on the ethical implications of sexual difference, and on her own proposals for a feminine ethic. McMillan's complaint against 'feminism' is that it has uncritically accepted a sexist conception of ethical rationality which downgrades women's traditional activities as well as the distinctive kinds of exercise of reason and moral agency embodied in those activities. Her argument is that this conception of ethical rationality, which she identifies as Hegelian, is structured around the oppositions reason/nature and reason/feeling. According to McMillan, these oppositions operate in Hegel's work in such a way as to locate women, by virtue of their bodies, both outside the dialectic of reason and outside the truly ethical sphere of social life. McMillan's argument is that the problem

lies not so much with women and women's bodies as with the Hegelian notion of reason. However although McMillan questions the legitimacy of the oppositions between reason/nature and reason/feeling, as well as their concomitant devaluation of women's contribution to social life, she unwittingly reinstates them in her discussion of Rousseau. McMillan regards Rousseau as the only philosopher who understood that social life must be based on a recognition of the significance of biological difference, without also devaluing women's contribution to social life. In fact she sees Rousseau's account of the education of Sophie as providing a model for a feminine ethic grounded in a recognition of the 'facts' of women's embodiment.[3]

My argument is that, on the question of sexual difference, Rousseau and Hegel are actually a great deal closer than McMillan realizes. McMillan's failure to see this arises from her failure to locate their discussions of sexual difference in the context of their broader ethical and political views. In the second and third sections of Chapter Four, I attempt to substantiate this claim through an analysis of the way in which the oppositions between public and private, reason and nature, and reason and feeling or passion, operate in aspects of the work of Rousseau and Hegel. I show that, despite the significant differences between their ethical and political philosophies,

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3. Rousseau's proposals for the education of Sophie – or woman – occupy Part V of Emile (Everyman, 1974). This text has traditionally been read simply as an educational treatise and the education of Sophie has usually been passed over in embarassed silence as an aberration on the part of Rousseau. I follow contemporary feminist readings of Emile and argue that it should be read in the context of Rousseau's political philosophy. Viewed from this perspective Part V makes it clear that Rousseau's conception of public political life is premised on the subordination of women. My reading of Rousseau has mainly been influenced by the following texts: Jean Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought (Martin Robertson, Oxford 1981); Moira Gatens, 'Rousseau and Wollstonecraft: Nature vs. Reason' in Women and Philosophy, ed. by Janna Thompson, supplement to vol. 64 AJP, June 1986; Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason, (Methuen, London, 1984), chapters 4 & 5; Susan Moller Okin, Women in Western Political Thought, (Virago, 1980); Carole Pateman, '"The Disorder of Women": Women, Love and the Sense of Justice', Ethics, October 1980, pp. 20-34 and The Sexual Contract (Polity Press, Oxford, 1988), especially chapter 4.

their presentations of woman's ethical life are very similar. I also show that their representation of woman's ethical life as necessarily particularistic and affective is less a reflection of the ethical implications of women's embodiment than it is the result of an attempt to resolve tensions within the moral and political ideals arising from the Enlightenment critique of sovereign power.

The tensions to which I refer centre on the conflict between the ideals of civic equality and justice on the one hand, and what might broadly be described as the ethical demands of relations of kinship and community on the other. This conflict is problematic for the moral rationalists of the Enlightenment because, while the ideals of civic equality and justice are defined in opposition to social relations based on kinship and community, they nevertheless presuppose the ethical bonds arising from those relations. The ethical and political writings of Rousseau and Hegel are interesting in this regard because they are very distinctly marked by an attempt to come to terms with this conflict. Because of this, their attempt to resolve it by sharply and explicitly distinguishing the ethical relations of the family – which preserve the ethical bonds characteristic of kinship relations – from those of civil society and, in Hegel's case, the state, simply makes explicit what was, and to a large extent remains, a general conceptual and social solution to this conflict. Their work also makes explicit the extent to which this 'solution' requires the subordination of women, because while the ethical relations of the public sphere presuppose the kind of ethical relations embodied in the family, they are also defined in contrast to them.

The ideal of autonomy or, to use his term, independence, plays a central role in the philosophy of Rousseau. In his work autonomy is a capacity which is both explicitly associated with the activities of the public sphere and, because of this, explicitly denied to women. His work thus makes particularly clear the way in which, within the matrix I have described, femininity and

autonomy came to be defined in opposition to one another. However in the Philosophy of Right Hegel is critical of the ideal of autonomy which, he claims, abstracts the individual from the social relations within which his/her actions are made meaningful, and reduces ethical action simply to a question of the subjective individual will. At least part of what I am arguing in this thesis is that Hegel's criticisms need to be taken seriously in order to articulate an adequate ideal of autonomy. His inclusion in my discussion here may therefore seem puzzling. My rationale for discussing Hegel in this context is that, despite his criticisms of an individualist notion of autonomy, Hegel nevertheless articulated a social ideal of autonomy, founded in relations of recognition. Unfortunately however, Hegel precluded women from attaining autonomy, thus understood, and represented women's bodies as passive, 'natural' bodies. His views on the ethical significance of women's embodiment thus help articulate and reinforce the general conceptual structures which have made autonomy incompatible with femininity – to the detriment of both.

The argument of Chapter Five is that the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft are focused by an attempt to challenge these structures. Wollstonecraft points out that Rousseau's 'solution' to the conflict within the ideals of the Enlightenment not only requires the subordination of women, it is also incoherent. How, she asks, can we claim to be interested in individual liberty if the liberty of some individuals is achieved at the expense of others, and how can we preserve in one sphere of social life those forms of authority which we have elsewhere deemed illegitimate, without undermining society from within? But the most significant aspect of Wollstonecraft's work is not so much her critique of Rousseau or of the inconsistencies in the Enlightenment ideals of equality. Rather it is her attempt to articulate an account of what it would be for women to be autonomous or, to use her term, self-governing. In contrast to some

contemporary feminist assessments of Wollstonecraft, I argue in Chapter Five that Wollstonecraft does not simply argue that women must have the liberty to exercise 'masculine' virtue. Rather her work shows an awareness that women's autonomy could not be achieved within the conceptual and political structures which she had inherited. In particular, her ideal of women's self-governance attempts to reconcile the opposition between reason and feeling or 'sensibility', to reveal the connection between women's social subordination and the representation and construction of women's bodies as passive obstacles to autonomy, and to transform the structure of both the public and the private spheres, as well as the relationship between them. The fact that Wollstonecraft was not completely successful in this attempt should not lead us to underestimate the scale of her achievements in identifying and attempting to resolve a problem which is still of relevance.

Chapter Four

THE BONDS OF LOVE : McMILLAN, ROUSSEAU AND HEGEL

Section 1: McMillan

According to Carol McMillan, de Beauvoir's failure to articulate an ethical perspective capable of adequately theorising women's embodiment is symptomatic of a gross confusion within 'feminism' more generally. The confusion centres on the relationship between sex and gender which 'feminists' have mistakenly understood in terms of the following conditional: If gender is not a direct causal effect of sex then there can be no relation between them, gender must be completely arbitrary. McMillan understands the terms 'sex' and 'gender' in the standard way. 'Sex' refers to biological characteristics at the hormonal and chromosomal level, gender to the social roles and characteristics usually associated with persons of a particular sex.[1] McMillan argues that, on the basis of the above conditional, 'feminists' have concluded that there cannot be any connection whatsoever between sex and gender because the cross-cultural diversity of 'gender' characteristics and social relations between the sexes undermines the credibility of any claim that gender is the causal effect of sex. McMillan's view is that, while the success of the 'feminist' claim that women are oppressed hinges crucially on this argument, the premise on which it is based is fallacious. For if it is true that the link between sex and gender is

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1. The sex/gender distinction was originally formulated by Robert Stoller in his book Sex and Gender in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of transexualism. The distinction and its implications for feminism have recently been questioned from a number of different perspectives by feminist critics. Some of the issues raised by McMillan are addressed in these discussions. For two somewhat contrasting perspectives, compare Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (Routledge, NY, 1990), and Moira Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction' in Beyond Marxism? Interventions after Marx, Allen, Judith & Patton, Paul (eds), (Intervention Publications, Leichardt, 1983), pp. 143-162. See also the articles in 'Sex/Gender', ed. S. Magarey, Special Issue of Australian Feminist Studies, no. 10, Summer 1989. My discussion in the Introduction to Part IV of this thesis raises issues relevant to this debate, but does not specifically address it.

arbitrary then why is technological control over reproduction considered to be so essential for the liberation of women? On the one hand, she argues, 'feminists' want to claim that gender is simply an effect of power relations between the sexes by means of which biological sexual differences, in themselves as insignificant as the biological differences between skin or hair colour, take on vast social significance. On the other hand, is not the 'feminist' insistence on the issue of reproductive control indicative of a recognition that the social situation of women, no matter what the cultural context, is in some way connected with the facts of female biology?

McMillan's critique of 'feminism' raises some important questions about how we should understand the relationship between bodily processes and the constitution of subjectivity.[2] However, although much of her analysis is not incompatible with a feminist perspective (although McMillan herself seems unaware of this), the conclusions she draws from her analysis are explicitly anti-feminist. The aim of McMillan's book is to show that, although gender is not in any straightforward way a causal effect of sex, there is nevertheless what she calls an 'internal relation' between women's biology and their social situations. By this, McMillan means that the diversity of social relations between the sexes should be understood as different ways of making sense of biological differences within the context of different 'forms of life'.[3] Seen from this perspective, McMillan argues, the organization of social life around some form of family life, in which women have primary responsibility for the care of children and for domestic labour,

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2. In the Introduction to Part IV I re-raise these questions and try to suggest a way of answering them that does not commit us to the conclusions reached by McMillan.

3. McMillan draws here on Winch's elaborations on Wittgenstein's notion of 'forms of life' in his books The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy, (RKP, London, 1958) and Ethics and Action, (RKP, London, 1972). In my discussion of McMillan in Chapter III I do not focus on McMillan's use of Winch, but in her review of McMillan Jean Grimshaw argues that McMillan's analysis makes clear the implicit conservatism of Winch's philosophical outlook. See Radical Philosophy 34, Special Issue on Women, Gender and Philosophy, Summer 1983, pp.33-35

is not oppressive to women but is rather a rational way of coming to terms with the implications of biological difference. 'Feminists' are therefore mistaken about the nature of the problem facing women. It is not so much that women are subordinated within social life and denied the scope to exercise autonomy, but rather that certain ways of thinking about social life, which are embodied in certain conceptions of rationality, devalue women's contribution to social life. To the extent that 'feminism' takes over and concurs with these conceptions of rationality, it is indistinguishable from the sexism which it denounces.

What seems to lie behind McMillan's critique of feminism is the worry that the instrumental rationality of contemporary social and political life systematically erodes the non-instrumental ethical relationships based on love and trust which make social life possible. For McMillan these relationships are primarily exemplified in the family and in particular in the ethical bonds between parents, especially women, and their children. She thus sees the 'feminist' argument that women's oppression is connected with their social role within the family as the privileging of instrumental reason. Now McMillan is right to point out that an ethical perspective which underestimates the importance of the social relationships within which moral agents are embedded is impoverished. She is also right to claim that there is a tension between instrumental reason and ethical ties based on kinship. But the problem with her analysis is that it fails to question the general *political* structures, in particular the organization of public life, which are the sources of this tension. Rather, by upholding the family as the haven which resists the encroachments of a social life dominated by instrumental relationships, and by arguing that women's ethical life should be directed towards preserving this haven, McMillan simply reinforces the distinction between public and private spheres by means of which women's contribution to social life is devalued. In the

discussion that follows I want to show that McMillan's account of the 'facts' of women's biology is in fact structured by this distinction.

The connection between McMillan's understanding of women's embodiment and her conception of the ethical significance of affective, familial relationships emerges in the context of her discussions of Rousseau and Hegel. While she links her own proposals for a feminine ethical perspective with the work of Rousseau, she identifies the conception of ethical rationality common to both sexism and 'feminism' as the 'Hegelian rationalistic conception of reason' which she mistakenly conflates with a form of instrumental reason. In fact, as I shall argue, McMillan's account of the ethical significance of sexual difference is much closer to Hegel's than she realizes.

McMillan correctly points out that Hegel develops his accounts of knowledge and of ethical rationality in the context of a critique of subjectivism. In his critique of Schelling in the Preface to the Phenomenology, for example, Hegel is particularly critical of the idea that immediate intuitions can provide the basis for knowledge, and in the section on 'Morality' in the Philosophy of Right he is scathing of the claims to ethical authority made on behalf of 'subjective' feeling. Consequently, Hegel explicitly rejects the idea that reason and freedom can arise out of a state of immediate, undifferentiated harmony with nature. Rather, these distinctively human capacities require that the relation between human life and nature is mediated by the 'labour of the spirit', that is by work, society and culture. However McMillan misunderstands Hegel's conception of Spirit and his understanding of the relation between reason and nature.[4]

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4 McMillan's interpretation of Hegel's conception of the relationship between reason and nature seems to have been shaped by her reading of Simmel's appropriation of Hegel in his discussion of sexual difference. She refers to Simmel's discussion of sexual difference in 'Das Relative und das Absolute im Geschlechter-Problem' in Philosophische Kultur (Kröner, Leipzig, 1919), translated as 'The Relative and the Absolute in the Problem of the Sexes' in

Whereas Hegel thinks that in Spirit the abstract oppositions between subjective and objective perspectives is superseded (*aufgehoben*), on McMillan's reading Hegel simply rejects the subjective standpoint. Similarly, she takes Hegel to be implying that reason as a, if not the distinctively human activity, must be defined in simple opposition to the animal and natural worlds and hence to all those aspects of human life which are involved with nature or which we share in common with animals. Her argument is that, on Hegel's view, because women's involvement in reproduction connects them inescapably with 'nature', then women must be outside the dialectic of reason, they must exist in an immediate, pre-rational state. This is why for Hegel women's mode of cognition is not through rational reflection but through intuition and feeling.

McMillan has two objections to Hegel's conception of reason as she presents it. The first is that it ignores the fact that human beings are part of and continuous with nature. That is, it ignores the fact that, like all natural beings, every aspect of our existence is caught up in bodily processes and needs – we require shelter and food, we digest, excrete, reproduce and so on. Certainly what is distinctive about human beings is that we attribute significance to these processes, that is, they form the basis of our social and cultural systems of representation and interpretation. But this is in itself an activity of reason. In other words reason cannot be defined in contradistinction to the natural facts of human existence but rather shows itself in the way in which we transform these facts into culturally meaningful activities. Further, because our relation to these bodily needs and processes is always already mediated by their cultural meanings for us, we cannot even make sense of the idea that these aspects of our existence are

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Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love, trans. by Guy Oakes (Yale U.P. 1984). With respect to Hegel's own work she refers in particular to Hegel's Logic and to the Philosophy of Right.

somehow 'outside' cultural systems of representation, that is, outside reason. For this reason it is simply a mistake to assimilate women's reproductive capacities, their sexuality, and their relationships with their partners and children, with the reproductive life of animals.

The argument that reason is not 'a separate faculty operating in isolation from, and in contradistinction to, man's "animal nature"'[5] certainly has some force, as does McMillan's complaint about the way in which women's sexuality and reproduction have been thought of as merely instinctual and devoid of reason. However McMillan's objection is not in fact inconsistent with Hegel's conception of reason. In the Hegelian dialectic what is superseded or *aufgehoben* in the dialectical process is not simply left behind but is rather incorporated into the subsequent stages of the dialectic. Thus for Hegel 'nature' does not stand 'outside' reason. The distinction between reason and nature is itself a product of universal reason, or Spirit. The point of his critique of 'immediacy' is rather that there can be no recourse to 'intuition' outside of reason. Contrary to what McMillan argues therefore, Hegel's claim that women live in the 'vague unity of feeling' does not contradict his critique of subjectivism. As I shall argue later, although Hegel connects women with 'feeling' and with 'nature', he does not regard women in any straightforward way as 'outside' reason. More to the point, in his discussion of Antigone in the Phenomenology, Hegel makes it clear that woman's contribution to ethical life is precisely to mediate between nature and self-consciousness. By attaching consciousness to merely natural processes – in this case death and the processes of corruption – and so 'interrupting the work of nature', Antigone, or woman, rescues human life from the indifference of nature and gives it ethical significance. Ironically, McMillan seems to be arguing for a position very similar to Hegel's.

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5 McMillan, *op. cit.* p. 12.

McMillan's second objection is to the conception of ethical agency that is implicit in Hegel's understanding of reason. Although McMillan agrees with Hegel's critique of ethical subjectivism, she thinks that by contrasting reason with 'mere' feeling Hegel ends up with a purely rationalistic ethic, one in which the only actions that can be considered truly ethical are those that conform to universal ethical principles. According to McMillan there are two problems with this view of ethical agency. The first is that it ignores the complexity and particularity of moral dilemmas. Moral dilemmas arise in situations where our ethical principles may conflict and where there is no straightforward or dispassionate way of deciding what to do. In such cases moral decisions are irreducibly particular. Ultimately a decision can only be made by the individuals concerned from within a particular context and judgments as to the rightness or wrongness of that decision cannot be made in abstraction from that context.[6] The second problem is that Hegel's opposition between reason and 'mere' feeling misunderstands both the nature of emotion and the nature of moral motivation. Although emotions are certainly connected with certain bodily sensations or 'feelings', they are not reducible to those sensations. Rather, emotion necessarily involves cognition – which is why we are able to make moral judgments about them. Further because moral decisions are always embedded in the context of people's lives, a person's emotions, far from undermining rational ethical deliberation, actually provides the motivational context for it. According to McMillan, these mistakes explain why Hegel sees women as incapable of justice – because their relationships to men and children within the family are necessarily particularistic and emotional. McMillan argues however that the problem lies not with women but with the Hegelian conception of reason.

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6. McMillan's position here is similar to that of some of the feminist interpretations of Gilligan's work which were mentioned in Chapter 1.

McMillan claims that Hegel valorizes a highly abstract notion of reason – reason as it expresses itself in art, religion and philosophy. It is thus not surprising that he fails to see activities such as those of the mother as embodying reason. What she tries to show is that this narrow conception of reason, which identifies reason simply with its abstract and universal applications, is inadequate for understanding the scope of human reason. What is needed, she thinks, is an extended conception of reason, one which is continuous with, rather than defined in opposition to, sensuous activity. The extent to which McMillan's view here echoes Rousseau's critique of abstract reason and his account of the continuity between reason, sensation and the body will become evident in the second section of this chapter.

McMillan characterises the extended conception of reason by making a distinction between 'reason' and what she calls 'intuitive knowledge'. 'Reason' in its narrow sense she identifies with abstract forms of thought, such as those employed in scientific activity and mathematics. 'Intuitive knowledge' by contrast, is identified with craft-type and practical activities involving certain skills. McMillan gives as examples of 'intuitive knowledge' the skills of the wheelwright, the Trukese navigator and the mother. The characteristic feature of 'reason' narrowly defined is that it involves justification and proof by reference to general laws or universal principles. Hence it gives rise to the sort of knowledge which involves systematising and theorising. 'Intuitive knowledge', on the other hand, requires neither this sort of justification nor systematisation. Rather it is knowledge which 'cannot be learned from books or through formal study but only through experience'.[7] This does not mean that 'intuitive knowledge' does not require training. But it requires a different sort of training than that required by scientific activity, the sort of training provided

7. McMillan, *op. cit.* p. 41.

by apprenticeships and 'vocational' training. Whereas McMillan seems to conceive of scientific training as a matter of acquiring a body of systematic and theoretical knowledge grounded in universal principles, she regards vocational training as necessarily particularistic and individual: 'Every new initiate must learn for himself in his distinctly individual way, what is right and what is wrong'.[8] McMillan's argument is that such 'intuitive knowledge' also requires the exercise of reason, but in a different form to that required by scientific and mathematical pursuits.

For the purposes of my argument it is not really relevant to assess the adequacy of McMillan's extended conception of reason.[9] However, it should be noted that McMillan's argument does not question the distinction between 'abstract' reason and 'intuitive knowledge', nor does it question the adequacy of the abstract conception of reason for such pursuits as those of science and mathematics. Rather, it preserves this opposition and simply questions the exclusion of 'intuitive knowledge' from a broader conception of reason.[10]

McMillan argues that on the basis of this extended conception of reason it becomes clear that women's 'traditional' activities – in particular mothering – are not devoid of reason at all. Rather they involve a different use of reason to the abstract reason which is so valued by a technologically-minded

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8. *ibid.*

9. Despite their gross misinterpretation of feminist critiques of reason, such as that of Lloyd, which they identify with McMillan's position, Pargetter and Prior argue convincingly that McMillan's discussion of this issue is confused. See Robert Pargetter and Elizabeth Prior, 'Against the Sexuality of Reason' AJP, vol. 64 June 1986 Women and Philosophy Supplement.

10. McMillan's position must thus be distinguished from the views of recent feminist critics of science, such as Evelyn Fox Keller, who argue that the conception of reason associated with 'abstract masculinity' in fact yields inadequate science. See for example Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Gender and Science' in Harding & Hintikka (eds.) Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Ontology, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of Science (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1983); and Sandra Harding, The Science Question in Feminism, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1986).

culture, that is a culture which values only those exercises of reason which involve technological mastery over and transformation of nature. Again, this claim has some force. The problem is that McMillan uses it to argue that 'feminists' are making a mistake when they object to women's forced exclusion from those spheres of social life in which abstract reason is exercised. According to McMillan, this objection is mistaken, in fact it is complicit with the sexism it denounces, because it simply endorses both the abstract conception of reason and the cultural valuation of women's 'traditional' activities as devoid of reason.

McMillan concedes that the 'feminist' argument is not altogether incomprehensible. One of the distinctive features of the modern world is that technological mastery has gradually encroached upon, and taken over, many employments requiring the practical and skilled craft activities which embody for McMillan her extended conception of reason. One of these is motherhood and the domestic sphere in which the traditional skilled activities of women have simply become outmoded. This has gone hand in hand with an erosion of the extended family to its modern caricature, the nuclear family. As a result there is less and less scope for women to exercise reason, skill and ethical agency within the domestic/private sphere. McMillan thinks that this explains why 'feminists' set so much store in abstract reason. That this solution to the problem is both unsatisfactory and indicative of the poverty of the Hegelian conception of reason on which it is based, is evident, according to McMillan, in the fact that feminists like de Beauvoir and Firestone, in agreement with Hegel, see women's reproductive capacities as obstacles to the achievement of reason and autonomy.

McMillan is right to question ideals of reason and autonomy which require that women can only be autonomous agents if they are able artificially to control their own reproductive capacities. But how does she get from here

to the claim that women's rational capacities should be exercised mainly in mothering and 'traditional' female occupations, rather than in abstract reason? Further what justifies the assertion that some form of family life in which women have primary responsibility for childcare and domestic labour is necessary? McMillan's argument here, which appeals to the notion of 'forms of life', is decidedly slippery. She argues that although women's social role within the family is based not on 'nature' but on convention, this convention is not merely a result of patriarchal oppression. Rather it is a convention which is the most 'rational' way of coming to terms with biological difference (but which notion of reason is being appealed to here?); it is a convention grounded in nature, that is in the inescapable limits imposed upon women by their reproductive capacities. Similarly, she argues that mothering skills, for example, are not innate but are rather acquired by training, explaining why both the training and the skills vary from culture to culture. Nevertheless she thinks it is culturally appropriate for women to be trained to use their reason in 'intuitive knowledge', and in particular in the forms that it takes in mothering and domestic activity, rather than in 'abstract' reason. Thus, as Jean Grimshaw has argued, 'nature (in the guise of biology) is expelled only to be reinstated (in the guise of culture)'.[11]

McMillan develops her notion of conventions grounded in nature in the context of an appeal to Rousseau's discussion, in Part V of Emile, of the significance of sexual difference. She finds Rousseau appealing for three connected reasons. Firstly, she thinks, Rousseau recognizes that social life can only flourish if it is based upon and takes account of 'certain inexorable facts about human life'.[12] Secondly, he does not presume a sexually

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11. Grimshaw, *op. cit.* p. 35

12. McMillan, *op. cit.* p. 90

undifferentiated human subject. Rather his proposals for the education of Sophie start from the recognition that although the only significant differences between men and women are biological, these differences make all the difference as far as the ethical lives of men and women are concerned. Thirdly, although Rousseau recognizes that social conventions must be grounded in certain biological givens, he does not think that biology determines the shape of social life in any straightforward way. Thus he recognizes that although 'maternity' is based in female biological reality, it is not a mere instinct; rather it is a cultural institution for which women have to be educated.

Following Rousseau, McMillan claims that if women are to be educated in such a way as to enable them properly to undertake their maternal role then their education needs to be different from the education which men receive. In particular women need to be educated to accept the restraint and curtailment of freedom which their biological role imposes upon them. Thus not only do they need to be educated in the care of infants, their education needs to be based on a model of ethical agency which is structured upon an acceptance of the limitations placed upon them by their biology. McMillan calls this notion of agency 'intentional passivity'; passive because it involves 'accepting rather than fighting' the inherent 'limitations' of the female body, but intentional because it is the means by which a purposive rational being comes to terms with these limitations. The examples McMillan gives of intentional passivity are natural childbirth and the rhythm method of contraception.

McMillan's recommendations are unclear to say the least. Firstly, in her discussion of 'intentional passivity' McMillan correctly points out, as have many feminists, that increasing technological intervention into the reproductive process has undermined our sense of women as active agents

in this process, and with respect to their own bodies.[13] But it is not clear how she gets from here to the claims that abortion and all forms of contraception other than the rhythm method are morally wrong. Secondly, although McMillan is right to point out that infants need continuity of care, love and nurturance, how does this claim justify the assertion that it is primarily up to the mother of the child alone to provide for these emotional needs and to fulfill 'her obligations to her children by providing for their needs in the form of nursing, cleaning, sewing, cooking, ironing, washing and so on'?[14] Thirdly, apart from suggesting that women must learn both to accept the inescapable limitations of their biology and somehow because of this, to structure their lives around the needs of others, McMillan's discussion does not provide a coherent account of a specifically feminine ethic. She points to Rousseau's account of feminine virtue as a model in this respect, but, as I shall argue in the next section of this chapter, the hallmark of this account is that, because it is constructed entirely around needs other than Sophie's own, its explicit intention is to undermine the possibility that Sophie will become an autonomous agent. But then this seems to be precisely what McMillan is recommending for women.

In fact, although she appeals to Rousseau, McMillan seems to be unaware of the connection between Rousseau's politics and his account of the ethical significance of sexual difference. For a consideration of Rousseau's political philosophy shows that, despite his own claims about the passivity of women's bodies, his account of 'feminine virtue', and his representation of women's bodies as ethically restrictive and politically subversive, have very little to do with any intrinsic properties of women's bodies. Rather once

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13 In Part IV of this thesis, especially in Chapter Six, I try to develop an account of bodily autonomy which can incorporate a recognition of women's autonomous agency with respect to bodily processes such as those occurring in pregnancy.

14 McMillan, *op. cit.* p. 98.

Rousseau's proposals about 'feminine virtue' are understood from within this political context it is obvious that Rousseau does not think of masculinity and femininity either as biological categories or as having an equal and complementary social weight. In fact they get their meaning from a series of hierarchical oppositions within which femininity is associated with the devalued but necessary underpinnings of masculine ethical and political life.

What seems to be going on in McMillan's book is that while she claims that she is questioning the social devaluation of femininity, and in particular of maternity, she is oblivious to the fact that her analysis is in fact structured by the very same oppositions within which that devaluation occurs. Consequently, while she presents her account of the ethical significance of women's embodiment as an argument based on inescapable, if not determining, biological realities, the truth is that her analysis is structured by a historically specific contrast between the public and the private spheres. This is evidenced by the extent to which McMillan's argument fails to question two very questionable, and connected presumptions. Firstly, McMillan fails to question the adequacy of conceptions of civic equality and justice which abstract from the particular and different needs and situations of different social groups. Rather, she simply wants to point out that our conception of morality is impoverished if it values only the characteristics and values paradigmatically embodied in the public sphere, namely abstract reason and ethical impartiality. The full implications of this failure become clear in McMillan's criticisms of childcare and of any form of compensatory legislation – such as maternity leave – for working women. These measures, according to McMillan, not only attempt to deny the natural limitations which their biology imposes upon women, but also erode the particularistic relationships which are the foundation of social life. What seems to elude McMillan however is the realisation that by failing to

question the adequacy, for our conception of the public sphere, of the ideals of formal equality and justice understood as abstract impartiality, she is in fact preserving the conceptual structures by means of which the ethical significance of these relationships is devalued. Consequently and secondly, McMillan fails to question the representation of women's bodies as 'passive' and 'limiting', in implicit contrast to the representation of men's bodies as 'active' and 'autonomous'. But this representation does not simply mirror the biological 'facts'. Rather it is itself produced by a contrast between the public and the private spheres within which women's sexuality and reproductive capacities come to signify an ahistorical and 'natural' difference, and which situates women ambiguously both within and without social and political life. In the following two sections of this chapter I present an analysis of the problems underlying this contrast. I also show how the ideal of autonomy has been constructed within the terms of this contrast as an ideal defined in opposition to femininity.

Section 2: Rousseau

Near the beginning of Emile Rousseau relates his famous story of the Spartan mother, ideal citizen but somewhat lacking in maternal virtue, who gives thanks for a Spartan victory which has cost the lives of her five sons. The theme of the story is familiar to readers of The Social Contract, namely that the duties of the individual as citizen often seem to conflict with the private interests of that same individual. But whereas in The Social Contract Rousseau argues that in a just society a person's private will should coincide with the general will, the moral of this story is that the Spartan mother cannot respond to the news of her sons' deaths both as a good citizen and as a good mother. The response that is appropriate from the impartial perspective of the citizen is completely inappropriate, in fact immoral, from the perspective of the mother.

Rousseau was not the first philosopher to be worried by the ethical and social conflicts, between love and justice, partiality and impartiality, individuality and communality, which are epitomised in this story. Plato's story of Euthyphro, for example, who feels compelled in the name of public duty to prosecute his own father, is centred on a similar set of conflicts. But in Rousseau's ethical and political thought these conflicts take on new meaning because Rousseau locates the conflicting virtues in different spheres of moral and political life and attaches them to different genders. While social relations between citizens within the public sphere are characterized as rational and contractual, and are organized around the ideals of autonomy or moral independence, impartial justice, and civic equality and liberty, relations within the private sphere are unequal, dependent, particularistic and affective. According to Rousseau, social life will only flourish if these two spheres are kept quite distinct, that is if citizenship is a masculine duty while women uphold the virtues of the private sphere. The apparent inconsistencies between the moral of the story of the Spartan mother and the theme of public good versus private interest thus disappear. For it is because she is a mother that the Spartan mother cannot be a good citizen. Further it is because she is a woman that the Spartan mother cannot, or rather should not, achieve the kind of moral independence and autonomy that is required for citizenship.

Rousseau claims in Emile that the differences between the positions of men and women in social life arise from the 'natural', biological differences between male and female bodies, which ground moral differences between the sexes. I want to argue however that it is a mistake to take Rousseau at his word on this issue. Rather, Rousseau's appeals to both 'nature' and 'woman' to resolve the conflicts within social life are symptoms of a profound tension at the heart of his moral and political philosophy. This tension concerns Rousseau's ideals of autonomy, justice and public life.

Rousseau is vehement that social equality and liberty can only arise if civil life is founded as if on a contract between self-sufficient individuals, and if contractual relations between these individuals are regulated by the ideal of impartial justice. Given his own analysis of socialised human nature however, Rousseau recognises that human beings are not self-sufficient individuals and that impartial justice and relations of contract cannot provide the foundation for moral life. Since for Rousseau human beings are mainly motivated by their passions, morality will have no hold if it is not in some way grounded in passion. But passion is necessarily partial and particular, and makes us inescapably dependent upon others. Rousseau's difficulty then is that the very aspects of human nature that give rise to moral and social life have a tendency to undermine autonomy, justice and the contractual ordering of civil life. Rousseau's appeals to 'nature' and 'woman' are an attempt to preserve, but also to contain, those aspects of human nature which Rousseau regards as both essential to moral and social life yet potentially disruptive of the civic, contractual order.

However Rousseau's attempt to resolve the tensions within his moral and political philosophy by means of a sharp distinction between the public and the private spheres only displaces these tensions into the private sphere itself. On the one hand the partial, affective relationships of the 'natural' private sphere are supposed to provide the non-contractual basis for civil life. On the other hand because these relationships arise from passions which are potentially disruptive to the social order they must be carefully regulated. But, as Wollstonecraft points out, Rousseau's attempt to regulate familial relationships, by subjecting women and children within the family to the authority of men, and by denying women the space to achieve autonomy, in fact undermines the moral life of the private sphere. She argues that not only is women's submission to male authority unlikely to encourage the conjugal relationships of trust and love that provide the

foundation for civil life, but Rousseau's account of feminine 'virtue' makes it impossible for women to educate their children to be virtuous citizens.

My argument is that there are a number of reasons why Rousseau gets himself into this contradictory position with respect to his claims about women's moral role and capacities: firstly, because there is a tension between Rousseau's excessively individualist account of autonomy and his views about the moral importance of feeling and passion, a tension which arises from his ambivalence about the passions; secondly, because he makes explicit the fact that the distinction between public and private spheres functions not only to preserve the non-contractual foundation of moral life but also to ensure claims to paternal right; and thirdly because he displaces onto women's bodies a difficulty which plagues his whole social and political philosophy. The difficulty is that, within the terms of his account of human nature, the distinction which is so central to his moral and political philosophy between those aspects of human social life that are beneficial and those that are destructive, cannot easily be sustained.

Because my argument is that Rousseau's conception of autonomy and his account of 'feminine virtue' must be understood from within the broader context of his moral and political philosophy, it is important to begin by outlining this context. My discussion starts with an analysis of the distinction between nature and social life in The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and then moves to an analysis of Rousseau's ideals of social justice and individual virtue in The Social Contract and Emile, concluding with a reading of Part V of Emile on the education of Sophie.[15]

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15. The editions to which I refer are: Emile, (Everyman, 1974); The Social Contract and The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality in The Social Contract and other Discourses (Everyman, 1973); and On the Social Contract; Discourse on the Origin of Inequality; Discourse on Political Economy, translated and edited by Donald Cress, (Hackett Publishing Company, Indiana, 1983). Hereafter I often refer to The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality as the Second Discourse.

I: 'Nature' vs. Social Life

As many commentators have pointed out, Rousseau uses the category 'nature' in a number of different ways in different texts, contrasting it with different categories on different occasions. In The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, 'nature' designates a primitive, asocial, but peaceable 'state of nature' which contrasts favourably with his presentation of sociality as dominated by vicious conflicts. In The Social Contract, the category is used sometimes to designate this primitive 'state of nature', at other times to refer to a pre-social contract state, which is very similar to Hobbes' picture of the 'state of nature' as anarchic and violent, and which Rousseau contrasts with the civic freedom and justice made possible by the social contract. In 'The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Priest' in Emile, 'nature' refers to the harmonious 'natural order' created by God. Here and elsewhere in Emile, as well as in the Second Discourse, 'nature' is also used adjectivally to commend the beneficent feelings and instincts which Rousseau wishes to contrast with the destructive social passions which undermine social life. [16] Nevertheless I think the key to understanding the function of the category 'nature' in Rousseau's philosophy is his discussion in the Second Discourse. Here not only are the conflicts within social life which so preoccupied Rousseau presented most vividly, but also the pessimistic sense, which always marks his work, that ultimately these conflicts may be irresoluble, emerges most strongly.

Rousseau begins the Second Discourse with a distinction between two kinds of inequality - natural inequality and moral or political inequality. Natural inequality 'is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age,

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16. For a detailed analysis of Rousseau's different uses of the category 'nature' see Bloch, Maurice & Bloch, Jean H.; 'Women and the dialectics of nature in eighteenth century french thought', pp. 25-41 in MacCormack & Strathern (eds.) Nature, Culture, Gender, (Cambridge U.P. 1980). They argue that for Rousseau 'nature' seems to operate more as "a category of challenge rather than an element in a stable binary contrast".

health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or the soul'. Moral or political inequality, on the other hand,

> depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful, or even in a position to extract obedience.[17]

Rousseau argues that while natural inequalities of capacity or differences between individuals are inescapable, such inequalities in themselves are morally insignificant. Because moral relations between people only arise in the context of social and political relations, it is only in society that natural differences assume moral significance. The aim of the distinction is thus to enable Rousseau to distinguish fortuitous differences between individuals from political inequalities and to argue that no natural difference can justify the establishment of political relations of domination and subordination between human beings who are by nature free. The Discourse attempts to explain how, given the natural liberty of human beings, political inequality can have arisen. Rousseau is explicit that this explanation is a fiction, but it is a fiction which in a sense can 'explain the nature of things' more adequately than 'historical truths' are able to do.

Following Hobbes, Rousseau's fiction takes the form of a contrast between a 'state of nature' and a state of sociality. Unlike Hobbes, however, Rousseau is famously ambivalent about sociality and the capacities which give rise to it. On the one hand sociality is the condition of possibility of human excellence and virtue. On the other hand sociality is also the condition of possibility of corruption – the other side of excellence and virtue. In the Second Discourse, Rousseau uses the device of the 'state of nature' to try to distinguish those aspects of human sociality which he thinks are conducive to the promotion of justice and virtue from those which give rise to

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17. Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Everyman edition, p. 44.

corruption and injustice. More than any other of his texts, The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality reveals the extent to which the desire which founds Rousseau's moral and political philosophy is, in his own terms, an impossible desire. It is a desire for excellence without corruption, for virtue without vice, for justice without inequality. But in the terms of Rousseau's own discourse this desire is impossible because it is the very same aspects of human sociality and the very same capacities which give rise to both excellence and corruption, virtue and vice, justice and inequality.

In the Second Discourse, Rousseau distinguishes three different phases of human development: the 'state of nature'; an idyllic early social state which Rousseau refers to as the 'youth of the world'; and a state of anarchic vice and inequality preceding the formation of a social contract. Although Rousseau attempts to account for the transitions between these states, the differences between the pre-social and the social states are striking. In the 'state of nature', nature herself is abundant. As a consequence, human life is peaceable because human beings are individually self-sufficient and live in a state of nomadic, asocial, dispersal. Their bodies are robust and resistant to disease. As a result there is no need for tools; the human body itself is the only tool needed for survival and the body is at one with the desires and purposes of the individual. Most interestingly, biological differences between the sexes have no significance. Women are as well adapted to survival as men because there are no affective bonds either between individual adults or between mothers and their children.[18] The emergence and subsequent development of human social life, by contrast, is marked by conditions of scarcity and competition, the increasing interdependence of human individuals and groups and the formation of larger and larger social groupings, and an ever-increasing dependence upon technology. The

18. As I shall argue later in this chapter, this account of independence as self-sufficiency is echoed in Rousseau's conception of autonomy, or moral independence.

catalyst and underlying basis for the development of sociality however is the abandonment of a nomadic lifestyle, the chief effect of which is the formation of family life which 'gives rise to the first expansions of the human heart':

> The habit of living together soon gave rise to the finest feelings known to humanity, conjugal love and paternal affection. Every family became a little society, the more united because liberty and reciprocal attachment were the only bonds of its union. The sexes, whose manner of life had been hitherto the same, began now to adopt different ways of living. The women became more sedentary, and accustomed themselves to mind the hut and the children, while the men went abroad in search of their common subsistence.[19]

Rousseau is aware that his explanation of the transition from the 'state of nature' to social life is arbitrary. He admits that a 'vast space' separates the two states, that it is very difficult to imagine how this space could possibly have been traversed and that only a chance concurrence of events can have brought human beings together. At one level this is not a real problem for Rousseau, for it allows him to claim that the disorder which characterizes human social life is a not a product of God's 'natural order', of which human life in the 'state of nature' forms a part. Rather it is the product of specific forms of social organization which have produced a socialized human nature that bears little resemblance to human nature in the 'state of nature'. At another level however, the weakness of Rousseau's explanation of this transition points to Rousseau's difficulty in making and sustaining a distinction between those aspects of human sociality that are beneficial and those that are harmful. No sooner does a distinction appear than it is shored up by another distinction which in its turn requires a further one. Rousseau uses the category 'nature' to try to make these distinctions hold, to enact some kind of theoretical closure. But, as I shall argue, this attempt ultimately results in incoherence.

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19. Rousseau, *op. cit.* pp. 79-80.

Rousseau's conception of socialized human nature, like that of many other Enlightenment thinkers, is structured around the central categories of 'reason' and 'passion'. At one level the conflicts within human nature and social life can be understood as the result of a straightforward conflict between these two faculties, a conflict in which passion undermines reason. However, although in Rousseau's philosophy the distinction between reason and passion is clearly hierarchical, Rousseau also recognizes that without passion reason is not only sterile but dangerous. He thus supports the distinction by making further distinctions, within the categories of reason and passion themselves, between 'reason' or 'understanding' on the one hand, and 'abstract reason' on the other, and between the beneficial and the destructive passions. The category 'nature' functions to mark off from one another the two terms within each opposition.

In the Second Discourse, Rousseau claims that in the 'state of nature' human understanding is in harmony with the body and with sensation; they share a unity of action and of purpose. The development of 'abstract' reason, by contrast, enacts a separation between reason, the body, and sensation, in which the desires and needs of the body often conflict with the dictates of reason, or in which reason generates needs and desires beyond those required for bodily survival. Rousseau explains the difference between these two kinds of reason by connecting the understanding with certain instincts which are common to both human beings and animals, while aligning 'abstract' reason with certain distinctively human capacities. The divisions internal to reason are thus supported by further distinctions: between animal and human life; between instincts and non-instinctual capacities, and between the body and reason. The two instincts governing both human and animal life are the instinct for self-preservation, or self-love (*amour-de-soi*), and compassion or pity. Self-love ensures that individuals have a proper regard for their own survival and act in such a

way as to maximise their chances of survival. In the 'state of nature' it is fostered by the unity between the understanding, sensation and the body. Compassion, or an aversion to the suffering of all sentient beings, tempers self-love and ensures that the instinct for survival is kept in check by a due regard for the suffering of other creatures. Understood in its connection with these instincts, understanding is thus not a distinctively human capacity.

What distinguishes human from non-human animals in the 'state of nature' are two capacities which help transform the understanding into 'abstract reason'. These capacities are 'liberty', and the faculty of 'self-improvement' or 'perfectibility'. What Rousseau means by 'natural liberty' is not completely clear. When contrasting 'natural liberty' with social inequality, he seems to equate it with self-sufficiency and independence. But this account of 'natural liberty' would not be sufficient to distinguish human from non-human animals in the 'state of nature'. When contrasting human liberty with the life of non-human animals, Rousseau thus seems to equate it with free will. Whereas the actions of non-human animals are governed by instinct alone, human liberty means that human beings are free either to act in accordance with instinct or to choose to go against it. Further while the life of non-human animals, according to Rousseau, shows no self-motivated evolution, the faculty of self-improvement enables human beings to alter the conditions of their existence. In the 'state of nature' however, perfectibility exists only in a rudimentary form. Its proper development requires the development of 'abstract reason', for perfectibility requires both foresight and the ability to make comparisons, neither of which arise when the understanding is used only to satisfy the needs and appetites of the present moment.

Rousseau's attitude towards 'abstract reason' and 'perfectibility' is ambivalent. On the one hand, without them any form of moral life would

be impossible because the exercise of moral choice presupposes the ability to make comparisons. Thus, without them, neither virtue nor human excellence would be possible. On the other hand, the exercise of these capacities fragments the natural unity of understanding, sensation and the body, and undermines the harmony between human beings and the natural world. With the development of the capacity for comparison, human beings no longer see themselves as part of the natural world, but come to see themselves as different from and superior to it. This is why Rousseau asserts that "a state of reflection is one contrary to nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal".[20]

Rousseau points out that both perfectibility and the abstract use of reason are dependent upon and presuppose the use of language. In the absence of a language which is able not only to name particulars, but also to discern resemblances and differences between particulars, that is, a language which can form general and abstract ideas, it would be impossible to engage in any form of reflection or comparison. But how could language arise in a state of asocial nomadic dispersal? Rousseau argues that it cannot. In fact he claims that Hobbes' mistaken picture of the 'state of nature' is based upon the preposterous presumption that the inhabitants of that state had linguistic capacities. Rousseau's position however leads him to a paradox. The paradox is that while the development of language does not seem possible outside sociality, sociality does not seem possible without language.[21] But if language cannot arise in a state of asocial nomadic dispersal, yet is necessary for the development of those capacities which distinguish human from non-human animals, then is it at all coherent to posit a human pre-social

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20. Rousseau, *op. cit.* p. 51.

21. Derrida raises a similar paradox with respect to the account of the origin of languages in Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages. See his discussion of Rousseau in 'Nature, Culture, Writing' in Of Grammatology, translated Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1976).

state? Rousseau attempts to salvage his position by claiming that human beings in the 'state of nature' enjoyed 'natural liberty'. But we have seen above that the only sense in which human beings can be said to enjoy a liberty which is not shared by non-human animals is if liberty is understood to mean 'free will'. But is it coherent to postulate anything remotely resembling free will in the 'state of nature'? Does not the exercise of free will presuppose the capacity for reflection which is only possible through the use of language, a necessarily social ability? If the notion of a human pre-social state is incoherent, as it seems to be, then Rousseau's appeal to 'nature' cannot be used to sustain a distinction between those aspects of human sociality which are beneficial and conducive to virtue and those which are conducive to vice. Human sociality is always already corrupt because the very aspects of human nature which, according to Rousseau, engender social life also undermine it.[22] I shall argue later that the instability of the distinction between the beneficial and the destructive passions emerges most clearly in Rousseau's views on sexual passion. I shall also argue that in his discussion of women's sexual passion, Rousseau projects onto woman the inability of his own system to sustain this distinction.

Abstract reason and perfectibility however are not alone responsible for vice, according to Rousseau. It is rather that the capacity to which they give rise, the capacity for comparison, although essential for moral life, has a tendency to corrupt self-love, transforming a natural instinct into the destructive social passion of egoism (*amour-propre*). This passion, which lies at the

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22. Hegel presents a similar critique of Rousseau in the Philosophy of Right, paragraphs 194-5, p. 128. He argues that Rousseau's 'state of nature' in which needs are confined to the merely physical needs of the organism cannot be characterized as a condition of freedom. Freedom is found 'only in the reflection of the mind into itself, in mind's distinction from nature, and in the reflex of mind in nature'. Furthermore, Rousseau's attempt to check the excesses of civil society by distinguishing 'natural' from 'social' needs (the beneficial vs. the harmful) is mistaken because this distinction 'has no qualitative limits'. G.W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, translated with notes by T.M. Knox, (Oxford University Press, 1967).

root of all social inequalities, "is a purely relative and factitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than any other [and] causes all the mutual damage which men inflict on one another".[23] Despite this characterization of *amour-propre* however, *amour-propre* is the pivotal category of Rousseau's moral and political philosophy. On the one hand, it is the source of all the conflicts within social life and socialized human nature. On the other hand, without it human life would never have progressed beyond the 'state of nature'. Human beings are only motivated to improve their reason, to develop their technological skills, and to better the conditions of their existence, because they are driven by the desire for pre-eminence. Further, without *amour-propre* Rousseau's conceptions of virtue and justice would have no hold.

Rousseau's view was that contemporary European society was afflicted by an excess of *amour-propre*. But it would be a mistake to think that Rousseau's desire was for a return to the state of nature. Rather the desire that governs his moral and political philosophy is the desire for a form of social life in which human life is enriched by passion without being torn apart by the conflicts which passion generates. Rousseau's image of the 'youth of the world' in the Second Discourse portrays such a state – an idyllic early social state in which the bonds of social interdependence were still loose, in which needs were few and life was relatively uncomplicated, in which social life expressed itself in the abandon of the festival. But again it would be a mistake to think that the aim of Rousseau's political philosophy is to recreate such a state for, however idyllic, it is a state which is now lost to humanity. The only way beyond the conflicts of social life is through social justice and individual virtue.

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23. Rousseau, *op. cit.* p. 66.

II: Social Justice and The Virtuous Citizen

II. i

One of the strongest themes of Rousseau's moral and political philosophy is that unequal relations of dependence, whether at the level of the state or at the level of social groups or individuals, are the precondition for servitude. Liberty is best preserved, he thinks, under conditions of maximal self-sufficiency, which is why human beings in the 'state of nature' allegedly enjoyed 'natural liberty' and an existence free from conflict. In the context of The Social Contract, Rousseau seems to equate liberty with independence from others, and with the pursuit of one's own particular self-interest which is here presented as 'natural' – that is, natural to socialised human nature. The problem which preoccupied Rousseau therefore, is that of how it is possible to create a system of social relations in which each person is maximally self-sufficient, and free to pursue their own particular self-interest, and yet equally dependent upon all others. For if people are mainly motivated by selfish and partial interests, that is by the desire for pre-eminence or *amour-propre*, then if society favours the particular interests of some more than others, social relations will inevitably tend towards unequal relations of dependence. A society can only be just if it is founded on impartial laws equally binding on all its citizens.

In The Social Contract Rousseau provides one resolution to this problem in the form of the 'general will'. Rousseau defines the 'general will' in contrast to an association of particular wills or 'the will of all'. Whereas the 'will of all' is the sum of different wills when they are directed by the concerns of their particular private interests, the 'general will' is the sum of different wills when directed by the general interest, an interest which is impartial as far as particular interests are concerned. Rousseau's view is that a society can only be just if it is founded on the 'general will'. The social contract

creates the conditions of possibility for the expression of the 'general will' because it institutes a form of government in which each individual is both equally bound by the conditions imposed upon all and enjoys the same rights as all others. Rousseau's view is that under such a contract each individual becomes equally dependent upon the social whole of which he forms a part and without which he is nothing, because the social contract effectively delegitimizes an individual's right to natural liberty and independence. Rather, in the social contract natural liberty is exchanged for protection and civil liberty is acquired through obedience. But doesn't this arrangement simply substitute one form of servitude for another? For doesn't the citizen's dependence on others and upon the contract itself enslave him just as much as the other forms of dependence from which the social contract was supposed to be a liberation?[24] Rousseau's defence of the social contract against this charge is that the citizen cannot really be said to be enslaved by this form of dependence, because by promoting the common interest each individual in fact best promotes his own interest. Through the social contract the parties to it gain civic liberty and equality, and protection of their persons and property. Thus in a just society, that is one which is impartial as regards the private interests of its members, the general will actually should coincide with the particular will of each individual. The citizens are thus subject only to their own collective will.

In this context it should be pointed out that, for Rousseau, one of the greatest threats to justice or the equality of the social contract is the existence of interest groups or partial associations, which attempt to use the conditions of dependence created by the contract to further their own particular interests. Although they reduce the number of different interests

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24. In her book The Sexual Contract (Polity Press, 1988), Carole Pateman argues such a case with respect to the very idea of a social contract. Her claim is that while theories of the social contract present contract as the only means of achieving social equality and liberty, the political structures that they institute are in fact structures of domination and subordination.

within the body politic, these associations do not further social harmony, but rather allow the particular interests of a few, namely the most powerful, to dominate. At the same time however, given his account of socialised human nature, it is almost inevitable that such partial associations will be formed and that the very citizens who constitute the body politic will come to represent its greatest threat. As we shall see, for Rousseau the family is just such a partial association, but it is an association which, unlike other such associations, is nevertheless essential for the life of the body politic. Whereas the form of coercion required to maintain the 'general will' is subordination masking as civic liberty, the form of coercion required to ensure that the family can thrive without undermining social justice is subordination masking as love.

Despite the claim that the 'general will' reconciles private interest with the public good, or self-interested motivation with reason, Rousseau is aware of the tension between his ideal of justice and his account of socialized human nature as mainly motivated by *amour-propre*. For justice presupposes trust, but trust cannot arise if people are motivated entirely by their own self-interest. Hence Rousseau acknowledges that social justice cannot be brought about solely by the institution of a republic founded on the social contract. Rather it requires a transformation and strengthening of human nature by means of which 'each individual (who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole)' is transformed 'into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being', and which substitutes 'a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature'. Thus the founder of a just republic, adds Rousseau,

> must deny man his own forces in order to give him forces that are alien to him and that he cannot make use of without the help of others. The more these natural forces are dead and

> obliterated, and the greater and more durable are the acquired forces, the more too is the institution solid and perfect.[25]

The question is how this view is to be reconciled both with Rousseau's favourable account of human beings in the 'state of nature' and with his account of the education of Emile, the aim of which, as we shall see, is to produce the ideal, virtuous citizen by encouraging in Emile self-sufficiency and the development of certain 'natural' dispositions. I think there are two somewhat different, although connected, answers to this question. Firstly, as I claimed earlier, Rousseau uses the category 'nature' somewhat differently in The Social Contract than in the Second Discourse. Here it seems to designate not the peaceable 'state of nature' of the Second Discourse but a Hobbesian immediately pre-social contract state.[26] Given this, Rousseau's account of the transformation in human nature required by the social contract pertains to socialized human nature. Secondly however, Rousseau makes a distinction in The Social Contract between the individual *qua* citizen and the individual *qua* private person. His account of the transformation in socialized human nature required by the social contract pertains to the individual qua citizen. As a citizen the individual must identify his private interests with the good of the collectivity and so 'deny his own forces', forfeiting natural liberty for civil liberty. However the collectivity can only require the individual to alienate 'that portion of his power, his goods, and liberty whose use is of consequence' to it.[27] As a private person therefore, the individual has a natural right to the pursuit of his own partial self-interest. The problem however is that the citizen and

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25 Rousseau, On the Social Contract, Hackett edition, p. 39.

26 The question of the relationship between the social contract of the Second Discourse and the social contract of The Social Contract is the subject of a debate among scholars of Rousseau's political philosophy. It is beyond the scope of my concerns in this discussion to assess this debate.

27 Rousseau, *op. cit.* p. 33.

the private person are the one individual. The tensions between Rousseau's account of justice and his account of socialized human nature thus get displaced onto a tension between individual *qua* citizen and individual *qua* private person. In The Social Contract Rousseau intimates that in the end this tension might have to be reconciled through force: 'in order for the social compact to avoid being an empty formula, it tacitly entails the commitment – which alone can give force to the others – that whoever refuses to obey the general will will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means that he will be forced to be free'.[28] In Emile however he indicates that a better way to deal with this tension is through the cultivation of a virtuous disposition, the aim of which is not to eliminate 'man's natural forces' or the passions, but to harness them in the service of morality. Rousseau's account of virtue thus complements his ideal of justice by providing the ideal of individual moral character necessary for the social contract to function non-coercively. In this context Rousseau associates the category 'nature' with those beneficial passions which underpin virtue.

II. ii

In Emile Rousseau characterises virtue in these terms:

The word virtue is derived from a word signifying strength, and strength is the foundation of all virtue. Virtue is the heritage of a creature weak by nature but strong by will; that is the whole merit of the righteous man...What is meant by a virtuous man? He who can conquer his affections; for then he follows his reason, his conscience; he does his duty; he is his own master and nothing can harm him from the right way...To feel or not to feel a passion is beyond our control, but we can

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28. Rousseau, *op. cit.* p. 26.

> control ourselves. Every sentiment under our control is lawful; those which control us are criminal. [29]

Virtue then, according to Rousseau, is achieved not by eliminating passion, but by controlling it. But how is passion to be controlled? For Rousseau the answer is through the formation of the right kind of moral character, one in which reason is grounded in feeling but not subject to the vicissitudes of passion.

If Emile is read in conjunction with The Social Contract, it becomes clear that for Rousseau the key to the formation of the right kind of moral character is to achieve the correct balance between dependence and independence. As we have seen, the just citizen is the person who understands the extent of his dependence on the social body as a whole and who is able to identify his private will with the 'general will'. But the kind of dependence required for social justice actually presupposes moral independence, which Rousseau defines in contrast to *amour-propre.* As I stated earlier, Rousseau is aware that moral relations can only arise in the context of social life, in our relations with others. More importantly, our moral identities are closely connected with the evaluations of others. This is why *amour-propre* can gain such a strong foothold in human social life. But for Rousseau there is a crucial difference between being held in high esteem by others and seeking out the esteem of others. Whereas in the first case the judgment is made on the basis of our independent actions, in the second case what motivates our actions is our concern for the opinions of others. According to Rousseau, *amour-propre* is characterized by such an over-dependence on the opinion of others, and it is this kind of over-dependence which leads a person to put their own interests ahead of the good of the collectivity. By contrast, the first requirement of virtue, and therefore of justice, is moral independence or autonomy.

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29. Rousseau, Emile, pp. 408-9.

Rousseau's conception of autonomy emerges most clearly in his detailed proposals for the education of Emile. These proposals bring together in a rather revealing way two somewhat inconsistent aspects of Rousseau's account of autonomy. On the one hand, Rousseau is clearly aware that autonomy is a capacity which is the end result of a lengthy developmental process, a process which is of necessity social. On the other hand, he presents this process as one which occurs within the solitary individual, in relative isolation from broader social relations or from reciprocal, interdependent relations with others. For although Rousseau stresses that Emile's tutor plays a crucial role in his development, and although Emile is dependent upon the tutor in various ways, their relationship is always unequal and carefully manipulated by the tutor, and Rousseau stresses that Emile should not become aware of his dependence. Rather he should be encouraged to see himself as a completely independent and self-sufficient being.

This inconsistency points to some difficulties with Rousseau's account of autonomy, the significance of which will emerge later. Firstly, although Rousseau is quite explicit about the importance of sociality in shaping the capacities of the individual, he views the influence of society as a largely negative influence. At one level this is connected with his claims about the corruption of contemporary social life. At another level however it arises from a very deep-seated individualism which in Emile is represented by the isolated environment in which Emile is raised. On Rousseau's view, although sociality is necessary to the development of the individual, others always represent a potential threat to the natural integrity and independence of the individual; an idea connected of course with the central theme of his political philosophy – that dependence is the pre-condition for servitude. The role of the tutor is supposedly to provide the necessary social context for Emile's development, but without threatening his integrity. Yet Emile's

'natural' individuality is very carefully nurtured and produced. Rousseau's account of autonomy thus attempts to disavow, while yet acknowledging, the importance of social relations.

Secondly, there is a tension between the individualism of Rousseau's conception of autonomy and his recognition that, given the moral importance of the passions, emotional dependence on others is both inescapable and necessary. This tension arises from his ambivalence about the role of passion in human life. Rousseau attempts to resolve this tension by trying to distinguish the kind of dependence which undermines the autonomy of the individual, and so undermines social justice, from the kind which enables him to preserve his independence. In this context he re-introduces the distinction between the beneficial 'natural' passions, and the harmful social passions. In the final analysis however, Rousseau ends up resolving this tension by associating autonomy and dependence with two different spheres of social life.

There are three central and connected characteristics which combine to form Rousseau's ideal of the autonomous individual: self-sufficiency; moral autonomy; and self-mastery. Rousseau's conception of self-sufficiency is interesting because while much of what he says seems correct, and while many of the educational proposals to which it gives rise are revolutionary, it nevertheless promotes a very individualistic view of human life. Rousseau claims that in developing in Emile the capacity for self-sufficiency his aim is to re-create the kind of 'natural' self-sufficiency which characterised human life in the 'state of nature', by re-integrating reason, sensation and the body. The first step in this process is to develop physical self-sufficiency. To this end, Emile is encouraged from birth to develop physical strength and endurance through exercise and freedom of bodily movement. In addition he is encouraged to develop the minimum of bodily needs and to satisfy these needs as far as possible himself. He is also discouraged from

developing tastes for luxury or bodily indulgence. This physical training continues throughout the period of Emile's education, but it is emphasized most in infancy and childhood. Now on the one hand Rousseau's emphasis on the importance of physical health and strength, especially for children, is laudable, as is his view that reason is continuous with the body and with sensation. On the other hand however Rousseau clearly regards physical dependence and incapacity as detrimental to a person's autonomy because it makes them over-reliant upon others. Already then we see the beginnings of a tension between autonomy and relations of dependence and interdependence.

The second requirement for self-sufficiency is the development of emotional self-sufficiency. Again some of Rousseau's recommendations here are salutary. Emile is to learn that he cannot always get what he wants and that emotional manipulation is unacceptable. He is also to learn how to play by himself and to entertain himself. However, Rousseau also seems to equate emotional self-sufficiency with solitude and with not needing others – hence his appeal to 'man's "natural" state' to provide the model for self-sufficiency. For example Emile's main friend seems to be his tutor. He rarely has anything to do with other children, except when the tutor wishes to teach him a moral lesson about the need for humility or the need to pay heed to the sufferings of others. In addition, his relationships with his parents or with other adults play no significant role in his emotional life as Rousseau presents it. Given the care and thoroughness of Rousseau's account of Emile's education, this is no mere oversight. Rather it reflects the excessive individualism of Rousseau's conception of autonomy.[30]

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30. One of Wollstonecraft's main criticisms of Rousseau's educational programme for Emile is its individualism. In her recommendations on education in Chapter 12 of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, entitled 'On National Education', she argues that children need relationships with other children in order to learn reciprocity and equality. She thus recommends the introduction of a system of publicly-funded co-educational day-schools for all

The third aspect of self-sufficiency is intellectual self-sufficiency, a capacity which, according to Rousseau, is undermined by the early development of abstract reason. Rousseau's view is that whereas an emphasis on abstract reason in a child's early education inculcates reliance upon the authority of others, an emphasis on practical reason (the 'understanding' of the Second Discourse) encourages the child to work things out for himself. Thus Emile's education aims to develop the more practical uses of reason, those grounded in experience and requiring problem-solving skills and sensual acuity. So Emile learns geography by being made to find his way home on an empty stomach with only a compass to guide him, and he learns arithmetic by having to use it in carpentry. It is only once the capacity for practical reason has been fairly well developed in these kinds of ways that Emile is encouraged slowly to develop the capacity for abstract reason, a capacity which, if developed appropriately, will enable him to acquire the capacity critically to appraise the opinions of others. There is no denying the educational importance of Rousseau's emphasis on contextual learning and the development of problem-solving skills. But Rousseau also seems to see intellectual self-sufficiency as a matter of protecting oneself from the corrupting views of others, which is why Emile cannot be exposed to the opinions of others until he has already acquired fairly well established views of his own.

The theme of protecting oneself from the corrupting views of others re-emerges in Rousseau's conception of moral autonomy, which Rousseau understands as the idea that morality must be grounded in the individual conscience. The notion of conscience figures throughout Emile, but it emerges particularly clearly in 'The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Priest'. The notion of conscience looks two ways. On the one hand,

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children. These criticisms reflect Wollstonecraft's awareness of the inadequacy of an individualist ideal of autonomy. Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of The Rights of Woman, (Penguin, 1975).

Rousseau sees the development of moral conscience as crucial to the independence of the individual, and the idea that morality must be grounded in the individual conscience provides the moral foundation for Rousseau's emphasis on the self-sufficiency of each individual. On the other hand, one of the important roles of moral conscience is to act as a check to the kind of self-centred individualism engendered by *amour-propre.*

Rousseau argues that a sense of right and wrong cannot be taught through the abstract precepts of organised religion or through moral instruction. For religion and morality teach the individual to rely on authority and distract him from developing for himself a sense of right and wrong. For this reason, Emile is given no moral or religious training. Rather he is taught to look to his own conscience to assess the moral worth of his actions and desires. While conscience presupposes the capacity for comparison and abstraction, and hence requires abstract reason, according to Rousseau the wellsprings of conscience are the 'natural' feelings of compassion for the sufferings of others. These feelings restrain the impulses of *amour-propre* by alerting us to the effects of our actions upon others. Rousseau's view is that these feelings can only arise through experience, by being made to be aware of the sufferings of others. Thus it is because they substitute the lessons of authority for the lessons of experience, and so divorce reason from feeling, that the precepts of religion and morality are positively dangerous unless they are conjoined with conscience.

There is a tension however between Rousseau's presentation of conscience in 'The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Priest' and his attempts in the rest of Emile to develop Emile's conscience. In educating Emile Rousseau seems to think it possible for Emile to gain experience of the suffering of others without at the same time being corrupted by interaction with others. He seems to think that this can be achieved by removing Emile to the

isolation of the country and carefully controlling his interactions with others. Yet the Savoyard priest only learns conscience after having first been corrupted. This tension points once again to the impossible desire which governs Rousseau's system – a desire for virtue without vice, for goodness without corruption – and to his attempts to use the notion of 'nature' to conceal its impossibility. It also points to his ambivalence about the passions, and to the resultant tension between the individualism of his conception of autonomy and his views about the importance of feeling and passion.

Despite the importance of 'conscience' to Rousseau's conception of autonomy however, the most crucial of the three characteristics required for autonomy is the capacity for self-mastery, which Rousseau equates with virtue. Self-mastery or virtue is the capacity to control passion through strength of will. Rousseau's view is that this capacity provides the foundation for moral and intellectual independence because if a person is not in control of his passions he can neither follow his conscience nor exercise his reason. The development of this capacity is the aspect of Emile's education which is attended to last, because it builds upon the dispositions which his earlier education has inculcated. It is also the most precarious aspect of his education, because it is his passions which render him most vulnerable to the kind of dependence on others which undermines autonomy.

Given Rousseau's views, however ambivalent, about the importance of feeling on the one hand, and his emphasis on independence on the other, the difficulty he faces, as I suggested earlier, is to find a way of distinguishing between those passions which enhance self-mastery and those which undermine it. To this end Rousseau appeals initially to 'nature', contrasting the 'natural', 'gentle', passions which arise from the instincts of self-love and compassion and which are allied with the understanding (as

opposed to 'abstract reason'), with the destructive 'social' passions, such as greed, pride, envy, jealousy, arising from *amour-propre*. His view is that the kind of emotional dependence on others encouraged by the passions arising from *amour-propre* is best countered through a different kind of emotional dependence, the kind arising from the 'natural' passions. The best way to control those passions which undermine reason is through those passions which are allied with it. The first step in developing in Emile the capacity for self-mastery is thus to guide Emile's passions away from the destructive social passions and toward the natural passions, in particular towards compassion, the wellspring of conscience. Initially Emile learns the meanings of compassion and dependence through his encounters with those less privileged than himself and through his friendship with his tutor. The real test however is Emile's encounter with the passion which for Rousseau dominates the moral landscape and can represent either the greatest threat to virtue or its greatest aid – sexual love. It is in Rousseau's discussion of sexual love that the distinction between the beneficial and the harmful passions threatens to collapse in upon itself, bringing to the surface the implicit tension between his individualist conception of autonomy and his recognition of our necessary dependence on others.

In the Second Discourse, Rousseau makes a distinction between physical and moral love: 'The physical part of love is that general desire which urges the sexes to union with each other. The moral part is that which determines and fixes this desire exclusively upon one particular object.'[31] Intercourse between the sexes in the 'state of nature' is restricted to love in the physical sense because moral love involves comparison and a grasp of abstract ideas such as beauty and merit, which, as we have seen, presuppose linguistic capacities and the capacity for abstract reason. Rousseau's view is

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31. Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Everyman edition, p. 70.

that it is first and foremost the absence of moral love that preserves peace in the 'state of nature'. For while moral love as exemplified in loving family ties is the foundation of the moral and social order, when conjoined with *amour-propre* it is the source of many of the most destructive passions known to humanity. It is the passion of sexual love above all that must be mastered in order to develop a virtuous disposition. According to Rousseau, sexual love can only be mastered by conjoining it with the 'natural' passions. When directed by these passions moral love gives rise to what Rousseau regards as 'one of the noblest sentiments known to man' – conjugal love. The problem is however that, because conjugal love has the same source as the destructive passions, it can very easily be transformed from the cornerstone of social life to one of its greatest threats. The ambivalent character of moral love emerges in the contradictions implicit in Rousseau's characterization of the social role of Sophie and in his recommendations for her education.

III: 'Everything reminds her of her sex'

Although Rousseau begins his discussion of the education of Sophie by claiming that 'But for her sex, a woman is a man', it soon becomes clear that in the case of woman 'sex' is not just a physiological attribute. Rather for woman sex difference ramifies into moral and intellectual difference until 'everything reminds her of her sex'. It is for this reason, argues Rousseau, that the education and social role of Sophie must not only be different from those of Emile but almost their antithesis. Thus while Emile's physical and intellectual training is directed towards fostering autonomy, understood as independence and self-sufficiency, Sophie's education (or lack thereof) is characterized chiefly by physical restraint and intellectual under-stimulation. Similarly we have seen that virtue for Emile is connected with moral autonomy and self-mastery. By contrast, for Sophie virtue involves obedience to the authority of others, the development of sensibilities

directed towards the needs of others, and a repression of her own passions, and in particular her sexual passions, through the virtues of modesty and chastity, as well as by means of the iron grip of social opinion. Further, while Emile as a man has access to the virtues of both public and private realms, Sophie is excluded from citizenship and hence the moral transactions and obligations of the public sphere. Not only this, although ethical relations within the public sphere are founded on conventions freely negotiated by equal individuals, Rousseau claims that ethical relations within the private sphere are founded on supposedly natural sexual, and hence moral, inequalities which subject women in the family to the authority of men.

But the problem is that while Rousseau attempts to justify the specific character of Sophie's education and social role by recourse to 'nature', arguing that the physiological differences between the sexes ground moral differences between them as well as differences in reasoning capacity, he never explains exactly how the striking contrast between the educations and social roles of Emile and Sophie is grounded in their difference of sex. Nor does he explain how he gets from physiological differences to claims like this: '...in their moral relations...The man should be strong and active: the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance'.[32] In fact however, even before we reach Rousseau's appalling proposals for the education of Sophie, the narrative development of Emile's education has already made it clear that Sophie's education and social role are not based on the exigencies of 'nature'. Rather her role is literally to embody certain 'natural', gentle passions – in particular, love, devotion, self-sacrifice – which are necessary both to the preservation of the social order and to the

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32. Rousseau, Emile, Everyman p. 322.

moral life of Emile, but which are inconsistent with the kind of self-sufficient independence and autonomy required of the citizen. Her role is also to act as a safeguard against the possible failure of Emile's own attempts at self-mastery. Sophie thus does not require the kind of education which Emile has received, for since she is his 'complement' she does not need to acquire the skills and virtues that he already has. The function of her education is to supplement what his lacks.

These two aspects of Sophie's role as complement are nicely encapsulated by two particular events in Emile. The first is Emile's introduction to Sophie which occurs initially only in Emile's imagination. Before submitting Emile to the final test of his educational training – his introduction to the corruption of Parisian society – Rousseau, Emile's tutor, directs Emile's sexual passion towards Sophie, an as yet unknown and unseen woman whom Emile, not surprisingly, does not find in Paris. It is the explicit intention of the tutor in doing this to innure Emile against the possibility of corruption by passion, and he justifies his action (to the reader) by proclaiming: 'Only through passion can we gain the mastery over passions; their tyranny must be controlled by their legitimate power, and nature herself must furnish us with the means to control her'.[33] The role of Sophie, or the virtuous woman, is thus clear. Through his love for Sophie and his attachment to her, Emile learns the self-mastery which is the hallmark of virtue and autonomy. He also learns to substitute conjugal love for sexual passion. But ultimately it is not Emile's masculine 'virtue' but Sophie's 'feminine' modesty, that sustains the distinction between the beneficial and the harmful passions, that is between conjugal love and sexual passion. This is one reason why there can be neither reciprocity nor

33. Rousseau, *op. cit.* p. 292.

equality in their passion. Her subordination is the condition of possibility of his autonomy.

The second event occurs after Emile's and Sophie's engagement, when the tutor informs them that before they can be married Emile must go abroad for two years to learn the duties of citizenship. What this event reveals is that although it is through his love for Sophie that Emile learns the kind of dependence which civilizes him and prepares him for citizenship, his first duty as a man is as a citizen and not as a husband. In other words, although love is an essential part of moral life, it can play no direct part in the ethical life of the body politic. Emile's separation from her also tests the virtues which Sophie is supposed both to embody in herself and to foster in others – the virtues of love, loyalty, trust, and devotion, those virtues which supposedly characterise the ethical bonds of the family.

In sum, if Rousseau's characterisation of Sophie's relationship to Emile is conjoined with his remarks on the family in both The Social Contract and the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, it is evident that for Rousseau woman's role in social life is to provide the necessary complement to the self-sufficient autonomy of the male citizen, ensuring that love and the partial passions provide the basis for moral life without disrupting the impartial contractual relations of civil society. By distinguishing the private sphere of the family from the public sphere of free and equal citizens, and by characterizing the family as both the sphere of affectivity and the foundation of social and political life, Rousseau attempts to preserve the particularistic, affective, passional foundation of social and moral life while upholding the Enlightenment ideal of civic equality and impartial justice.[34]

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34. Genevieve Lloyd presents an argument to this effect in The Man of Reason, Chapter 4.

The irony of Rousseau's position however, is that this solution displaces the tensions within social life into the private sphere itself. Thus while the family is the foundation of civil life it is also the most partial of all partial associations. Similarly, while women embody love and the partial passions, their passion is also 'boundless' and 'disorderly'. Because of this, while conjugal love transforms sexual passion from a destructive to a beneficial passion, the precarious balance between the two can all too easily be undermined. This theme emerges in Rousseau's discussion of the sexual relationship between Sophie and Emile. Rousseau begins this discussion by claiming that, 'nature has endowed women with a power of stimulating man's passions in excess of man's power of satisfying those passions'.[35] His solution to this problem is the marriage contract which both satisfies sexual passion (or men's right of sexual access to women) and contains its damaging effect by transforming it into moral love. But this solution can only be effective if moral love does not become entirely divorced from sexual passion. One of Sophie's, or woman's, major tasks therefore is to make sure that moral love does not lose its sexual aspect. By means of a series of coquettish ruses which she learns as part of her education Sophie is supposed to keep Emile both sexually enthralled and virtuous. But this sexual power that Sophie has over Emile, though necessary, is also potentially very dangerous. For Sophie could use it not only with Emile, but with other men. This is why, for Rousseau, although conjugal love is the best way of maintaining the precarious balance between the beneficial and the destructive passions, it is a resolution which is hedged about with dangers and can only be maintained in the first instance by the repression of women's needs and passions through modesty (Sophie must reserve her sexual ploys for her husband only) and the need to preserve a good reputation. Ultimately however conjugal love (men's right of sexual access)

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35. Rousseau, Emile, Everyman, p. 323.

must be maintained by force, that is through the subordination of women in the family to the authority of men. Although Rousseau describes this subordination as 'natural', the post-social contract family of Emile is a far cry from the early family of the Second Discourse which, you will recall, was described as 'a little society, the more united because liberty and reciprocal attachment were the only bonds of its union'.

Rousseau asserts in Emile that women's subjection is necessary because women's passions are unruly. But Rousseau's explanation as to why this is the case hinges on the different relations men and women bear to reproduction, that is because maternity is a fact that cannot be doubted, whereas paternity is always only an abstraction. Rousseau's 'argument' is worth quoting in full:

> The mutual duties of the two sexes are not, and cannot be, equally binding on both. Women do wrong to complain of the inequality of man-made laws; this inequality is not of man's making, or at any rate it is not the result of mere prejudice, but of reason. She to whom nature has entrusted the care of the children must hold herself responsible for them to their father. No doubt every breach of faith is wrong, and every faithless husband, who robs his wife of the stern duties of her sex, is cruel and unjust; but the faithless wife is worse; she destroys the family and breaks the bonds of nature; when she gives her husband children who are not his own, she is false both to him and them, and her crime is not infidelity but treason. To my mind, it is the source of dissension and of crime of every kind. Can any position be more wretched than that of the unhappy father who, when he clasps his child to his breast, is haunted by the suspicion that this is the child of another, the badge of his dishonour, a thief who is robbing his own children of their inheritance. Under such circumstances the family is little more than a group of secret enemies, armed against each other by a guilty woman, who compels them to pretend to love one another.
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> Thus it is not enough that a wife should be faithful; her husband, along with his friends and neighbours, must believe in her fidelity; she must be modest, devoted, retiring; she should have the witness not only of a good conscience, but of a good reputation. In a

> word, if a father must love his children, he must be able to respect their mother. For these reasons it is not enough that the woman should be chaste, she must preserve her reputation and her good name. From these principles there arises not only a moral difference between the sexes, but also a fresh motive for duty and propriety, which prescribes to women their conduct, their manners, their behaviour. Vague assertions as to the equality of the sexes and the similarity of their duties are only empty words; they are no answer to my argument.[36]

Sex difference is thus not an issue of concern in Rousseau's 'state of nature' because there is no claim to paternal right. Paternal right only arises in civil society and, as Rousseau makes clear in the Second Discourse – anticipating Engels – with the rise of private property. But paternal right can only be assured by a marriage contract which, by subordinating women to the authority of men and debarring them from access to the opportunities of public life, functions to provide some guarantee of the certainty of paternity. This is a further reason why there can be neither reciprocity nor equality in sexual relations between men and women, for when it comes to sexual passion man's self-mastery requires that he is also master of women's bodies. Hence, contra McMillan, for Rousseau sexual difference as moral and social difference arises not from nature but from the patriarchal organisation of civil society.[37]

There is a further explanation however for Rousseau's obsession with women's 'disorderly' passions. I have argued that one of the functions of Rousseau's distinction between the beneficial and the destructive passions is

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36. Rousseau, *op. cit.* pp. 324-5.

37. In her discussion of Rousseau in The Sexual Contract Carole Pateman presents a forceful argument to show the extent to which Rousseau's social contract presupposes a sexual contract among men for the orderly exchange of women. While my discussion here is much indebted to her analysis, Pateman's claim is that the aim of the sexual contract is primarily to ensure men's sexual access to women, rather than to ensure paternal right. On my reading, Rousseau's obsession with Sophie's marital fidelity, although obviously connected with an interest in men's sexual right of access to women, is motivated more by the concern to ensure paternal right. Okin also makes this point in her discussion of Rousseau in Women in Western Political Thought (Virago, 1980; Princeton U.P. 1979).

to reconcile the tension between his individualist account of autonomy and his views on the moral importance of feeling. I have also shown that Rousseau is painfully aware of the fragility of this distinction, and it is the double character of the passion of sexual love which especially exposes this fragility. I want to suggest that Rousseau attempts to resolve this vulnerability within his system by displacing the difficulty onto sexual passion itself, making sexual passion the source of his problem, and of social disorder more generally, rather than their symptom. The real problem is that, given Rousseau's account of socialized human nature, it is the very same aspects of human nature that give rise to both virtue and vice, to what is excellent and what is destructive in human beings, which is why the distinction between the 'natural', beneficial, and the social, destructive passions cannot easily be sustained. However Rousseau projects the tensions within his system onto sexual passion itself. Given Rousseau's concern with paternal right, it is an easy step from here to claim that the ultimate source of the tensions within social life is women's sexual passion and so to see women's subordination as the only solution. Woman thus becomes both the safeguard and the potential destroyer of social life, the embodiment of both the beneficial and the destructive passions.

Conclusion

The question which Rousseau's account of masculine autonomy and feminine virtue inevitably seems to raise is whether Rousseau's ideal of autonomy is inescapably bound up with ideals of masculinity, that is whether Rousseau's sexism could be countered by making his ideal of autonomy an ideal for women. To conclude my discussion of Rousseau I want to try to pull together the numerous strands of my argument by addressing this question. My answer is that, as it stands, Rousseau's ideal of autonomy cannot simply be appropriated by women, nor is it an appropriate

ideal for women – or indeed for men. Nevertheless certain aspects of this ideal are worth preserving.

In my discussion I have shown that there are a number of problems with the Rousseauian ideal of autonomy. Firstly I have argued that this ideal is excessively individualist, and that as a result it is in tension with social relationships based on bonds of interdependence and affectivity. Secondly I have shown that this tension arises because this ideal is not simply a moral ideal, it is also a political ideal connected with a particular conception of political life. The salient features of this conception are that it is built upon the presumption that people are self-sufficient individuals motivated primarily by the pursuit of their own self-interest, and that it is structured upon a conception of social justice based upon notions of formal equality and impartiality. Thirdly I have shown that, because Rousseau is ambivalent about the passions yet recognises the moral importance of relationships based on feeling and interdependence, he supplements the lacks within his conceptions of autonomy and political life by representing women, within the private sphere, as the embodiment of the kinds of partial affections upon which social life depends. The result of Rousseau's attempt to reconcile autonomy with interdependence however is that they end up being defined in opposition to one another, with autonomy a characteristic of the masculine public sphere and dependence a characteristic of the feminine private sphere. Despite Rousseau's claim that these two spheres of social life, as well as the characteristics which they embody, are complementary, we have in fact seen that the private sphere must be subordinated to the public sphere for two reasons: firstly, to ensure paternal right; and secondly, because the passions, though necessary, are always potentially disruptive to social life.

I have argued that the representation of women's bodies as both passive and disruptive is the product, rather than the cause, of this conception of social

life. Nevertheless, this representation latches onto certain aspects of women's embodiment, in particular to aspects of women's role in reproduction, which seem incompatible with the Rousseauian ideal of autonomy, especially with the notions of self-sufficiency and self-mastery.[38] The conclusion to be drawn from this however is neither McMillan's conclusion that woman's ethical life must be centred in the private sphere, nor de Beauvoir's conclusion that woman's embodiment is an obstacle to autonomy. The appropriate conclusion is rather that this kind of ideal of autonomy, and the conception of social life with which it is connected, are inadequate. In the next chapter I want to show that this is Wollstonecraft's conclusion and that her response to it was to try to articulate an ideal of autonomy which could incorporate Rousseau's recognition of the importance of independence and individual self-determination, without defining these in opposition either to the passions or to relations of interdependence.

Before turning to Wollstonecraft however I want to conclude this chapter with a discussion of Hegel's account of the relationship between the family and civil society. In Hegel's work, Rousseau's still somewhat underdeveloped sense of the tensions between the ethical demands of relations of kinship and community on the one hand, and the Enlightenment ideals of civic equality and justice on the other, emerges in a self-conscious form. In fact Hegel's theory of the State is an explicit attempt to articulate these tensions and to reconcile them through the idea that freedom and autonomy can only be achieved in rational social institutions which are an embodiment of self-conscious Spirit. While these rational institutions include the family, as well as those institutions associated with civil society, Hegel claims that the family is Spirit's self-expression in an

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38. I discuss this claim about women's embodiment in detail in Part IV, although not in connection with Rousseau.

immediate, unconscious form, because the kinds of social relationships which characterise the ethical life of the family are based not on reason but on feeling. Moreover, while men have scope for an ethical life beyond the family, in the rational ethical relations of the State, women's ethical life is circumscribed within the family. Hegel therefore self-consciously makes explicit the recognition that underlies Rousseau's discussion of Sophie – that in the modern world 'Woman' has become the symbolic embodiment of the kinds of 'natural' ethical relations which must be both presupposed and transcended in the ethical relations of the public sphere.

Section 3: Hegel[39]

In the Philosophy of Right Hegel's descriptions of 'civil society' echo Rousseau's critique of the degeneracy of modern civil society. Hegel describes civil society as atomistic, dominated by particularistic self-interests, and characterised by a tendency to spawn inequalities, excesses and moral corruption: "...civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and want as well as of the physical and ethical degeneration common to them both".[40] However whereas Rousseau sees the particularistic excesses of civil society as arising from tendencies inherent in socialized human nature, Hegel regards civil society as a historically specific, but necessary, moment in the

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39. My analysis of Hegel's discussion of women and the family concentrates primarily on its place within the Philosophy of Right. However I also discuss his reading of Antigone in the Phenomenology of Spirit. Hegel's accounts of the symbolic significance of femininity are to be found in the following places: Phenomenology of Spirit, paragraphs 444-476; Philosophy of Right, paragraphs 158-181 plus Additions 101-115; Philosophy of Nature, translated by M.J. Petry (George Allen and Unwin, London 1970), paragraphs 366-369 (on reproduction). My reading of Hegel here has been particularly influenced by Genevieve Lloyd's discussion of Hegel in The Man of Reason, (Methuen, London, 1984) pp. 70-93, and by Carole Pateman's discussion in The Sexual Contract (Polity Press, Oxford, 1988), pp. 173-81. I have also found Luce Irigaray's reading of Hegel's version of the Antigone story fascinating and illuminating. By tracing the significance of the metaphors of blood and of the cave in the story of Antigone she shows that it is no accident that women come to be associated with the unconscious principle of social life. See Luce Irigaray, 'The Eternal Irony of the Community' in Speculum of the Other Woman, translated by Gillian C. Gill, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985).

40. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, Knox translation, para 185, p. 123. For Hegel Roman society epitomized this kind of degeneracy.

constitution of the State. Rousseau's attempt to overcome the tensions within civil society through an appeal to 'man's natural state' is thus mistaken. Civil society is specifically characterized by an infinite particularity of interests which, if left unchecked, will generate a multiplication *ad infinitum* of needs and desires, that is excess and the degeneracy which it entails. But since 'the distinction between natural and refined needs, has no qualitative limits'[41], no appeal to 'nature' can curb this excess. Rather it can only be curbed by absorbing civil society within the higher unity of the State, a unity in which particular self-interest is consciously aimed towards a universal end because each separate member of the state regards the affairs of the state as his particular affair.

Hegel is also scathing of Rousseau's idea that the tension between private interest and public good will be overcome if the state is founded on a social contract. He thinks that, far from resolving the difficulties of civil society, the assumptions of the doctrine of the social contract reinforce them. Hegel's objection to the idea of a social contract is that, while the notion of contract is appropriate in the context of transactions involving private property, it is a gross mistake to transfer the characteristics of these transactions, which arise from the subjective caprice of the parties to them, into the political relations of the state. If the state is seen as founded on a contract whose sole end is to promote the particular interests of individuals by protecting their property and personal freedom, then it becomes a purely contingent institution based on the capricious consent of its members. On Hegel's view the institution of the state is a necessary embodiment of self-conscious universal reason, or Spirit, actualizing itself as will, that is as freedom. The aim of the state therefore cannot solely be to promote the particular interest of individuals, nor can freedom be identified with a

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41. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 195, p. 128.

purely subjective freedom. Rather 'since the state is mind objectified, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life'.[42] Freedom in the rational state is therefore the unity of subjective freedom and objective freedom (freedom of the universal will). Thus while Rousseau was right to see the state as the expression of will, the social contract reduces the universal will embodied in the state to the 'general will' which is simply a union of subjective, arbitrary, individual wills united by a common interest. But this common interest cannot possibly unite the infinitely particular wills of civil society unless it is subordinated to a 'higher principle', namely universal reason as embodied in the state.

Despite his criticisms of Rousseau however, Hegel's conception of civil society, and in particular his understanding of the relationship between the family and civil society, owe a great deal to Rousseau. Themes in the Second Discourse and The Social Contract are reiterated, for example, in Hegel's claim, in the Philosophy of Right, that it is in response to the particularistic excesses of civil society that universal reason first expresses itself, even if inadequately, in social life – in the Enlightenment ideals of abstract equality, individual freedom, the 'rights of universal man', and impartial justice embodied in civil law. For Hegel, as for Rousseau, these ideals are defined in contrast to the 'natural' ethical life of the family, an ethical life which is rooted in the bonds which characterise kinship relations – the bonds of custom, habit and love. Rousseau's depiction of the family as the foundation-stone of social life is also restated in Hegel's conception of the family as the pre-condition and ethical root of the state. Further, like Rousseau, Hegel claims that woman finds 'her substantive destiny' in the ethical life of the family, while 'man has his actual substantive life in the

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42. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 258, p. 156.

State'.[43] Finally, Hegel's distinction between physical love and what he calls 'ethico-legal love' echoes Rousseau's distinctions between physical and moral, and sexual and conjugal love. However while Rousseau grounds conjugal and familial love in the passions, thus according to Hegel making them mere expressions of the subjective will, for Hegel the purest expressions of familial love are not based solely on feelings for particular individuals but are rather grounded in universal principle, a principle which embodies Spirit although in an 'unconscious' form.

It is because Hegel sees familial love as an embodiment of universal principle rather than as an expression of mere feeling that one recent feminist commentator has attempted to defend Hegel's views against feminist criticisms.[44] In her article 'Hegel and Feminism', Susan Easton argues that feminist critiques of Hegel's discussions of woman and the family attribute to Hegel what she calls a 'biological reductionist' position. By this Easton means a view which reduces sexual relationships between men and women to relationships rooted in biological necessities and which sees woman's position within the family as an inevitable function of her role in reproduction. Easton's argument is that quite to the contrary, Hegel's understanding of familial love as grounded in universal ethical principles, not only provides a means for transcending the purely biological dimensions of human sexual relationships, but also offers an account of love which goes beyond the simple view of love as passion standing in contrast to reason. In addition, according to Easton, in both his discussion of Antigone in the Phenomenology and in his discussion of marriage and the family in the Philosophy of Right, Hegel sees the ethical bonds of the family

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43. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 166, p. 144.

44. See Susan Easton's article 'Hegel and Feminism', pp.30-55 in David Lamb (ed.) Hegel and Modern Philosophy (Croom Helm, UK, 1987). Easton refers to the work of Okin, Elshtain and Lloyd as representative of the 'orthodox' feminist position.

as redemptive and as a 'counter to the fragmenting forces of civil society'.[45] She concludes that Hegel's conception of woman's contribution to ethical life, far from endorsing a reductionist view of women's position in social life, actually counters such a view.

As I have already pointed out in my discussion of McMillan, Easton is right to argue that Hegel does not situate woman's ethical life merely in the realm of biological necessity but sees it as an embodiment of self-conscious Spirit in social life. However there are two problems with Easton's analysis. Firstly she overlooks the fact that although for Hegel the family is an expression of Spirit in social life, it is nevertheless an inadequate expression of Spirit and therefore one which must be superseded by the more adequate forms of Spirit's self-expression in civil society and the state. She also overlooks the fact that although the ethical bonds of the family – the bonds of love – create the conditions of possibility for ethical life in general, love is not the highest form of ethical relationship. Rather the highest expression of ethical life is reason as embodied in the relationship between the state and the citizens of the state. Further for Hegel the ethical bonds of the family can only be ethical to the extent that they are directed towards the interests of the state. Easton's analysis thus ignores the fact that while Hegel indeed recognizes the ethical significance of love, the family and woman's place within it, Hegel's understanding of this significance is structured by a network of hierarchical oppositions – between Spirit as expressed in love and Spirit as expressed in universal reason, between the 'natural' unconscious unity of the family and the self-conscious 'rational' unity of the state – which entail the political subordination of women. In addition, these oppositions function within the family itself, in the relationship between husband and wife, resulting in the subordination of women within

45. Easton, *op. cit.* p. 36.

the family to the authority of men. Secondly, Easton asserts that 'drawing attention to the 'feminine' quality of love does not in itself entail a reductionist position provided that it is clear that this quality is not biologically based'.[46] But she fails to ask why love is seen as a 'feminine' quality and why woman's ethical life should be restricted to maintaining the ethical bonds of the family and resisting the encroachments of the self-interested and fragmented life of civil society. In the context of an ethical and political matrix in which woman's identification with love and with the ethical bonds of the family entails women's subordination both inside and outside the family, the claim that Hegel's position is amenable to feminism because he regards love as an ethical relationship misses the point.

For the remainder of this chapter I want to show that Hegel's discussion of woman's ethical life in the family provides Hegel with a way of preserving the 'natural' bonds of love and kinship which are essential to sociality but which Hegel, perhaps more than anyone else, realized are necessarily in conflict with the ethical and political structures of the modern, post-Enlightenment, state. As a result, woman is precluded from attaining the kind of autonomy which characterises the social life of the citizens of the state. Further, although Hegel does not situate woman's ethical life outside reason or in the realm of biological necessity, he nevertheless symbolically aligns woman and woman's body with 'nature' because woman plays the same function with respect to social life as Nature does with respect to self-conscious Spirit.

In the Introduction to Part III, I claimed that Hegel articulates what I called a social ideal of autonomy. In the Philosophy of Right this ideal is tied to Hegel's notion of 'ethical life', which he contrasts with the notion of

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46. Easton, *op. cit.* p. 40

'morality'. According to Hegel, in 'ethical life' Spirit becomes ethically self-conscious. Hegel claims that the sphere of ethical life supersedes the sphere of 'morality' because in ethical life the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity which characterises morality is transcended. From the standpoint of morality the essential factor in moral life is the freedom and autonomy of the individual will and it is in relation to this will that both the morality and immorality of actions are grounded. The moral attitude is governed by a dialectical interplay between the subjective purpose, intention and conscience of the individual moral subject, and notions of responsibility, welfare and good which hold the actions of individuals accountable to objective norms. For Hegel this dialectic is expressed in its purest form in the conflict between Kant's categorical imperative, which embodies universality and objectivity in the highly abstract form of duty, and the subjectivism of the romantics, including Rousseau, which grounds morality in the particularity of the individual conscience. Hegel argues that, to the extent that both positions locate the essence of morality in the subjective will they are identical. For they both regard freedom as abstract and individual, while 'duty' is presented as something external to the individual moral subject, and as a limitation, however necessary, of his freedom.[47]

The sphere of 'ethical life' preserves the important insight of the attitude of 'morality', the insight that moral action must arise out of conscience and subjective dispositions. However, for the ethical subject, subjective disposition and duty are not opposed, and for two reasons: firstly, because the ethical subject recognises that his subjective freedom can only be actualized in rational social institutions, and to the extent that his particular

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47. Hegel's critique of the sphere of 'morality' echoes his critique of 'civil society'. In fact Hegel's claim is that the moral attitude arises from, and is founded in, the kind of conception of social and political relations which characterise 'civil society'.

interests concord with his duties as a member of those institutions; and secondly, because the legitimacy of the institutions of the ethical state derives from the fact that they embody and preserve the subjective freedom of the citizens of the state. Consequently, 'ethical life is a subjective disposition, but one imbued with what is inherently right'[48], while the ethical order, in contrast to the abstract Kantian notion of duty, is a concrete system of duties in which 'the individual acquires his substantive freedom'.[49] Autonomy, or 'substantive freedom' can thus be achieved only in the context of social institutions in which ethical subjects recognise themselves and in which they recognise others as the condition of possibility of their freedom.

Hegel distinguishes three different moments of ethical life which each embody distinctive forms of recognition. These are the Family, Civil Society, and the State.[50] The family is ethical life in the phase of substantive, but immediate, unity, by which Hegel means that while the ethical bonds of the family form the basis for social life, and while the unity of the family prefigures the unity of the state, social life does not find its highest expression in the family. This is because the unity of the family is a unity based on feeling and custom, rather than reason, a unity which is therefore contingent and potentially capable of dissolution. In the family, recognition takes the form of love. In contrast to the unity of the family, where what is essential to the individual is his/her membership of the family, civil society is structured around two main principles, the primacy of the self-interested individual, and the interdependence of all individuals on one another. On the one hand civil society thus introduces into social life

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48. Hegel, P.R. para 141, p. 102.

49. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 149, p. 107.

50. In what follows I will not follow Hegel's practice of capitalizing these terms.

difference, particularity and plurality. On the other hand, acting as a curb to the free play of particularity, it introduces universality in the form of justice – understood as the abstract rights and abstract equality of 'universal man', which are embodied in law. In civil society however, universality and particularity do not form a unity because these two principles are defined in opposition to one another; it is only by compulsion (as a curb on the excesses of self-interested particularity) that universality (in the form of justice and law) arises. The kind of recognition embodied in civil society is thus the recognition by each individual that he requires others in order to pursue his self-interested ends, and therefore recognition by each of the liberty of others. In the state, the oppositions internal to civil society, and between the family and civil society, are reconciled and the individual lives a universal life founded on reason. However the state is not something existing over and above, or separate from, the family and civil society. The state is rather the ground of the family and civil society, which are its two moments or manifestations. When the interests of the family and the interests of civil society are directed toward the interests of the state, the 'substantive unity' of the former and the particularity of the latter are preserved, but the opposition between them is overcome because they are both grounded in a universal end. The kind of recognition embodied in the state is the recognition of the citizens of the state that their substantive freedom can only be achieved in rational institutions which express the self-conscious reason of each citizen. These 'rational institutions' include the institutions of civil society and the state – corporations, the judiciary, the parliament– as well as the institutions of the family – specifically marriage and property.

Hegel's discussion of the relationship between the family and civil society occurs at a number of different levels. At one level the transition from the family to civil society is a necessary development in the unfolding of the

Idea of freedom to its final expression in the state. At another level, the transition between them is a historical transition. Thus the kinds of ethical relationships embodied in the family represent Spirit's *immediate* self-expression in social life, in forms of social recognition self-consciously founded on custom and kinship relations. According to Hegel, this immediate self-expression of Spirit corresponds with the ethical life of the Greek polis.[51] His claim is that although the polis embodied the unity and universality characteristic of the state, this unity could not incorporate a recognition of the subjective freedom of individuals. With the emergence of this principle 'in an inward form in the Christian religion and in an external form...in the Roman world'[52], the demise of the polis and the corruption of its ethical principle were inevitable. As a result, social relations founded on the unity of custom gave way to civil society and to social relations founded on a recognition of the difference and particularity of separate individuals. At yet another level, the historical development and the development of the Idea of freedom are the same, and both preserve within them the moments which have been superseded. Thus, the 'substantive unity' of kinship relations and the 'particularity' of social relations founded on the idea of subjective freedom are both preserved in modern social life in the idea of the state, which manifests itself in the two moments of the family and civil society.

At all three levels however, woman's ethical life is confined to the sphere of the family. As a consequence, woman is symbolically aligned with Spirit's immediate and unconscious self-expression in social life. Despite the fact that they relate to two different forms of social organisation – characteristic of antiquity and modernity respectively – and hence to two different

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51. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 185, pp. 123-4; para 356, p.221; Addition 154, p. 280.

52. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 185, p. 124.

moments of Spirit's self-expression, Hegel's accounts of woman's ethical life, in his discussion of Antigone in the Phenomenology and in his discussion of the modern family in the Philosophy of Right, complement each other in bringing out the meaning of this symbolism. I want to begin to analyse this symbolism by first looking at Hegel's discussion of woman's role within the modern family.

We saw earlier that in the Philosophy of Right Hegel claims that the unity of the family is a unity based on feeling. The first moment or expression of this unity is the love between husband and wife which, according to Hegel, has two aspects, physical and ethico-legal. The physical aspect of love may be viewed from both an objective and a subjective point of view. Objectively, it involves the reproduction and maintenance of the species, which for Hegel is the rational ground of sex differences. Subjectively, it is experienced as sexual desire. However Hegel argues that although the physical aspects of love are essential to marriage, marriage cannot be founded on sexual passion alone. Rather, marriage is primarily an ethical relation which transcends 'the contingency and caprice of bodily desire' because it involves the renunciation of selfish independence in mutual recognition: 'From this point of view, their union is a self-restriction, but in fact it is their liberation, because in it they attain their substantive self-consciousness'.[53] For Hegel this renunciation cannot be merely a private affair between two individuals, for then it is indistinguishable from a contingent inclination. Genuine ethical recognition, as we have seen, can only occur in the context of social institutions. The form of recognition expressed in love must thus be objectively realised in marriage and

53. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 162, p. 111.

mediated through a public and symbolic action, a wedding – hence the importance of the legal tie.[54]

In his characterisation of love Hegel is explicit that both sexes renounce their individual personality in the love relation. However this renunciation seems to have a different meaning for the woman than it does for the man. For although Hegel does not deny to woman either the right to subjective freedom or the right to recognition within the love relation, she is nevertheless precluded from engaging in the activities and forms of recognition characteristic of citizenship. Her freedom is thus a very attenuated form of freedom, freedom grounded in feeling rather than in reason. Because of this, her ethical life within the family is different from that of her husband. Further, her freedom within the family and within the love relation must always be subordinate to his.

Firstly, the man leads a double ethical life. On the one hand in the family 'he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling'. On the other hand he leads 'his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself'.[55] The ethical life of woman however is bound up entirely with marriage and the family 'and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind'.

> Thus one sex is mind in its self-diremption into explicit personal self-subsistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality, i.e. the self-consciousness of conceptual thought and the volition of the objective final end. The other sex is mind maintaining itself in unity

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54. For Hegel the ethical and the legal aspects of marriage are equally significant. He berates Kant for regarding marriage only as a civil contract and so reducing it to the 'level of a contract for reciprocal use'. According to Hegel, although marriage originates in a contract it is a 'contract to transcend the standpoint of contract, the standpoint from which persons are regarded in their individuality as self-subsistent units'. *op. cit.* para 163, p. 122.

55. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 166, p. 114.

> as knowledge and volition of the substantive, but knowledge and volition in the form of concrete individuality and feeling.[56]

Secondly, and because of this, sexual desire has a different meaning for the two sexes. Because a man's principal sphere of ethical action is outside the family, it matters less if he gives way to sensual impulses before marriage than it does for a woman who 'in surrendering her body loses her honour'[57]. In the Phenomenology Hegel even claims that while the man acquires the right of desire within marriage, 'and at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to it', 'in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, [woman's] interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire'.[58]

There are similar asymmetries in Hegel's accounts of the relations the man and the woman bear to the two external moments or manifestations of the love relation – the family property and children. Although he deplores the Roman system of law which made children the property of their fathers and which precluded women from inheritance rights, Hegel, like Rousseau, nevertheless sees the institutions of monogamous marriage and private property as clearly linked, and as necessitating the political subordination of women both inside and outside the family. Thus, despite his claim that women have a right to inheritance of the family capital, which is common capital, he regards the husband as both the legal representative of the family and as having the 'prerogative to go out and work for its living, to attend to its needs, and to control and administer its capital.'[59] Woman's role in the family by contrast is to instill in the child 'ethical principles in the form of feeling' 'so that thus equipped with the foundation of an ethical life, his

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56. *ibid.*

57. Hegel, *op. cit.* Addition 106 to para 164, p. 263.

58. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, para 457, p. 275.

59. Hegel, P.R. para 171, p.116.

heart may live its early years in love, trust and obedience'. In addition to this positive aim, the child's early education also has 'the negative aim of raising children out of the instinctive, physical, level on which they are originally, to self-subsistence and freedom of personality and so to the level on which they have the power to leave the natural unity of the family'.[60] But while woman's role is to promote this kind of 'self-subsistence' in others, she herself is precluded from attaining it.

Like Rousseau, Hegel claims that these ethical differences in the lives of men and women arise from physiological differences between the sexes. Again like Rousseau, he characterises these differences in terms of the difference between passivity and activity. Whereas men are like animals, women are like plants 'because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the vague unity of feeling', rather than the unity of reason.[61] Similarly, he compares the state with the nervous system, with the family corresponding to 'sensibility' – 'feeling in the abstract, keeping oneself self-enclosed, the dull movement which goes on internally, reproduction, internal self-nutrition, growth, and digestion' – and civil society corresponding to 'irritability', 'sensation moving outwards'.[62] In the context of my earlier discussion about the relationship between the family and civil society, what this comparison makes clear however is that the representation of woman's body as passive is the product of an ethical and political matrix in which woman's role is to preserve the ethical bonds

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60. Hegel, *op. cit.* para 175, p. 117 & Addition 112 to para 175, p. 265.

61. Hegel, *op. cit.* Addition 107 to Para 166, p.263.

62. Hegel, *op. cit.* Addition 157 to Para 263, p. 281; cf. also the Philosophy of Nature, para. 368, p. 175: 'The clitoris moreover is inactive feeling in general; in the male on the other hand, it has its counterpart in active sensibility...Thus, the simple retention of conception in the uterus, is differentiated in the male into productive cerebrality and the external vital. On account of this difference therefore, the male is the active principle; as the female remains in her undeveloped unity, she constitutes the principle of conception'. Hegel's account of the significance of sex differences seems to owe a great deal to Aristotle.

which modern masculine ethical and political life both presupposes and transcends. The specific character of these ethical bonds emerges most clearly in Hegel's discussion of Antigone in the Phenomenology. This discussion also makes it clear that woman's identification with the bonds of kinship is rooted in her role as mediating the relationship between Nature and Spirit.

Hegel characterises the ethical world in which the conflict between Antigone and Creon is played out – the world of the Greek polis – as a world in which social recognition takes the form of custom. In this ethical world individuality or subjective freedom has not yet emerged as such. Individuals know themselves only as members of the social whole, the community, which is actualized and has objective form in the customary laws of the community. As a consequence, ethical life takes the form of unreflective duty:

> In it there is no caprice and equally no struggle, no indecision, since the making and testing of law has been given up; on the contrary, the essence of ethical life is for this consciousness immediate, unwavering, without contradiction.[63]

In this immediacy of duty lies both the strength and the weakness of the ethical world of custom. Its strength derives from the fact that individuals know their existence depends on their belonging to the social whole. Its weakness derives from the fact that, because individuals simply 'know' the rightness of their duty, when their different duties conflict the conflict undermines the social whole, as is the case in the struggle between Antigone and Creon, or rather between the opposing laws which they respectively embody.

Hegel describes the opposing laws embodied by Antigone and Creon in a number of different ways: as an opposition between divine law and human

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63. Hegel, Phenomenology, para 465, p. 279.

law; between the law of the heart and public law; between the law of the family and the law of the nation; and between the law of woman and the law of man. What causes the ultimate downfall of the ethical world of custom is the fact that, although opposed to it, human law is rooted in divine law because the world of custom emerges out of, and has its essence in, the 'natural' community of the family. Human law is the outward expression or actual, self-conscious existence of its unconscious, 'inner Notion', that is divine law or the law of the family. Thus the world of custom gets its strength as an ethical community from the fact that its substance lies in the ethical ties of the family. Hegel describes the family as a 'natural' community because it is founded on ties of kinship, or what he calls 'blood relations'. These relations are 'natural' because they arise out of the natural processes by means of which the species reproduces and maintains itself through the births and deaths of individuals. However 'blood relations' are only *ethical* relations to the extent that they transcend these natural processes. The function of 'woman' in the ethical life of communities based on custom, is to enact this transformation of natural relations into ethical relations, through rites and symbolic gestures which mediate natural processes and imbue them with ethical significance.

In the Phenomenology Hegel claims that the most significant symbolic rites are those associated with death, that is funeral rites. This is because while living individuals are able to give their lives spiritual significance through their own actions, the dead individual is threatened with becoming merely a meaningless corpse, prey to the processes of corruption and consumption by other living things. The role of the family, embodied in woman, is to rescue the dead individual from this fate, through funeral rites which make him a member of the divine underworld which watches over and protects the daylight world of living human beings. Hegel also claims that of the blood relations within the family – those between husband and wife,

parents and children, and brother and sister – the most ethical is the relationship between brother and sister because in this relationship the 'natural' aspects of blood relations are least present. In the relationship between husband and wife, ethical recognition firstly takes the form of natural desire and then is mediated through a third term, the child, a natural product of this desire, while in the relationship between parents and their children recognition is not mutual – the child can only achieve independence by breaking away from his natural tie to his parents. However in the brother-sister relation, their ties of kinship preclude the possibility of desire and so 'they are free individualities in regard to each other', hence capable of mutual ethical recognition.

However despite Hegel's claim that brother and sister 'are free individualities in regard to each other', their positions both within the family and in the public world are not the same. While the sister remains within the family, the brother becomes also a member of the broader community. It is this difference between the positions of women and men that brings about the downfall of the world of custom, for it creates within the community an internal enemy – womankind. The opposition between woman and the broader community surfaces in the event of war.[64] Hegel claims that the community can only survive if the male members of the family leave the inward-looking sphere of the family and become active participants in the public world. But this public world contains within it an implicit recognition of individuality, for it has a tendency to become fragmented, with individuals losing sight of their dependence on the social whole. At such times the unity and survival of the community can only be recovered through war, which confronts individuals with the possibility of

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64. Genevieve Lloyd gives a detailed analysis of Hegel's account of the opposition between femininity and war in her article 'Selfhood, War and Masculinity' in Feminist Challenges, C. Pateman & E. Gross (eds.) (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986).

death, 'their lord and master', and in doing so makes them realise that their survival depends upon the survival and unity of the whole community. In war, however, the community asks the ultimate sacrifice from the family, for it robs the family of its male members. The family's compensation is the right to reclaim its dead for itself through its own funeral rites and ceremonies. This is why Creon's refusal to Antigone of the right of a sister to bury her brother is so blasphemous – because it embodies a refusal to recognise the dependence of the community on the family from which it emerged. Creon's refusal, and Antigone's insistence on the sacredness of familial ties, thus upsets the whole tenuous relationship between the family and the public world, between divine law and human law, and so brings to the surface the contradiction at the heart of the world of custom – that the community can only survive at the expense of those very bonds of kinship from which it emerged and on which it depends. Although a recognition of the value of individuality does arise out of this conflict, partly through Antigone's insistence on the importance of the spirit of Polyneices, it is achieved only through the downfall of the kinds of substantive ethical relationships which characterise the world of custom.

According to Hegel, what distinguishes modernity from the ancient world of custom is that the modern world has gone through the necessary phase of rampant individuality which characterised the Roman world. As a consequence, modern social life incorporates a recognition of the subjective freedom of individuals. However Hegel's concern is that this recognition can give rise to a very soulless and legalistic form of social life, a world in which individuals become abstract and isolated persons. At its worst this can give rise to forms of totalitarianism, as happened with the Roman emperors.[65] At its best it can give rise to the recognition of the 'rights of

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[65] See the section of the Phenomenology of Spirit entitled 'Legal Status', paras 290-294. Interestingly, in the Philosophy of Right Hegel connects women's financial

man' which characterises the Enlightenment. But what Hegel desires is a form of social life which can recognise the subjective freedom of individuals, but which preserves the substantive kinds of ethical bonds of kinship and community characteristic of the world of custom. This is only possible however if these substantive bonds are rooted in universal reason, rather than in Nature.

Hegel's account of the State, which, as we have seen, grounds the freedom of individuals in their relationship to the rational institutions of the State, is an attempt to articulate such a conception of social life. But Hegel's modern community, like the ancient community, can only achieve a substantive ethical life by being rooted in the ethical bonds which characterise the modern family – the bonds of love. Within this family woman still has the function of mediating between Nature and Spirit – remember it is the mother who is charged with the duty of 'raising children out of the instinctive, physical, level on which they are originally, to self-subsistence and freedom of personality and so to the level on which they have the power to leave the natural unity of the family'. Further, as this quotation makes explicit, because the bonds of the family are bonds of feeling, rather than bonds of reason, and so retain their roots in natural desire, masculine ethical and political life is still defined as a transcendence of the 'natural' harmony and unity of the family sphere. Because of this, modern life preserves, through woman's position within the family, not only the ethical bonds characteristic of kinship relations, but also the tension between the private world of the family and the public world of citizenship. In fact, speaking of Antigone, Hegel claims that this opposition is 'the supreme opposition in ethics and therefore in tragedy; and it is individualized in the

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disenfranchisement within Roman law to the rampant individualism of Roman society. See the discussion in para 180, pp. 120-122.

same play in the opposing natures of man and woman'.[66] The preservation, within the modern State, of the substantive ethical life which characterises kinship relations can therefore only be achieved by denying woman the kind of social autonomy or 'substantive freedom' which arises from the rational recognitive relations of the public sphere.

In the next chapter I will argue that Wollstonecraft was also aware of the tensions within modern social life, and recognised, although in a much less self-conscious way than Hegel, that social life must be grounded in what Hegel calls 'substantive' ethical relationships. However she rejected the idea that these substantive relationships can only be maintained by denying women the scope to exercise autonomy and by making woman the embodiment of ethical relations founded on feeling. Her claim was that this 'solution' to the tensions within modern social life is in fact the main source of the problem. In trying to articulate an ideal of autonomy for women she also made brilliantly clear, and for the first time, what the effect is on *women* of those symbolic structures which associate *woman* with feeling as opposed to reason.

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66. Hegel, P.R. para 166, p. 115

Chapter Five

REASON AND SENSIBILITY: THE IDEAL OF WOMEN'S SELF-GOVERNANCE IN THE WRITINGS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

> '...when morality shall be settled on a more solid basis, then, without being gifted with a prophetic spirit, I will venture to predict that woman will be either the friend or slave of man. We shall not, as at present, doubt whether she is a moral agent, or the link which unites man with brutes.'[1]

I

In a letter written in 1795 while she was travelling in Scandinavia doing business on behalf of Gilbert Imlay, the man who had recently abandoned both her and her child by him, Wollstonecraft wrote of herself: 'For years have I endeavoured to calm an impetuous tide – labouring to keep my feelings to an orderly course. – It was striving against the stream. – I must love and admire with warmth, or I sink into sadness.'[2] It is reflections such as these, as well as the tempestuous events of Wollstonecraft's own personal life, which have led one of her biographers to suggest that Wollstonecraft was unable in her own life to live by the ideal of self-governance which she proposed for women in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.[3] The

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1. Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, (Penguin, 1975) p. 120. Hereafter cited in footnotes as V.R.W. I use the terms 'autonomy' and 'self-governance' interchangeably in this chapter although only the latter term was used by Wollstonecraft. My tendency however is to stick with Wollstonecraft's own term.

2. Mary Wollstonecraft, Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark in Janet M. Todd (ed.) A Wollstonecraft Anthology (Indiana U.P. 1977), Letter VIII, p. 160.

3. This view is expressed by Claire Tomalin in The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft, (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1974). Between the time of the publication of Vindication of The Rights of Woman in 1792 and her death following childbirth in 1797, Wollstonecraft had lived in revolutionary circles in Paris during the French Revolution, had

explanation proffered for this apparent discrepancy is that the Vindication was written when Wollstonecraft was childless and inexperienced in sexual relationships with men. Her later experiences taught her however that passion cannot always, or very easily, be governed by reason. More recent feminist commentators have rejected this rather patronizing view of the relationship between Wollstonecraft's life and her writings.[4] However the idea that Wollstonecraft defined self-governance in opposition to passion has not been challenged and still prevails even in feminist interpretations of her work. Jane Martin for example argues that Wollstonecraft adopts what Martin calls a 'sovereignty model of personality', which posits reason in opposition to feeling as the 'ruling element' of the soul and which allows between reason and feeling 'no give and take, no interaction, no sensitivity to context.'[5]

My argument in this chapter is that the overriding preoccupations of Wollstonecraft's work, as well as of her life, were to articulate what it means for women to think and act as autonomous moral agents, and to envisage the kind of social and political organisation required in order for them to do so. Although at times she seemed to identify autonomy with reason, defining it in opposition to passion, in a context in which, as we have seen,

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an affair with the American Imlay who was the father of her first child Fanny, attempted suicide on two occasions following the break-up of her relationship with Imlay, and lived with and then married William Godwin who was the father of her second child Mary (Shelley). By the standards of her time, and indeed even by our own, her life was extremely unconventional. It is partly because of this that since the publication of Vindication the nature of her personal life has often provided the main context for the reception and interpretation of her work.

4. See especially Miriam Kramnick's 'Introduction' to the Penguin edition of Vindication and Moira Gatens, 'The Oppressed State of My Sex: Wollstonecraft on Reason, Feeling and Equality' in C. Pateman & M.L. Stanley (eds.) Feminist Interpretations of Political Theory (Polity Press, forthcoming). Although my interpretation of Wollstonecraft differs in some respects from that of Gatens it was her discussion in this article which in part provoked a re-thinking of my views on Wollstonecraft.

5. Jane Roland Martin, 'Wollstonecraft's Daughters', Ch. 4 of Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman, (Yale U.P., 1985).

woman 'is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust'[6], Wollstonecraft also struggled to develop an account of women's moral agency which would incorporate a recognition not only of women's capacity to reason, but also of their right to experience and give expression to passion, including sexual desire. Of particular concern to her was the need to create the possibility for genuinely reciprocal friendships and love relationships between men and women. She was also vehement that women's bodies should be regarded neither as mere objects of use, pleasure and exchange among men, nor by women as objects of narcissistic attention. Rather, respect for the body is an integral part of both self-esteem and respect for others. Wollstonecraft's view was that such reciprocity and respect could only be realised in a context where women are able to exercise control of both the external – financial, educational and political – circumstances of their lives, and the direction of their own affections.

This interpretation of Wollstonecraft does not entail a denial of the claims that there are tensions within her account of women's autonomy, as well as difficulties with it for contemporary feminists. In particular, Wollstonecraft's treatment of the distinctions between reason/passion and public/private seems to raise problems from a feminist perspective for her understanding of self-governance. But I want to suggest that these problems are not as clear-cut as they are sometimes made to seem. Firstly it is true that at many points in the Vindication Wollstonecraft is explicit that virtue must be founded on reason, not sensibility. She also ties virtue to the notion of the perfectibility of the soul. This lends credence to the view that she regards self-governance as a matter of reason's control over unruly passions associated with the body. From a feminist perspective this is

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6. Wollstonecraft, VRW p. 142.

problematic because it allies Wollstonecraft's account of self-governance with hierarchical oppositions between soul/body, reason/passion and masculine/feminine. The supposedly sex-neutral 'self' which controls the body is thus implicitly associated with 'masculine' virtues while downgrading 'feminine' virtues associated with affectivity. While not denying that Wollstonecraft does appeal to the idea of a 'soul which knows no sex', I will try to show that, within the inevitable limits posed by this idea, Wollstonecraft was also struggling to articulate a more subtle view of self-governance, one which would not pit women's reason in opposition either to their bodies or to affectivity. The outlines of this view are certainly present in the Vindication but they are more fully developed in Wollstonecraft's posthumously published novel The Wrongs of Woman and in some of her travel writings and personal letters.[7]

Secondly, in the Vindication Wollstonecraft makes much of the claim that, although virtue must be regarded as the same in both sexes, men and women have different 'duties'. Women's 'duties', duties associated with the care of children and the running of the household, are considered by Wollstonecraft to follow 'naturally' from women's role in reproduction. But, as feminists have pointed out, this division of the sexes according to duties, as well as the idea that certain duties are 'natural' to women, derives from and preserves the distinction between public and private which is at the root of women's subordination. Moira Gatens argues that

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7 Mary Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment, in Mary and The Wrongs of Woman, edited by James Kinsley and Gary Kelly (World's Classics, Oxford U.P. 1980). This unfinished novel, which Wollstonecraft tells the reader is the story 'of woman, rather than of an individual', is set in an asylum – Wollstonecraft's metaphor for women's 'civil death' in eighteenth century English society (see footnote 10 below). Its three central characters are Maria, a woman who has been committed and had her child abducted by an unfaithful and impecunious husband (George Venables) seeking to gain control of her inheritance; Jemima, Maria's warder, a working-class woman whose basically virtuous character has been deadened by poverty, sexual abuse, hard labour and lack of affection; and the ambivalent Darnford, Maria's lover, who seems to embody both the virtues and the vices which Wollstonecraft discovered in men.

Wollstonecraft's endorsement of a sexual division of labour is a consequence of her attempt to extend the liberal ideal of equality to women.[8] According to Gatens, Wollstonecraft assumes that the liberal notion of equality, and the reason which grounds it, are sex-neutral. In fact however, the characteristics of the 'equal' liberal citizen are defined in opposition to, but also presuppose, those affective virtues associated with women. As a result the liberal public sphere is a sphere of male equality which can only function through the subordination of women in the private sphere. Wollstonecraft's argument that women can fulfill dual roles as mothers-daughters-wives and as equal citizens thus overlooks the fact that within liberalism women's duties are necessarily tied to women's subordination. According to Gatens, Wollstonecraft attempts to deal with this difficulty by denying the ethical significance of those virtues associated with women, and adopting a supposedly sex-neutral but in fact masculine ideal of virtue in both public and private spheres. But given the facts of women's embodiment, while the ethical significance of sexual difference is denied, difference re-emerges at the level of the division of labour.

While I do not deny that the idea that women have certain 'natural' duties must be rejected, I want to suggest that Wollstonecraft's views on the relation between public and private spheres are more complex than perhaps Gatens allows. Although Wollstonecraft certainly wants nothing to do with the Rousseauian idea of specific 'feminine' virtues, she does not deny the ethical importance of the affections. Nor does she overlook the ethical significance of sexual difference.[9] Her concern is to understand the kind of

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8. Gatens, *op. cit.* See also Moira Gatens, 'Rousseau and Wollstonecraft: Nature vs. Reason' in Women and Philosophy, ed. by Janna Thompson, supplement to vol. 64 AJP, June 1986.

9. Gatens' arguments in both her articles on Wollstonecraft seem to assume that a recognition of the ethical significance of sexual difference entails the idea of a specific feminine ethic. My argument in this thesis is that while sexual difference gives rise to different bodily

moral character required in order to achieve justice in the public realm and genuine reciprocity in the private. But what motivates this concern is a recognition that male and female embodiment are different and that this difference has ethical and political significance. It was for this reason that she called not only for a 'revolution in female manners' but also for a complete transformation of the legal and economic relations of both public and private spheres.

I do not claim that Wollstonecraft was entirely successful in her effort to combat the dominant Enlightenment philosophical and cultural representation of women's bodies as obstacles to women's moral agency. At times she certainly seems to take over the view that women's bodies are more 'dependent' than men's and hence that they may be impediments to virtue. Particularly in The Wrongs of Woman and in some of her reflections on own her feelings for her daughter, she also seems to suggest that women are by nature more susceptible to the 'attached affections' than men. And, as I stated above, she seems to endorse the idea that certain duties are natural to women. But even here Wollstonecraft shows an awareness that perhaps her views, as well as her own susceptibilities, arise more from 'the imperfect state of society' than from the nature of women's bodies.

II

When reading Wollstonecraft it is important to try to disentangle her somewhat sketchy conception of self-governance from the arguments for equality out of which it arises. In her defense of equality she puts a great deal of stress on women's capacity to reason and on the idea that virtue must be founded on reason. This gives rise to the impression that for

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perspectives, a recognition of the ethical significance of these different perspectives need not entail a sexually specific ethic.

Wollstonecraft self-governance is equivalent to the rule of reason. I want to suggest however that Wollstonecraft does not straightforwardly endorse the extreme rationalism of the arguments for equality. Rather these arguments serve the strategic function of directly answering the charges against women's equality that were raised by Enlightenment thinkers, but in particular by Rousseau. Although the arguments for equality provide the necessary theoretical underpinning for her account of self-governance, my claim is that in this account the role of reason figures more as a necessary part of a virtuous character than as the sole authority in all matters.

Wollstonecraft's argument in defense of women's equality works by extending the Enlightenment critique of sovereign power to relations between the sexes. Her claim is that if sovereign power is deemed illegitimate because it sanctions arbitrary power, then logical consistency requires that any exercise of arbitrary power be deemed illegitimate. What she seeks to show is that women's subordination to men is purely arbitrary, that is, it cannot be justified by reason. Wollstonecraft's main method of exposing the arbitrary nature of patriarchal power is via a critique of Rousseau's arguments against women's claims to equality. Her targets are firstly Rousseau's claim that women are by nature inferior to men with respect to those capacities which ground equality, namely reason, independence and virtue, and secondly his claim that women's equality would subvert the social order. In the Vindication Wollstonecraft presents two main arguments against the first claim, an environmental argument and an argument based on an appeal to the perfectibility of the soul. The environmental argument involves a straightforward appeal to empiricist psychology. Following Locke she argues that our capacities are developed and our characters formed in response to our environments, or what she terms 'the effect of an early association of ideas'. For Wollstonecraft one of the most significant features of the environment is education or its lack, but

environment also embraces customs, habits, opportunities, parental influences and so on. Her response to Rousseau concedes that women 'in the present state of society' do seem to be less capable of both reason and virtue than men but seeks to show that this is simply a product of women's education and environment, rather than a natural incapacity.

The environmental argument has of course been rehearsed repeatedly under a number of different guises by feminists since Wollstonecraft. A more interesting argument from our point of view is the appeal to the perfectibility of the soul. At one level this argument works simply to challenge the coherence of any claim that certain groups of human beings can be naturally subject to others. Women, says Wollstonecraft, are either human beings or they are not, that is, they either have an immortal soul or they do not. To postulate the possibility of a being which is neither one thing nor the other is to suggest that women are 'beautiful flaws in nature. Let it also be remembered that they are the only flaw.'[10] If women are <u>not</u> human beings then they must be regarded as subject to their impulses and hence incapable of freedom of the will. If this is the case then their subjection to the authority of others is perfectly justifiable. However if women <u>are</u> human beings then their subjection to the will of others is completely unjustifiable. Furthermore if this is the case it is morally requisite that women be given the liberty and the scope to perfect their souls through the exercise of their reason. Underlying this challenge is the idea that human beings have a duty to improve their souls, more than this, that the highest aim of human life is self-improvement. Wollstonecraft's argument against Rousseau is thus that by denying women equality he undermines the foundation of morality, because he denies women the possibility of undertaking what is in fact the sternest duty of beings

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10. Wollstonecraft, <u>VRW</u>, p. 122.

accountable for themselves to God. Shortly we shall see how this doctrine of perfectibility underpins Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance.

In response to Rousseau's claim that women's equality would subvert the social order, Wollstonecraft seeks to show that precisely the reverse would be true. Her argument to this effect focuses on Rousseau's conception of feminine virtue which, she claims, is not virtue at all but a sham more likely to corrupt and degrade women and the social order than to improve either. The strategy of Wollstonecraft's argument is to concede to Rousseau certain assumptions but to deny the inferences he makes on the basis of those assumptions. Firstly, she concedes that public virtue must be founded in private virtue, conceding also the importance of modesty and fidelity in relationships between men and women. However she argues that Rousseau's recommendations for the education of women and his subjection of women to the authority of men will not in fact bring about the desired result. According to Wollstonecraft, modesty must be founded in self-respect and in respect for the integrity of one's body, while fidelity is only a virtue if it arises out of genuine affection. Understood thus, modesty and fidelity are not sexually specific virtues at all. But Rousseau adopts a sexual double standard and makes modesty and fidelity the paramount virtues for women. Furthermore, he grounds these allegedly 'feminine' virtues not in women's self-respect and capacity for affection but in male needs. It is clear that for Rousseau the function of so-called 'feminine' virtue is in fact to make women pleasing to men and to ensure that women's own needs are subordinated to this end. Wollstonecraft cites as evidence of this claim Rousseau's injunctions to Sophie to ensure that she is always alluring for Emile, while at the same time insisting that her chastity is her main asset. But, pointing to the behaviour of the leisured middle-class and aristocratic women whom Wollstonecraft so despised, she suggests that Rousseau's advice is more likely to produce infidelity, or at

least sham fidelity than genuine fidelity because it focuses women's whole attention on 'corporeal embellishments', rather than on attaining genuine virtue.[11] The fact that feminine 'virtue' must in the end be assured through force indicates that Rousseau was in fact aware of this. Wollstonecraft's suggestion is that he abandoned logic on this issue because he succumbed to his own lasciviousness! Wollstonecraft is also outraged by Rousseau's insistence that it is not sufficient for a woman to be faithful, everybody must know of her fidelity. By making virtue a function of the opinions of others, rather than a function of a person's own integrity and honesty, Rousseau deliberately undermines women's independence. More than this, he quite openly incites women to duplicity and cunning. But by depriving women of integrity and of every legitimate means of exercising power, Rousseau ensures that women will in fact create social disorder because despotism becomes the only path open to them. By being civil and political slaves

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11. In many places in the Vindication Wollstonecraft is quite scathing about the coquettish, pleasure-seeking, self-obsessed behaviour of these women who could take as long as five hours to get dressed! Her observations, as well as her animosity, arose from her experience working as governess to the children of a landed Irish aristocratic couple, the Kingsboroughs. Wollstonecraft felt that there was little hope, short of revolution, in changing the ways of the aristocracy. However she hoped to influence the middle-classes, to whom, she claims, her book is addressed. Wollstonecraft was appalled by the way in which the newly leisured middle-class women were attempting to emulate their aristocratic sisters, but, despite her scorn, the argument of the Vindication is that the behaviour of these women has only one source – their social position. As Miriam Kramnick makes clear (*op. cit.*), the social position of both middle- and working-class women, as well as the opportunities open to them, were dramatically different at the end of the eighteenth century than they had been one hundred years previously. The rapid expansion of industrialisation and mechanisation in production had shifted much productive work out of the domestic economy and out of family-based businesses and into factories removed from the home. As a result middle-class women, who previously had played a significant role in the economy, had become a very leisured class dependent entirely upon their husbands for economic support and 'protection', while working-class women spent increasingly long hours outside the home, performing badly paid menial work with very little time left to care for their children. While working-class women thus ruined their health in factories, middle-class women ruined their health through idleness and through attempts to achieve ideals of 'feminine' beauty. Women's economic disenfranchisement became 'civil death' when Blackstone announced in 1757 that 'the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband' (quoted by Kramnick, *op. cit.* p. 34). As I will suggest later in this chapter, sensitivity to this context makes some of Wollstonecraft's more drastic pronouncements against pleasure more comprehensible.

women thereby become private tyrants.[12] Wollstonecraft's conclusion is that Rousseau's recommendations teach women manners rather than morals – hardly an adequate basis for the virtue required to perfect the soul.

Rousseau's second argument in support of the claim that women's equality would subvert the social order is that women's primary function in life is to raise and educate children. Were women themselves to be educated to participate as equal citizens who would take responsibility for this crucial task? Wollstonecraft's response is simple but devastating. Once again she concedes certain assumptions to Rousseau, namely that the family is indeed the foundation of social life and that women's primary social duty is to raise and educate children. However she points out that if women are trained to be dependent upon men, and required to base their judgements upon the authority of men, then they will be incapable of raising and educating children. Wollstonecraft's argument is that the task of education demands independence of judgement. This in turn requires a capacity for reflection and generalization. But the education and social position which Rousseau recommends for women denies them the opportunity of developing these capacities. Furthermore if women are ignorant of virtue and are themselves subjected to arbitrary authority how likely is it that they will inculcate virtue in their own children? What is more likely is that they in turn will subject their children to arbitrary authority, rather than teaching them virtue through the use of reason. Having conceded that women's primary social duties are maternal duties however, Wollstonecraft also argues that women have a duty to which their social duties must always be secondary. This is their duty to themselves as beings accountable to God.

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12. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. esp. Chs. 4, 5 & 12. cf. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman (*op. cit.*), vol. 1, Ch. 8, p. 137 'By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, the fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as proof of inferiority of intellect'.

III

Wollstonecraft's views on the perfectibility of the soul are beautifully captured in one of her travel letters written in Tonsberg, Norway. The letter is interesting because it shows that Wollstonecraft's belief in the immortality of the soul did not prevent her from reflecting on the moral significance of human embodiment. In the letter, Wollstonecraft recounts her horror at discovering in the town's church a recess full of coffins containing embalmed bodies. Her horror arose from a sense that it degrades humanity to attempt to preserve the body when all active life has been extinguished, when 'the enchantment of animation' is broken. In contrast to the 'noble ruins' which are reminders of the exertions and efforts of earlier generations and which 'exalt the mind', these futile attempts at prolonging life bring home the 'littleness' and mortality of the individual. Reflecting on her reaction, Wollstonecraft writes 'Life, what art thou? Where goes this breath? this *I*, so much alive? In what element will it mix, giving or receiving fresh energy...I feel a conviction that we have some perfectible principle in our present vestment, which will not be destroyed just as we begin to be sensible of improvement...'[13]

Although at times Wollstonecraft's belief in the immortality of the soul led her to adopt an attitude of stoicism and resignation in the face of life's sorrows and injustices, her more considered view was that it is by learning from error and experience and fighting injustice that the soul is improved.[14] As we shall see, Wollstonecraft's views on what constitutes virtue or the

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13. Letters Written...in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, Letter VII in J. Todd (*op. cit.*), p. 158-9.

14. The attitude of stoic resignation is most evident in Wollstonecraft's early novel Mary, A Fiction, published in 1788. At the end of the novel the heroine's response to sorrow and sexual injustice is resignation mixed with joy at the prospect of death and the thought that 'she was hastening to that world *where there is neither marrying*, nor giving in marriage' (*op. cit.* p. 68). Even here however Wollstonecraft's irony gets the better of her resignation.

perfection of the soul shifted somewhat from the Vindication to The Wrongs of Woman. But the idea that self-governance is essential to virtue, and to the possibility of perfectibility or self-improvement, remained a constant theme in her work, as did the idea that sexual inequality is immoral because it deprives women of self-governance.

Central to Wollstonecraft's notion of perfectibility and to her account of self-governance is a contrast – not accidentally echoing the same contrast in Rousseau– between independence and dependence. To be dependent is 'to act according to the will of another fallible being, and submit, right or wrong, to power'.[15] However independence, which Wollstonecraft calls 'the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue', is not the mere converse of dependence, namely being self-willed, but is a more complex virtue.[16] In the Vindication Wollstonecraft lays great stress on the importance of reason to independence. She characterises reason in the following terms:

> 'Reason is...the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself. More or less may be conspicuous in one being than another; but the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for, can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason?[17]

According to Wollstonecraft, a person must exercise her reason in a number of different ways in order to achieve independence. The most important of these ways, and the one to which she remains committed throughout her writings, is that exercise of reason which counters the effects of prejudice and which refuses blind obedience to authority. Our actions can only be free

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15. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 3, p. 135.

16. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Dedication, p.85.

17. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 4, p. 142.

and virtuous, she wants to say, if they are based on reasoned judgements, rather than arising out of conformity to social expectations or from notions of duty which require the individual to submit her own judgement to the arbitrary authority of others. In the Vindication this view leads Wollstonecraft to condemn military training and discipline as incompatible with freedom.[18] In The Wrongs of Woman she has Darnford declare that 'minds governed by superior principles...were privileged to act above the dictates of laws they had no voice in framing'.[19] These 'superior principles' are principles founded in respect for the rights of rational beings, including self-respect, as opposed to the principles of social utility which justify, among other things, the subordination of women and the exploitation of the poor. Her view was that a knowledge of such principles could only be arrived at by 'enlarging the mind' through education, sensibility and experience. By 'cramping the understanding', women's education and social position, as well as Rousseau's recommendations on these matters, put the capacity for making independent judgements out of the reach of most women, condemning them to be slaves to the opinions of others.

In the Vindication Wollstonecraft seems to follow Rousseau in linking dependence on the opinions of others to being subject to one's own

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18. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 1, p. 97. Cf. also her remarks in Ch. 2, p.106: 'Standing armies can never consist of resolute robust men; they may be well-disciplined machines, but they will seldom contain men under the influence of strong passions, or with very vigorous faculties; and as for any depth of understanding I will venture to affirm that it is as rarely to be found in the army as amongst women...The great misfortune is this, that they both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have from reflection any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural. Satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority'.

19. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman, Vol II, Ch. 15, p. 187. Cf. also Maria's picture of her uncle who 'inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure of the world', Vol. I, Ch. 7, p. 128.

inclinations and passions.[20] In some places she therefore connects that exercise of reason which leads to independence of judgement and virtue with the control of the passions and with a kind of self-denying fortitude. Her complaint against the indolent women of the middle-classes for example is that their senses are inflamed by the pursuit of pleasure and by momentary feelings. As a result their reason is prevented from 'attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others and content with its own station'.[21] The virtuous widow whom she depicts for us in contrast is a woman who subdues any passionate inclinations, selflessly devotes herself to educating and providing for her children, and then 'calmly waits for the sleep of death'.[22] In a similar vein Wollstonecraft also declares that 'a master and mistress of a family ought not to love each other with passion. I mean to say that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society.'[23]

However even in the Vindication Wollstonecraft seems to be ambivalent about this view. In a number of places she contrasts the 'romantic, wavering feelings' which 'inflame' the passions, with those 'strong, persevering passions' which 'strengthen' the passions and so enlarge the understanding and ennoble the heart.[24] Similarly she contrasts lust with love, sensuality with sensibility, parental self-love with parental affection and so on, suggesting that while the first term in the pair undermines virtue the second term is essential to it. She also suggests that 'the

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20. Cf. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 5, p. 202: Woman 'becoming the slave of her own feelings, she is easily subjugated by those of others'.

21. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 4, p.152.

22. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 3, pp. 138-9.

23. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 2, p. 114.

24. See for example Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 4, pp. 152 & 169; Ch. 2, p. 115.

regulation of the passions is not, always, wisdom' and that the reason why men seem to be more capable of independent judgement than women is because they have more scope to exercise 'the grand passions'.[25] Even more surprising she claims for women the right to sexual desire: 'Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason: but the obligation to check them is the duty of mankind, not a sexual duty'.[26]

By the time of The Wrongs of Woman, Maria, in a letter addressed to her infant daughter, cautions her daughter to learn to distinguish genuine love and affection from passing infatuation, but urges her not to flee from pleasure and to open her heart to affection, even though that will also make her vulnerable to pain. In an important passage she deplores contemporary moral standards which require women to remain married to men for whom they have neither affection nor esteem: '...woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate'.[27] Maria declares that to the contrary, lack of passion and coldness of heart undermine virtue and she argues that desire must be reciprocal and women must have the freedom to express 'that fire of the imagination, which produces *active* sensibility, and *positive* virtue'.[28] Later she rails against the tyranny of laws which pit women's reason in opposition to their inclinations.

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25. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 5, p.212.

26. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 7, p. 238.

27. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman, Vol. II, Ch. 10, p.154.

28. Wollstonecraft, *op. cit.* p. 153.

How should these apparent tensions be read, and what implications do they have for Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance? I want to suggest that in the Vindication Wollstonecraft does seem to waver between two different ways of thinking about self-governance. On the one hand, especially in her insistence on women's capacity to reason and in her scathing condemnation of the 'manners' of contemporary women, she seems to regard the control of the passions by reason as essential to self-governance. On the other hand, she seems also to be moving towards the view that in a well-balanced, virtuous character, reason and sensibility should mutually strengthen and support each other, rather than either dominating the other. This seems clearly to be the view of The Wrongs of Woman. Why then this ambivalence on Wollstonecraft's part? There may be some truth in the claim that the events of Wollstonecraft's own life helped confirm her in the latter view. However I think there may be other reasons for Wollstonecraft's wavering. A clue to these reasons is to be found in one of her travel letters. Reflecting on her fears and hopes for her daughter Fanny, Wollstonecraft writes:

> You know that as a female I am particularly attached to her – I feel more than a mother's fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the despondent and oppressed state of her sex. I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. With trembling hand I shall cultivate sensibility, and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, while I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast I would fain guard– I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit– Hapless woman! what a fate is thine.[29]

In many other places in her writings Wollstonecraft qualifies her claims with a statement to the effect that what she describes characterises the

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29. Wollstonecraft, Letters Written...in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark in J. Todd, *op. cit.*, Letter VI, p. 156.

situation of women 'in the current imperfect state of society'. This seems to me to indicate that Wollstonecraft's apparent devaluation of passion stems from a number of sources. As I argued above, it must be seen, in the context of Wollstonecraft's defense of equality and of women's capacity to reason, as a counter to the Rousseauian depiction of 'feminine' virtue. But Wollstonecraft's anxiety about passion is also a response to a social situation which denied to women the scope for expressing desire and passion and hence gave rise to devastating conflicts between reason and sensibility. This is particularly evident in Wollstonecraft's reflections on Fanny quoted above, and in her depiction of Maria's marriage to George Venables, a situation which Maria managed to tolerate for six years only by deadening her sensibility. A further reason for Wollstonecraft's ambivalence was her view that 'in the current state of society' there was always the danger that women's sensibility was more likely to undermine than strengthen virtue by encouraging 'romantic, wavering feelings' rather than 'strong, persevering passions'. As Maria reflects while gazing out of her asylum window hoping to catch a glimpse of Darnford, 'how difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits.'[30]

Wollstonecraft's attempt in the Vindication to distinguish between those passions which undermine and those which strengthen virtue echoes of course Rousseau's attempt to make a similar distinction. Like Rousseau, she feels that the very same faculties and capacities, under different circumstances, may give rise to virtue and generosity of heart or self-centred vice. She also shares Rousseau's views about the power of education to shape these faculties and capacities for good or ill. Where she differs from Rousseau is in her acute awareness that virtue and vice arise as much, if not

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30. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman, Vol. I, Ch. 2, p. 87.

more, from the character of our social and affective relations with others, as from our individual dispositions, characteristics and capacities. Although she often wants to make exceptions for individuals of 'genius' and at times portrays herself as Rousseau's solitary walker, requiring solitude for reflection, Wollstonecraft's individuals are nevertheless much more embedded in their relations with others than are Rousseau's.[31] Despite the fact that she condemns the kind of obedient dependence characteristic of subordination, for Wollstonecraft independence is not defined in opposition to a mutually supportive dependence on others. In fact the values of affection, reciprocity, and love for humanity are central to her account of self-governance. Wollstonecraft's view is that in the absence of genuine feelings for others self-governance is most likely to be displaced by a kind of self-interested prudence. This was one of the aspects of Imlay which so wounded her, and which she blamed on his involvement with commerce.[32] In the Vindication she claims:

> The world cannot be seen by an unmoved spectator; we must mix in the throng and feel as men feel, before we can judge of their feelings...we must attain knowledge of others at the same time that we become acquainted with ourselves. Knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart and perplexes the understanding.[33]

And in The Wrongs of Woman Jemima is presented as a woman with a great capacity for virtue, but in her 'virtue, never nurtured by affection,

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31. In a footnote in the Vindication which is somewhat reminiscent of the feminist critiques of liberalism discussed in Chapter 1, she suggests that Rousseau's picture of the solitary individual in the 'state of nature' overlooks 'the long and helpless state of infancy' and so the necessary sociality of human life. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W., Ch.1, p. 94.

32. See for example her letter to him written in Hamburg en route to England from Scandinavia. Letter LXVII, p. 251 in J. Todd *op. cit.* Wollstonecraft seemed to regard commerce as inherently corrupting. Cf. her portraits of George Venables and the young Darnford in The Wrongs of Woman.

33. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 5, p. 215. Cf. also Letters Written...in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, *op. cit.* Letter III: 'Mixing with mankind, we are obliged to examine our prejudices, and often imperceptibly lose, as we analyze them', pp. 150-151.

assumed the stern aspect of selfish independence' until Maria treats her with affection and respect.[34]

Many of the tensions in her writings and the conflicts in her life bear testimony to Wollstonecraft's painful awareness that for women 'in the current state of society' this kind of self-governance founded in generosity and affection was very difficult to achieve. On the one hand, she argues, women's subordination to men within the family, the idea that women's function is solely to please men, and the denial to women of the right to express or act in accordance with their affections, all conspire to make love and friendship founded on respect just about impossible between men and women. This is because the effect of women's situation on *women* is to give rise either to an excess of affectionate sensibility – as Wollstonecraft felt was true of herself – or else to coquetry, while its effect on *men* is to render them lascivious or tyrannical or both. In these circumstances it is highly unlikely that women will have sufficient self-respect, or command sufficient respect from men, to make reciprocity a genuine possibility. In this context it is interesting to note that Wollstonecraft's sometimes prudish remarks in the Vindication about the need for bodily modesty arise from the conviction that self-respect and respect for others is necessarily connected with respect for the integrity of one's own body and for the bodies of others. By the time of The Wrongs of Woman the prudish aspects of this conviction have disappeared, and Wollstonecraft's comments about marriage laws – 'legal prostitution' – which make women and their children the property of men suggest that she regarded women's right to self-governance with respect to their bodies as integral to the demand for equality.

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34. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman, *op. cit.* p. 82.

On the other hand, she continues, women's exclusion from the duties of citizenship tends to promote a kind of self-centredness and leads to a lack of that sense of justice that is necessary if we are to treat others with respect. In this context Wollstonecraft points to the behaviour of those leisured women who showed more concern for their dogs than for their servants. She also points to the kind of parental affection which is an extension of this kind of self-love: 'Justice, truth, everything is sacrificed by these Rebekahs, and for the sake of their *own* children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common relationship that binds the whole family on earth together'.[35] Wollstonecraft is adamant that the only solution is a transformation of women's situation in both private and public spheres.

IV

One of the major themes of Wollstonecraft's work is that women will not be able to attain self-governance without a certain degree of material independence, in particular without financial independence. Wollstonecraft's concern with women's financial independence arises out of two firm convictions. The first is that women's emotional dependence and subjection to the tyranny of men will continue so long as women are financially dependent upon men and so long as women's independence is not protected by the law. This conviction is articulated most forcefully in The Wrongs of Woman, where it is dramatized in the stories of Maria, Jemima and the various women in whose houses Maria took lodgings after leaving George Venables, all of whom are victims of the law's inequality. The second is that financial independence, but more importantly, work, is essential to self-esteem and to virtue. As she remarks in the Vindication, 'virtue, says reason, must be acquired by *rough* toils, and useful struggles

35. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 10, p.265.

with worldly *cares*.'[36] It is these convictions which underlie Wollstonecraft's suggestion that women could very usefully be trained for a number of professions, including medicine, education, politics and business.

Wollstonecraft was aware that women's financial independence could not be achieved without large-scale changes to the organisation of society. To this end she advocated sweeping changes to marriage and property laws, the introduction of a system of public co-education, and suggested, even if somewhat tentatively, that it was not sufficient for women to be citizens, they must also be represented in government. Her view was that these were matters for public, not private concern, and she clearly felt that until such changes were introduced women would be unable to achieve self-governance in either their social or their affective relationships. However Wollstonecraft had no clear proposals as to how the changes she advocated might be compatible with the maternal 'duties' which she seemed to think were natural to women. It is for this reason that feminists recently have raised two serious objections to Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance.

Firstly it is often claimed that Wollstonecraft's ideal of self-governance is an ideal attainable only by middle-class women. In the Vindication for example, her description of a harmonious and fulfilling domestic scene includes reference to a woman 'discharging the duties of her station with perhaps merely a servant-maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business', and it is evident that without such domestic help Wollstonecraft herself would not have been able to devote much of her time to the business of writing.[37] The character of Jemima in The Wrongs

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36. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 4, p. 143, footnote 5.

37. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 9, pp. 254-5. Wollstonecraft employed a French nursemaid named Marguerite to care for Fanny.

of Woman indicates that Wollstonecraft became increasingly aware of this problem. Nevertheless much of the narrative is occupied with the story of the middle-class Maria who promises, in exchange for Jemima's support, to better her situation. Is the self-governance of educated middle-class women therefore to be achieved at the expense of working-class women who can relieve them of the 'servile' aspects of their duties?[38] This question is of course still pertinent today.

Secondly it is argued that despite the importance of Wollstonecraft's critique of property and marriage laws and of her argument that the rights of citizenship must be extended to women if they are going to be expected to fulfill what are after all social duties (the rearing of children), her critique of civil society works by trying to extend the contractual relations of civil society into the private sphere, rather than challenging the association between the masculine/feminine distinction and the tensions within the liberal public sphere between justice and love, contract and kinship, individuality and community. In other words Wollstonecraft claims for women the capacities of the self-governing male citizen, arguing that relations within the family between men and women and parents and children must be founded on the same basis as relations between equal citizens within the public sphere. Given this starting point, Wollstonecraft can only acknowledge the ethical and political implications of women's specific embodiment by arguing that women have specific social duties, namely their maternal duties, to which any activities in which they engage in the public sphere must be seen as secondary. Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance thus compels her both to preserve the distinction

38. This objection is raised by both Jane Martin, *op. cit.* and Moira Gatens, *op. cit.*

between public and private spheres and consequently to accept the representation of women's bodies as passive bodies bound to nature.[39]

I want to begin to address these criticisms by first assessing Wollstonecraft's views on maternity. It seems to me that Wollstonecraft's remarks about women's maternal duties need to be read fairly carefully for the following reasons. Firstly, it is clear that these remarks play a very important strategic function in Wollstonecraft's argument in defense of equality. For as I indicated above, what she seeks to show is that, even granting the premises of the Rousseauian argument, the conclusions thought to follow from it do not in fact do so. It should not be assumed however that Wollstonecraft simply endorses these premises. Secondly, that Wollstonecraft does not straightforwardly endorse these premises is I think evident from a number of conflicting remarks she makes about maternity. It is true that she does claim that 'the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature'.[40] However she also claims that 'natural affection, as it is termed, I believe to be a very faint tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy'.[41] And in The Wrongs of Woman Maria remarks that *'in the present state of women*, it is a great misfortune to be prevented from discharging the duties, and cultivating the affections' of a mother.[42] It seems to me that these remarks suggest that Wollstonecraft's views on maternity pertain to a very specific context. The context is one in which women had few options, as far as contributions to society were concerned, apart from the raising of children;

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39. As I mentioned earlier, this criticism is raised by Moira Gatens, *op. cit.* A criticism to this effect is also raised by Carole Pateman in The Sexual Contract (Polity Press, 1988).

40. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 10, p. 265.

41. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 10, p. 266.

42. Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman, Vol II, Ch. 10, p. 154. My emphasis.

in which, in the lack of genuinely reciprocal relationships between men and women, the only outlet for women's affections was in their relationships with their children; in which women were by default primarily responsible for the raising of children because there was no legal or social obligation for men to do so; and in which many leisured women effectively abrogated their responsibilities towards their children.

Given the complexity of this context I think Wollstonecraft's views on maternity need to be read on a number of different levels. At one level they are addressed to men, in particular to middle-class men, in the hope of convincing them that the education of their daughters and wives will in fact better enable them to perform those duties which she concedes are 'annexed to the female character by nature'. At another level, by distinguishing between affections and duties and by suggesting that maternity is a social duty, not a merely 'natural affection', Wollstonecraft aims to contest the assumption that maternity and self-governance are incompatible virtues by showing that the kind of affections, responsibilities and skills which arise in the context of the raising of children are essential to self-governance. On this basis she can then argue that 'maternal duties' are not incompatible with the duties of a citizen. At yet another level I think that this distinction also enables Wollstonecraft to suggest that women should be able to fulfill their obligations to society in ways other than, or additional to, maternity. Although Wollstonecraft was very well aware that this would not be possible without vast changes to the structure of society, it seems clear that she thought the difficulty was a question of social organisation, rather than of women's natures.

If my reading of Wollstonecraft's views on maternity is correct, what are its implications for the claim that Wollstonecraft's ideal of self-governance is an ideal attainable only by educated middle-class women? I think it is important to try to distinguish, as far as is possible, between the issue of

whether class distinction is a necessary feature of Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance, and the issue of what she herself says on the matter. As far as Wollstonecraft herself is concerned, she seems to voice a number of somewhat conflicting views, probably reflecting the limited range of conceivable options that were available to her, indeed to all women. In a number of places she suggests that self-governance has less to do with what she calls a woman's 'station' than it has to do with a woman's dignity and independence. In the Vindication for example she claims that as far as virtue is concerned it seems most prevalent among poor uneducated working-class women, and in The Wrongs of Woman Maria writes to her daughter 'I fondly hope to see you...possessed of that energy of character which gives dignity to any station; and with that clear, firm spirit that will enable you to choose a situation for yourself, or submit to be classed in the lowest, if it be the only one in which you can be the mistress of your own actions'.[43] Wollstonecraft was aware however that poor women, in addition to suffering the 'wrongs of woman', also suffered the burdens of the poor more generally and she felt that poor women were unlikely to be the mistresses of their own actions until both class and sex inequalities were abolished. Yet elsewhere Wollstonecraft seems to align self-governance with 'cultivated sensibilities' and to take the existence of servants for granted, even though she is insistent that servants must be regarded and treated as fellow human beings. It is clear, though not surprising, that Wollstonecraft did not really come to terms with the question of who would care for the children of professional women. It is therefore quite possible that she assumed another woman, probably a servant, would take up some of the responsibility. Despite this I do not think that Wollstonecraft's conception of self-governance presupposes class distinction. For it seems to

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43. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W. Ch. 4, p. 171; The Wrongs of Woman, Vol. II, Ch. 9, p. 149.

me that her ideal of self-governance is not committed to the idea that only professional women can achieve independence, even though she is adamant that a certain degree of education is essential for all women. Rather, at the heart of Wollstonecraft's concern with women's independence are the ideas that women must have the liberty and resources to assume responsibility for their own actions, and that self-governance is not inconsistent with maternity, affection or interdependence.

Where does this leave Wollstonecraft with respect to the public/private distinction and with respect to the alleged masculinity of her conception of self-governance? Again I think Wollstonecraft's views need to be read carefully. On the one hand it seems to me that Wollstonecraft was aware that, 'in the present imperfect state of society', men's equality and reason were achieved at the expense of women's liberty and autonomy, and that reason and sensibility, justice and love, citizenship and kinship, and individuality and community, seemed irreconcilable, particularly for women. I have tried to show that, because she <u>was</u> concerned with the ethical implications of sexual difference, Wollstonecraft tried to articulate a conception of women's self-governance which does not simply identify self-governance with one side of these oppositions (the 'masculine' side), but rather tries to reconcile them, as well as to disentangle them from their association with the masculine/feminine distinction. I have also argued that Wollstonecraft was aware that her recommendations for women would require massive re-organisation of the public sphere, including the political representation of women's interests. That Wollstonecraft in 1792 could not envisage the full extent of this re-organisation should not lead us to conclude that she underestimated its difficulty or immensity.

On the other hand however what is to be made of Wollstonecraft's agreement with Rousseau that the family is the foundation of civil life? And what is to be made of her concession that women's comparative

physical weakness may make them more 'dependent', and so perhaps less able to achieve virtue, than men?[44] To some extent this concession should be read as a response to Rousseau's attempt to ground women's lack with respect to reason and virtue in the 'natural' passivity and dependency of the female body. Wollstonecraft seeks once again to show that one may accept Rousseau's premises without accepting his conclusion – that virtue is different for the different sexes. This interpretation is supported by Wollstonecraft's frequent arguments to the effect that the physical incapacities to which many women are subject are the direct result of their subordination, in particular of ideals of feminine beauty which actively discourage women from developing physical strength and skill. However in the light of the fact that Wollstonecraft's text wavers between the character ideal conception of self-governance which I have highlighted in this chapter, and the idea that self-governance is a matter of reason's sovereignty over the body, this concession also indicates that Wollstonecraft was still struggling in the grip of the dominant representation of women's bodies as passive, heteronomous bodies. This is perhaps why in the Vindication she could not see a clear solution to the problem of women's subordination except a transformation of the family. The events of Wollstonecraft's life after the publication of the Vindication, as well as her later writings, indicate that Wollstonecraft became somewhat less optimistic about this solution. But the fact that feminists today are still coming to terms with the problem she so acutely diagnosed, and with some of her solutions, shows that many of the conflicts Wollstonecraft experienced and expressed, in trying to articulate an adequate ideal of self-governance, are still with us.

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44. Wollstonecraft, V.R.W., Author's Introduction, p. 80 & Ch. 2, p.109.

PART IV

EMBODYING AUTONOMY

Introduction

In Part I of this thesis I argued that the notions of individual self-determination and self-constitution underlie our conception of what it is to be a moral agent. I also argued there that it is important for feminists not to jettison these notions, for, as we have seen, a defense of women's capacity and right to exercise autonomy is crucial to any critique of oppression. However the arguments of Parts II and III have also shown that, within the constraints imposed by our recent philosophical heritage, articulating what it means for women to be autonomous agents has not been an easy task. As we saw through the discussions of Hegel and Rousseau in Part III, the difficulties have arisen out of a context in which autonomy has been associated with the virtues of the 'masculine' public sphere and in which women's bodies have become a metaphor for those aspects of human life which the autonomous individual must control and transcend. In different ways, de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft both tried to come to terms with these difficulties and to some extent succeeded in doing so. Both stressed that, in the absence of equality and reciprocity in both public and private spheres, the pursuit of autonomy gives rise to relations of domination and subordination, and both attempted to resist and transform the image of women's bodies and subjectivities as governed by nature. That their efforts at resistance, as we have seen, were not entirely successful, reveals the extent to which, within the social, political and conceptual structures we have inherited, the supposed passivity of women's bodies has been naturalised and seen as the cause, rather than the result, of the gendering of social life. However the failure of de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft adequately to articulate an ideal of autonomy for women also raises doubts about the validity of the assumption that autonomous agency is the activity of a supposedly sexually neutral will or subjectivity.

The question which now faces feminists interested in the ethical implications of sexual difference is how to respond to these doubts. On the one hand, as we saw in Chapter 1, some feminists have argued that the most appropriate response is to reject the ideal of autonomy altogether. Their argument, you will recall, is that this ideal is inextricably bound up with masculine individualism, and with distinctions such as those between public/private, reason/passion, and culture/nature, which define autonomy as a transcendence of femininity. On the other hand, it might be thought that if we take seriously the idea of an embodied subjectivity then what is required is a sexually specific account of autonomy for women. Something along these lines has been suggested by Carol McMillan, as we saw in Part III.

I want to endorse neither of these suggestions. With respect to the first suggestion, that feminists abandon the ideal of autonomy, the arguments of Part III have shown that, within our intellectual and cultural heritage, the ideal of autonomy certainly has been crucially associated with ideals of masculinity and with conceptions of social and political life which define autonomy and femininity as mutually exclusive. Further, we have seen through the examples of de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft the extent to which this alignment has made the ideal of autonomy so fraught for women. However, we also saw in their work indications as to how the ideal of autonomy can be re-thought in such a way that some of the worries raised by these feminist critiques can be met. By incorporating within their conceptions of genuine autonomy a recognition of the importance both of intersubjective recognition and of human embodiment, de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft indicated a way in which the associations between autonomy and masculinist ideals and distinctions such as public/private, reason/passion and so on, may begin

to be dismantled. Given my arguments in Part I about the importance of the ideal of women's self-determination, it seems crucial that feminists pursue and develop their suggestions, rather than abandoning the ideal of autonomy altogether.

There are two principal objections I wish to raise against the suggestion that feminists should attempt to develop a sexually specific ideal of autonomy for women. The first is that, as the example of McMillan has shown, many attempts in this direction have simply ended up re-affirming women's traditional place, because they have failed to question the more general theoretical adequacy of our inherited ideals of autonomy. But secondly, even if it were possible to articulate a sexually specific account of autonomy which does not simply re-affirm women's inferiority, there is still a further question to be raised about the desirability of such an account. For we may ask to what extent it will simply reinforce the idea that masculinity and femininity are two distinct, irreconcilable categories.

Because I wish to avoid such a conclusion, my aim in this part of the thesis is to outline an alternative to the untenable image of the disembodied, self-sufficient autonomous agent, an alternative which starts from a recognition of the significance of embodiment in the constitution of subjectivity, and hence which takes seriously the ethical significance of bodily differences, but which entails neither a rejection of the ideal of autonomy nor the articulation of a sexually specific account of autonomy. My view is that the question of sexual difference helps bring into focus certain problems with some of our ways of thinking about autonomy, moral agency and moral reflection. These problems, as we have seen, have certainly caused difficulties in articulating what it means for women to act as autonomous moral agents, but the issues they raise go beyond the

question of sexual difference and therefore require a more general solution. In the two sections of this Introduction I shall both re-cap the arguments of earlier parts of this thesis, in order to provide a summary of these problems as they have emerged so far, and sketch out an account of embedded and embodied autonomy which may begin to address them. In Chapter 6, I shall use the example of decision-making in abortion in order to illustrate the kind of conception of autonomous moral reflection that is demanded by taking embodiment seriously.

I

At the outset of this thesis, in Part I, I argued that although the kind of conception of autonomous agency that emerges from contemporary philosophical discussions of autonomy seems correct, there are also a number of reasons to be cautious about how we spell out this conception. You will recall that, using these discussions as a basis, I had characterised autonomous agency as the capacity to constitute an identity for oneself through one's decisions and projects and on the basis of one's values and commitments. My concerns about this account focused on the apparent conflict between the ideal of autonomy, thus articulated, and other values such as love and loyalty; on the notions of independence of judgement and critical reflection; and on the nature of the self presupposed by this account. I want now to re-articulate and amplify these concerns in the light of my discussions in subsequent chapters.

I shall begin with the question of how best to articulate the notion of independence of judgement and the conception of critical self-reflection which underpins it. In Part I, I voiced misgivings about the way in which, in the contemporary philosophical literature, autonomy is often described as a process of freeing oneself from one's socialised prejudices. In the light of my discussion in Part III, the nature of these misgivings can now be

expressed more completely. On the one hand, as Wollstonecraft and Rousseau both insisted, it is clear that a person cannot be self-governing if she is either unable, or lacks the liberty, to engage in some kind of reflection about, and critical assessment of, the opinions, prejudices, customs and habits of her family, her peers, her community or her society. Some kind of independence in these respects seems to be essential to individual self-determination. On the other hand, as Hegel insisted, it is also clear that no form of social life can persist and reproduce itself unless individuals feel themselves bound in certain ways by certain taboos, habits, customs, ways of life, and attachments which are not negotiable and which cannot simply be overturned by the decisions of individuals. To say this is not to say, as McMillan attempted to do, that we can specify in advance what form these ways of life, attachments and so on will take, for this will depend upon a whole set of contingent factors specific to particular communities and societies– including demographic, geographic, cultural, religious, political and other factors. Nevertheless, a minimal requirement of any form of social life would have to be that it ensures that at least some individuals are involved in some way in reproducing and rearing children.

My argument in Part III was that one of the consequences for Enlightenment thinkers of the challenge to sovereign power and to the old order of status, was that the claims that each individual should be self-governing, and that power can only legitimately be exercised through the agreement of individuals, raised the question of how to ensure the persistence of those social habits, customs, ways of life, and attachments which found social life. As we saw through the discussions of Rousseau and Hegel, one very powerful and influential historical and conceptual solution to this difficulty was to try to make a distinction between the non-

negotiable ethical bonds of the family and the contractual ethical relations of the body politic. This distinction had two results. Firstly, it constructed the sphere of the family, the sphere of customs, habits, particularistic affections and so on, as the 'natural', historically unvarying foundation or underside of social life. Secondly, it identified independence of judgement and self-determination with a transcendence of this sphere. We saw in Part III how these results have made the ideal of autonomy seem inconsistent with women's ethical life. But they have also given rise to inadequate conceptions of moral reflection and autonomous agency.[1]

Firstly, because what I have called the 'underside' of social life has been represented as merely 'natural', as governed by prejudice, irrational customs, sentimental attachments and so on, the kind of critical reflection involved in autonomous decision-making has been represented as a process which should disregard, or at least abstract from, these prejudices, customs and attachments and assess them from a supposedly impartial point of view. Further, in cases where the 'impartial' and the 'embedded' perspective conflict, the tendency has been to assume that the impartial perspective represents the morally autonomous perspective. Autonomous moral reflection thus gets divorced from the concrete context in which moral agents are embedded and out of which moral conflicts arise. This explains the misgivings voiced in Part I about the possible implications of the idea that the exercise of autonomy often involves a kind of freeing of oneself from one's socialisation.

Secondly, because autonomy has been associated with ethical relations founded on agreement and convention, the exercise of autonomy has come to be seen as incompatible with, or at least compromised by, certain

1. The following remarks do not apply to Hegel however.

ways of life and by certain binding responsibilities, attachments and commitments. Hence my unease in Part I about the apparent tension between autonomy and other values such as love or loyalty.[2] Thirdly, and following from these two points, the kind of critical reflection involved in autonomous decision-making has been represented as a process of reflection engaged in by isolated and discrete individuals, in abstraction from, or in tension with, their responsibilities towards others. Independence of judgment, in other words, has been seen as incompatible with interdependence on others.

In response to these ways of thinking about moral reflection and autonomy, some communitarian and feminist philosophers have argued that the ideals of individual self-determination and critical reflection are individualist and alienate us from the kinds of ethical relations which found social life– those arising out of shared ways of life and non-negotiable attachments and responsibilities. Although I am unable here to address the contemporary debate among communitarians, liberals and feminists on this issue, I would suggest that an adequate account of autonomy must steer a course between the two alternatives of individualism and communitarianism. For while the exercise of autonomy is important, and must involve a critical assessment of one's own and others' opinions, prejudices, customs, attachments and ways of life, autonomous moral reflection cannot be thought of as disengaged from, or incompatible with, a person's responsibilities and attachments, nor should it be seen as the activity of disembedded and isolated individuals. Rather,

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2 In Chapter 6 I will argue that this view of autonomy is implicit in many feminist defenses of abortion, particularly in the way in which bodily autonomy is represented.

reflective self-constitution is a process which occurs in response to our specific context and our concrete relationships with, and responsibilities towards, others. While it is true that certain responsibilities, relationships, ways of life or customs may unjustly impede a person's autonomy, it is a mistake to assume that autonomy can only be achieved by unencumbered individuals. Nevertheless it is because self-constitution is an intersubjective process, that unless our relationships with others are genuinely reciprocal, that is, unless we respect the autonomy of others and are attentive to their different needs and perspectives, the pursuit of autonomy will give rise to relations of subordination and domination.

If this is right, then how should we think of the process of critical self-reflection? Once again it seems to me that this is a process which arises out of our interactions with others, and in a number of different ways. To begin with, as Wollstonecraft argued, self-evaluation and self-constitution require moral example. We work out what virtues and characteristics we value, how we want to live our lives and undertake our responsibilities, through the example of others and through the process of identifying with, or distancing ourselves from, those examples. In addition, we become aware of the way in which our attitudes, values and desires have been structured by our familial or cultural environment, and of the limitations of our own perspectives, through the attempt to understand the different perspectives of others. In these ways we achieve a certain degree of independence of judgement. But this independence should be seen as a matter of achieving a more encompassing perspective, rather than as a matter of somehow transcending our socialisation (or our facticity, as de Beauvoir seemed to think), or stepping beyond all concrete and particular perspectives.

II

We have seen that the inconsistency, within our cultural and philosophical heritage, between the ideal of autonomy and women's supposedly particularistic and embedded ethical life, has required us think carefully about how to articulate the notions of independence and critical reflection. Similarly, the representation, within that same heritage, of women's bodies as obstacles to autonomy requires us to think equally carefully about how to understand the nature of the autonomous self. In Chapter 1, following Frankfurt, I argued that part of what is involved in the process of self-constitution is identifying oneself with certain aspects of oneself – certain desires, values, characteristics – while attempting to distance oneself from other aspects. I also suggested that failure in this respect, that is, acting upon certain desires, impulses and so on with which one does not identify, can give rise to a kind of psychic alienation or self-estrangement. What de Beauvoir made clear was that this kind of alienation is a characteristic of oppression. She also made it clear that, because our relation to the world is necessarily a bodily relation, oppression and the alienation which is its product latch on, as it were, through a person's body and body-image, so that the experience of self-estrangement is, at least in part, a bodily experience. Bartky gives a wonderful phenomenological description of such an experience, the experience of feeling one's body freeze in response to a wolf-whistle.

> It is a fine spring day, and with an utter lack of self-consciousness I am bouncing down the street. Suddenly I hear men's voices. Catcalls and whistles fill the air. These noises are clearly meant for me; they come from a group of men hanging about a corner across the street. I freeze. As Sartre would say, I have been petrified by the gaze of the Other. My face flushes and my motions become stiff and self-conscious. The body which, only a moment before, I inhabited with

> such ease now floods my consciousness. I have been made an object...There is an element of compulsion in this encounter, in this being made-to-be-aware-of one's own flesh.[3]

Bartky argues that this kind of sexual objectification is one of the mechanisms by means of which women's autonomy is undermined. She also suggests that this undermining gives rise to a kind of fragmentation of a person's sense of herself.

But how should we understand this notion of fragmentation of the self? Bartky describes it as the splintering off of a person's body from her personality. When the woman freezes she feels herself to be no longer an autonomous person, but just a body, an object for the other. But what is it to experience oneself as no longer a person? Bartky characterises this experience by saying that, whereas before the wolf-whistle the woman was not conscious of her body as a sexually specific body, the experience of being whistled at suddenly makes her aware of the sexual specificity of her body. Now Bartky does not claim that every experience in which one becomes aware of the sexual specificity of one's body involves self-estrangement. She wants to distinguish between those cases where such an awareness is appropriate and desired, as in reciprocal erotic encounters, and those cases where such an awareness is inappropriate, as in a job interview. If Bartky is simply saying that there is a difference between the kind of sexual self-awareness that arises from a reciprocal erotic encounter and the kind that arises from sexist chauvinism, I have no dispute with her. But what worries me is the extent to which her characterisation of self-estrangement echoes the distinction which we have already encountered in de Beauvoir between the body as transcendent and the body as immanent. For she seems to be saying that to perceive oneself as a person is to be somehow unaware

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3. Sandra Lee Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression', p. 37 in S. Bishop and M. Weinzweig (eds.) Philosophy and Women, (Wadsworth, 1979).

of one's body and of one's sexual specificity. To experience oneself as no longer a person is to experience one's body as a mere thing in the world, and as a sexually specific thing, rather than as the radiation of a subjective personality.

Moreover, as I have already argued in my discussion of de Beauvoir, this kind of distinction reinforces the idea that self-constitution is a matter of a sexually indifferent and disembodied will or self exercising control over a sexually specific body. It thus implies the mistaken view that women can only be autonomous by somehow transcending their sexual specificity. But I want to stress that this kind of view is also problematic because it involves a mistaken view of subjectivity and of autonomous agency, presupposing that we can make a sensible distinction between an active, conscious and free subjectivity on the one hand and a passive, determined, merely natural body on the other. My call for caution in how we understand the nature of the autonomous self arose from a concern that this kind of view be avoided. How then can we retain the insights of de Beauvoir and Bartky – that autonomy and self-estrangement are bound up with our body-images and with our bodily relations to the world and to others – without reinforcing the idea of autonomy as control over the body? In what follows I will try to answer this question by outlining an account of subjectivity as in part constituted by a person's *bodily perspective.* Before doing so however I want to provide an explanation of why some feminists may have adopted the view that autonomous agency involves control over the body.

In my discussion of Rousseau I argued that Rousseau's account of the connection between the character of the female body and women's position in social life contains a revealing slippage. Rousseau argues that women are incapable of abstract reason and must be excluded from the body politic because their bodies are closer to nature than men's bodies and are therefore subject to feelings, desires and bodily processes which cannot be controlled

by reason. However we saw that when it comes to spelling out what it means to say that women's bodies are subversive of reason's control, Rousseau's real worry is about how to ensure that men exercise control over women's sexuality and procreative capacities. I argued that what Rousseau makes clear is that women's supposed incapacity for autonomous agency has very little to do with the attributes of women's bodies. Rather, the denial to women of the scope for autonomy is necessary to the maintenance of a patriarchal social order, that is a social order in which men control women's sexuality and reproductive capacities. From Wollstonecraft onwards, the claim that women must have self-determination in these respects has thus been critical to feminist defenses of women's capacity for, and right to, autonomy. Bartky's phenomenological description of the experience of being whistled at, for example, aims to show how lack of this kind of self-determination undermines a person's sense of herself. However in a context in which autonomous agency has been defined in terms of control over the body, and in which women's bodies have become a metaphor for inert nature, it seems that some feminists have responded to women's lack of sexual and reproductive self-determination by reversing Rousseau's slippage. Thus the demand for women's self-determination with respect to their bodies, their sexuality, and their reproductive capacities, has become conflated with the idea that self-determination involves control over the body by the will.

The problem that needs to be addressed then is this. How can we make sense of the idea that self-determination with respect to one's body is essential to self-constitution, and how can we explain the kind of bodily self-estrangement that is characteristic of oppression, without presupposing a distinction between the person – a free subjectivity – and her body? It seems to me that to answer this question we need to sketch out a conception of embodied subjectivity that can fulfill the following three requirements.

Firstly, such a conception has to be able to show why subjectivity is necessarily bodily and therefore why the idea of a sexually indifferent subjectivity makes no sense. Secondly, it needs to be able to show why bodily autonomy is essential to a person's autonomy. Thirdly, such a conception needs to provide an account of bodily autonomy which does not construe it as control over the body by a disembodied subject or will. This third requirement is somewhat complicated for the following reasons. To be a person at all requires that we have developed the capacity for a certain degree of bodily control and direction. When we think of the process by which an infant becomes a person for example, it is clear that this is in part a process which involves the infant learning to gain control of, and direct, its bodily movements, impulses and desires, and developing and increasing its bodily capacities.[4] But this process does not stop with infancy. In order to carry out any kind of project at all, it is clear that, at least to some extent, we must stave off and re-direct our immediate desires and bodily impulses in the interest of longer-term goals. But the problem seems to be this. When we think of the process of learning bodily direction in infancy we do not see it as a matter of the infant learning to control its body through the exercise of its will. Rather we think of the infant becoming a self and acquiring a will *in the process* of learning bodily self-direction. However this interactive conception of the self tends to drop out when we think of self-constitution and bodily autonomy in adulthood, with the result that we think of self-directed agency in abstraction from the body. What I am suggesting therefore is that although to be an agent at all clearly requires the capacity for bodily control and direction, this capacity should not be thought of as a capacity which is somehow separate from the body, nor should it be thought of as a capacity for control over the body.

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4 . Cf. Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p.137, 'Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of "I think that" but of "I can"'. (RKP, 1962).

Without necessarily endorsing Lacanian psychoanalysis, I want to suggest that as a starting point for an adequate conception of subjectivity we can make use of Lacan's notion of the 'imaginary body' and argue that subjectivity is always already a bodily subjectivity because the self is constituted through the constitution of the body-image.[5] In his analysis of the mirror-stage, Lacan proposes that a crucial moment in the formation of the self is the formation of a unified body-image. The body-image is the infant's *psychical representation* of its body boundaries and bodily processes. This representation is not yet a fully fledged self because, according to Lacan, the self only emerges with the emergence of the unconscious, and as a result of the resolution of the oedipal crisis through the castration complex. However this representation is a prefiguring of the self in which the infant begins to constitute a self by integrating its fragmented experiences of its bodily processes into a unified image. The details of the place of the notion of the 'imaginary body' in Lacan's psychoanalysis need not concern us here. But I want to take up the idea that the self is constituted in part through the formation of a unified body-image and to suggest that this process is not confined to early infancy, nor to pre-conscious experience. Rather we continue to constitute ourselves as selves through the continual process of developing a *bodily perspective.* Autonomy and bodily autonomy involve achieving what I want to call an *integrated* bodily perspective, as opposed to the *estranged* bodily perspective that is the result of oppression.

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5. Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience' in Ecrits: A Selection, translated by Alan Sheridan, (Tavistock, London 1977). I am indebted to an article by Moira Gatens for drawing my attention to the way in which the Lacanian notion of the 'imaginary body' sheds light on some of the problems with the way in which subjectivity has been conceived within feminism. See Moira Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction' in Beyond Marxism? Interventions after Marx, Allen, Judith & Patton, Paul (eds), (Intervention Publications, Leichardt, 1983), pp. 143-162. My discussion of the notion of a bodily 'perspective' also draws on some of Gatens' suggestions in this article and on Luce Irigaray's notion of the 'morphological body'. See especially Luce Irigaray This Sex which is not One, translated by Catherine Porter, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985).

Before explicating the idea of an integrated as opposed to an estranged bodily perspective however, I want first to explain what is meant by the idea of a bodily perspective *simpliciter*. It needs to be stressed that such a perspective is quite distinct from the biological body. It might best be characterised as the point of intersection of biological processes, cultural representations of the body and of bodily processes, and of an individual's personal unconscious and conscious history. Thus our bodily perspective is constituted in response to certain biological processes over which we do not exercise conscious control – menstruation or menopause for example – and in response to involuntary changes to our body boundaries and capacities – for example those experienced by the infant as it becomes increasingly mobile, the sexual developments which occur during puberty, or the changes to a woman's body boundaries in pregnancy. But our experiences and representations of these processes are always already mediated by the ways in which those processes are signified in our culture, by the particular psychic significance those processes have, at any given time, for each individual, and by the way an individual comes to terms with those processes and with their cultural and personal meanings. What I am suggesting then is that the constitution of a bodily perspective is an *active*, meaning-conferring process; that it is a necessarily social process which occurs through our bodily interactions with others, and through the ways in which we perceive our bodies to be represented by others; and that a person's bodily perspective is a fluid perspective which changes in response to changes in a person's bodily situation and in response to her changing relations with others. I also want to suggest that the kind of bodily self-direction that seems crucial to personhood and autonomous agency is always mediated through this shaping for ourselves of a bodily perspective.

It seems to me that the idea that subjectivity is constituted in part through the shaping for oneself of a bodily perspective, confounds the distinction

between an active, conscious and free subjectivity and a passive, determined, merely natural body. A further implication of this view is that if our body-images, and therefore in part our conceptions of ourselves, arise in response to, and are representations of, bodily processes and changes, then we should expect that, while there will be certain commonalities in the bodily perspectives of human beings, it will also be true that sexually different bodies will give rise to different psychic representations of the body and of the self. Given this, it should be expected that in some respects, and with respect to certain bodily experiences, the bodily perspectives of women will overlap to a certain degree, and in different ways from the ways in which the bodily perspectives of men overlap. That being said, I have argued that our bodily perspectives are not simply a function of bodily processes and changes. Rather they are constituted in the context of certain shared cultural meanings and in the context of an individual's particular history, as well as her bodily and social relations with others. This means that, despite some overlap between perspectives, we should also expect there to be vast differences among the bodily perspectives and experiences of women, depending on their particular cultural context or, within a culture, depending on factors including their racial, ethnic and class situation, their sexual orientation and whether or not they are mothers. We should also expect changes within a woman's bodily perspective, sometimes resulting from changes in her bodily situation, sometimes from changes in her relations with others. The notion of a sexually specific bodily perspective thus does not appeal to a biologically determined or essentialistic conception of femininity. Rather it aims to account for both the commonalities and the differences between the bodily perspectives of men and women, and among those of women.

On the basis of this characterisation of the notion of a bodily perspective, we can now begin to see how to articulate the difference between an integrated

or autonomous, and an estranged, bodily perspective, without recourse to the notion of a controlling and sexually indifferent consciousness. If our bodily perspectives, and hence in part our subjectivities, are constituted in response to certain involuntary bodily changes and processes, then it makes no sense to think of bodily autonomy as a matter of exercising conscious control over the body. Rather bodily autonomy involves achieving an integrated bodily perspective, that is, a representation of the meaning of our bodies and of those involuntary bodily processes we experience, which we ourselves determine and with which we identify. It also involves being able to act in accordance with that representation. An estranged bodily perspective by contrast is a representation which either does not seem to be self-determined, or with which we do not identify.

A number of points need to be made to clarify this view. Firstly, it is important not to interpret the difference between an integrated and an estranged bodily perspective as the difference between an actively produced and a passively received body image. Our body images are always active interpretations or representations of our body boundaries and bodily processes, even if those representations are always culturally mediated. The difference is rather a question of the extent to which we have the scope to engage in critical self-reflection upon those personal and cultural representations. The notion of 'identification' must thus be read as identification which is the result of critical reflection. As I made clear in the first section of this introduction, such reflection cannot be understood as a process which abstracts from a person's specific situation. Rather it arises out of this situation and in the context of her interactions with, and responsibilities towards, others. For example a woman may re-shape her own bodily perspective through her relationship with a pregnant friend. This brings me to my second point which is that our bodily perspectives are causally efficacious and actually shape the character of our experiences of

our body boundaries and bodily processes. For, as de Beauvoir makes vividly clear, it is obvious that in a cultural context in which menstruation is represented culturally as unclean, a woman may in some sense identify in an unreflective way with her own representation of her body as shameful and disgusting and so come to experience menstruation in this way. It is for this reason that it is so important to challenge the various cultural representations of women's bodily experiences as obstacles to autonomy, for they bring about the paradoxical result that women shape for themselves a bodily perspective which represents their own bodies as passive. Thirdly, as I hope I have already made clear, I do not think the aim of any such challenge is to enable the articulation either of a universal and singular 'feminine' bodily perspective or of a sexually specific account of autonomy. Rather it is to enable women to shape for themselves an integrated and autonomous bodily perspective. Nevertheless, because our bodily perspectives are formed in response to certain bodily processes and changes, in articulating what it means for women to exercise autonomy and bodily autonomy in certain circumstances which are sexually specific – for example in pregnancy and abortion – we need to recognise the specificity both of these processes and of the reflective bodily perspectives to which they give rise.

In the next chapter I want to outline what such a recognition might entail by using the case of pregnancy and abortion as an example. My argument has a number of different, though connected strands. One concern is to argue that the ways in which some feminist philosophers have defended women's right to abortion misconstrue the notion of bodily autonomy, because they fail to question the representation of pregnancy as a process which simply takes over women's bodies and with respect to which women are passive. As a result they misdescribe what is involved in exercising autonomous decision-making in pregnancy and abortion. My main concerns however

are to try to characterise the kind of reflective bodily perspective that is formed during the process of pregnancy, to show how this perspective must underpin women's claims to bodily autonomy with respect to pregnancy and abortion, and to argue that, in order to come to grips with the moral issues raised by abortion, we must accord this perspective a great deal of moral significance. My argument also aims to show that if we take seriously the moral significance of embodiment, then we must also come to terms with the embedded nature of moral agents and of moral decision-making.

Chapter Six

ABORTION AND EMBODIMENT[1]

I. Introduction

Feminist perspectives on abortion focus on a fact the moral implications of which are either overlooked or considered unimportant by most other disputants in the debate. This is the fact that a foetus is not a free-floating entity about whom questions of potentiality and personhood arise as though in a vacuum. Rather a foetus is a being whose existence and welfare are biologically and morally inseparable from the woman in whose body it develops. From a feminist perspective the central moral subjects of the abortion question are thus not only, or not primarily, foetuses but women.

Within an influential strand of the feminist philosophical literature it has been usual to understand the moral dilemmas arising from this unique relationship between a foetus and a woman in terms of a conflict of rights and to defend a woman's right to abortion via the notion of bodily autonomy. In its crudest form, the alleged conflict is between a) the 'right to life' of the foetus, a right based on the presumption that it is a being deserving of some moral consideration, and b) the right of the woman to bodily autonomy, that is, her right to decide what happens in and to her

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1. A slightly different version of this chapter will appear as an article, also entitled 'Abortion and Embodiment', in the December 1991 issue of the Australasian Journal of Philosophy. I am grateful to the journal's editor Robert Young, and to the journal's anonymous referees, for their comments on the article. These comments have helped to clarify both my argument in this chapter and the account of a reflective bodily perspective which underlies the argument. Earlier versions of this chapter were read as papers in the Philosophy Department at Monash University and the Philosophy Society at Princeton University, and at a seminar on 'Legal and Conceptual Aspects of Abortion' at the University of New South Wales. I would like to thank participants in those discussions for their comments. I would also like to thank the following people for their helpful discussions and/or comments on earlier versions of this chapter: John Bigelow, John Burgess, Genevieve Lloyd, Michaelis Michael, Robert Pargetter, Peter Singer, Michael Smith, C.L. Ten.

body. In attempting to resolve this conflict in women's favour feminist defenders of abortion have taken two main lines of argument.

The first, articulated best by Mary Anne Warren, argues that in abortion decisions the woman's right to bodily autonomy must always prevail over any rights which may be claimed on behalf of the foetus.[2] This is because the only beings with full moral standing are persons. Not only are foetuses not persons, they are not even personlike enough to warrant our regarding them as if they were persons. Indeed, Warren claims that an 8-month foetus is no more personlike than the average fish. On this view then, the 'right to life' of the foetus, to the extent that it has such a right, cannot possibly outweigh the right of a person to one of the fundamental rights of persons – the right to bodily autonomy. In fact, Warren claims that having an abortion is morally equivalent to cutting one's hair.

The second line of argument is best represented by Judith Jarvis Thomson and, following her, Christine Overall.[3] Their claim involves a sophisticated reinterpretation in terms of an absence of rights, of the cruder claim that even if a foetus does have a right to life, the woman's right to bodily autonomy overrides that right. By trying to show that even if the foetus is a being with moral standing it has no automatic right to occupancy of a woman's womb, their argument seeks to undermine the basic premise of

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2. My argument in this part of the chapter refers to Mary Anne Warren's paper 'On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion' in R. Wasserstrom (ed.) Today's Moral Problems (Macmillan, 1975). In a very recent paper, which I refer to in more detail later in this chapter, Warren's characterisation of the foetus is markedly different although her basic position on the woman's right to bodily autonomy remains unaltered. See 'The Moral Significance of Birth', Hypatia, Special Issue: 'Ethics and Reproduction', ed. by Laura Purdy, vol. 4, no.3, Fall 1989. This paper is a modified version of an earlier paper with the same title which appeared in Bioethics News, Publication of the Centre for Human Bioethics, Monash University, vol.7, no. 2, January 1988.

3. Judith Jarvis Thomson 'A Defense of Abortion' Philosophy and Public Affairs, vol. 1, no. 1 (1971); Christine Overall, Ethics and Human Reproduction, Chs. 3&4 (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

the conservative position on abortion – namely the premise that if foetuses are persons, that is, beings with full moral rights, then abortion is necessarily wrong.

My aim in this chapter is to defend a feminist perspective on abortion by showing that questions of women's autonomy lie at the heart of the abortion issue. I want to argue however that the conflict-of-rights framework and rights-based models of bodily autonomy are liable seriously to misrepresent both the nature of abortion decisions and the reasons why the availability of abortion is essential to women's autonomy. My dissatisfaction with this kind of approach centres on four related concerns. Firstly, a conflict-of-rights approach fails adequately to address the issue of responsibility in pregnancy and abortion. Hence it mischaracterises both the nature of the moral relationship between woman and foetus and the kind of autonomy that is exercised in pregnancy and abortion. Secondly, it tends to oversimplify our conception of the status of the foetus. Thirdly, it leads to a misconstrual of the notion of bodily autonomy because it is inattentive to the kind of reflective bodily perspective that arises from a phenomenological account of pregnant embodiment. Finally, defending abortion solely on the grounds of women's right to bodily autonomy logically requires that the right to abortion cannot entail a right to secure the death of the foetus but only a right to foetal evacuation.

What I want to argue is that a strong feminist case for abortion needs to construe a woman's right to obtain an abortion as the right of an autonomous moral agent to be able to make a decision about whether she wishes to take responsibility for the future well-being of a being dependent upon her. In choosing an abortion in other words, a woman is not merely choosing not to allow the foetus occupancy of her uterus. Nor is she merely choosing not to undertake responsibility for a particular future child. Rather, as Steven Ross has pointed out, she is choosing that there be <u>no</u>

being at all in relation to whom she is in a situation of such responsibility.[4] To require that a woman has no right to secure the death of the foetus, at least in the early stages of pregnancy, thus violates her autonomy.

Now against this claim it could be argued that here the woman is not only making decisions about her own life but about that of another. What entitles her to make such a decision? The next three sections of the chapter attempt to answer this question. In the second section I make some suggestions as to how we should understand the notions of responsibility and autonomy in pregnancy, while the third section assesses the moral status of the foetus both from the point of view of its intrinsic moral properties and from the point of view of its relationship with the woman in whose body it develops. Building on the previous two sections, the final section draws on a phenomenological account of pregnancy in order to explain the connection between autonomy, bodily autonomy and pregnant embodiment. My criticisms of the rights-based accounts of bodily autonomy emerge from this discussion.

II. Responsibility and Autonomy

Appeals to responsibility in the context of the abortion debate usually trade on the asymmetry between the situation of men and women with regard to pregnancy. The asymmetry is that while it is always possible for men to evade or even remain blissfully unaware of the consequences of their actions where those actions result in pregnancy, the same is not true for women. Further it is women alone who are physically able to sustain the foetus. Thus women come to be held "responsible" for what was after all a joint action. Given this context it is hardly surprising that feminist defences

4. Steven Ross, 'Abortion and the Death of the Foetus', Philosophy and Public Affairs, vol. 11, no. 3, (Summer 1982).

of abortion often attempt to shift discussions of the abortion issue away from the question of responsibility. Thorny, as it may be however, one of my central claims in this chapter is that the issue of responsibility is crucial for an understanding of women's moral autonomy with respect to pregnancy and abortion. In this section of the chapter I attempt to outline an adequate feminist approach to the question of responsibility in pregnancy and abortion.

A number of different aspects of responsibility are often conflated in the abortion debate. To disentangle these I want firstly to distinguish what I call causal responsibility from moral responsibility. By causal responsibility I mean simply responsibility for the direct causal consequences of one's actions in cases where those consequences can be said to be reasonably foreseeable and where a person's actions were freely chosen. In this sense a woman can be said to be responsible for the existence of the foetus in much the same way as she can be said to be responsible for getting drunk, in that it is her actions, in this case along with those of another, which have brought about this outcome.[5] Although conservatives do not usually make an explicit distinction between causal and moral responsibility, the conservative claim seems to be that in the case of pregnancy, because the outcome here is to have brought into existence a being with full moral standing, then a woman's causal responsibility necessarily entails a moral responsibility towards maintaining the existence of the foetus.[6]

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5. I discuss the question of men's responsibility below. Given this account of causal responsibility, a woman is of course not causally responsible in the case of rape. But neither can she be considered causally responsible if she cannot and cannot reasonably be expected to foresee the consequences of her actions (eg if she is a minor or mentally handicapped) or if her actions were performed under duress (the distinction between rape and consent is not as hard and fast as many would think), or if she cannot be said to be acting autonomously (eg. in a case of drug addiction or alcoholism or some other dependency).

6. Somewhat surprisingly, some feminists have argued for a similar view. See Hilde and James Lindemann Nelson, 'Cutting Motherhood in Two: Some Suspicions Concerning Surrogacy', Hypatia, *op. cit.*

Feminists and liberals have responded to this claim in a number of ways. The approach of Warren and Tooley is to attempt to shift the focus of the abortion debate away from questions of moral responsibility and towards a consideration of the actual present status of the foetus with respect to personhood. Their argument is that because foetuses are not persons and therefore do not have rights, abortion is morally permissible.[7] The second approach is to show that one does not necessarily have automatic moral responsibility to maintain the existence of a being dependent upon oneself – even if that being does have full moral standing and hence a right to life. This is Thomson's approach in the examples of the violinist and Henry Fonda.[8] As Warren and Feinberg have shown however this strategy fails because the examples chosen are disanalogous to the case of the foetus in one relevant respect, namely with respect to causal responsibility.[9] The strategy thus begs the question. Yet another tactic is to show that the attribution of causal responsibility is a lot less straightforward than it might appear and thus to argue that causal responsibility for the existence of a being does not necessarily mean that one is required to assume moral responsibility for maintaining its existence. For to what extent is a person still morally responsible for the consequences of an action if they have taken reasonable precautions against those consequences occurring? Thomson's example of the house-owner covering her windows in wire

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7. Warren, 'On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion', *op. cit.*; Michael Tooley, 'Abortion and Infanticide', Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol 2, No. 1 (1972).

8. The violinist example seeks to show that a person has no moral obligation to sustain the life of a famous violinist who has been attached to her without her consent, and whose survival is dependent on being connected to her circulatory system for nine months. The Henry Fonda example involves the case of a person who is dying but would be revived by the touch of Henry Fonda's hand on her brow. The example seeks to show that a person does not necessarily have a right to whatever is required to ensure her survival. See Thomson, 'A Defence of Abortion', *op.cit.* I discuss the problem with such examples in the final section of this chapter.

9. Warren, 'On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion', op.cit.; Joel Feinberg, 'Abortion', Ch. 6 in Tom Regan (ed.) Matters of Life and Death, (Random House, 1980).

mesh to prevent the entry of 'people-seeds' seeks to undermine in this way any necessary connection between causal and moral responsibility.[10]

While these responses have been partially successful in exposing some of the assumptions at work behind the seeming self-evidence of the conservative argument, they nevertheless fail adequately to come to terms with the question of moral responsibility in pregnancy because they concede too much at the outset to the conservative notion of moral responsibility. This is particularly true of the last approach which forces Thomson, after a series of increasingly bizarre examples, to attempt to dissolve the question of responsibility by an appeal to decency.[11] What needs to be pointed out is that the conservative account of moral responsibility is premised on a set of assumptions which are fundamentally oppressive to women. For it is significant that in this whole debate about responsibility there seem to be only two possible ways for women to get pregnant. Either they are raped, in which case they have no causal responsibility for the existence of the foetus – although according to some conservatives they nevertheless have a moral responsibility towards it. Or else they are not raped, in which case they are held to be fully responsible, in both a causal and moral sense. In neither case however is men's moral responsibility ever seriously discussed, despite their obvious causal involvement in the pregnancy. The consequence of this blindness is that moral responsibility in pregnancy gets construed

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10. In this example 'people-seeds' are seeds which blow in through house windows like dust, take root in carpets, and then grow into people who demand food and shelter!

11. I have in mind here Thomson's discussion of the woman who at 7-months requests an abortion in order to avoid having to postpone an overseas trip. Thomson realises that her argument does not allow her to claim that such a request would be immoral, so she resorts to the claim that it would be indecent. This issue aside Thomson's example is somewhat offensive in its presentation of women's moral attitude towards abortion. Those women usually seeking abortions at this stage of pregnancy are those whose health is in some way gravely threatened by continuation of the pregnancy, or those who, due to drug addiction, mental handicap or some other such reason, cannot be said ever to have made a moral decision with regard to their pregnancies.

extremely narrowly, as just responsibility towards the foetus, and in a way that seems to commit women to maternity.

The challenge then seems to be to envision a notion of moral responsibility in pregnancy that acknowledges the moral complexities of the situation, and of the decision facing a woman who is weighing up the choices of abortion or maternity, but that does not imply that the only possible morally responsible course of action is to choose maternity. My starting point here is to accept, without argument at this stage, both that the foetus does have some moral significance and that this is in part why causal responsibility does entail some kind of moral responsibility. Having conceded that much to the conservatives I want to disentangle two aspects of moral responsibility which are confused in conservative arguments.

The first aspect, which I call decision responsibility, emerges as a strong theme in Carol Gilligan's interviews with women making the abortion decision.[12] Gilligan's women reveal that in their thinking about abortion, acceptance of causal responsibility means assuming a moral responsibility to make a decision or a series of decisions about your future relationship with the being whose existence you have directly brought about. The decision process is focused on questions such as whether you are in a position adequately to care for it, both now when it is in the foetal stage and, more importantly, when it is an independent being; how and whether it can be integrated into your life and the lives of others, for example other children, whose lives will also be significantly affected by your decision; whether you feel yourself able, or prepared to, provide the physical and emotional care and nurturance needed in order for both foetus and child to flourish. What

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12. Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1982). It should be noted here that the kinds of moral reflection in which these women engage is in part made possible by the fact that these women do have reproductive choice.

emerges from these discussions of responsibility is that the assumption of moral responsibility in pregnancy cannot be construed just in terms of responsibility towards the foetus but has a wider focus – on the self, on relations with significant others, on a person's other commitments and projects. When responsibility is construed in such a way it is clear that exercising moral responsibility in no way entails a commitment to maternity and that the choice of abortion is in many cases the morally responsible decision. It should also be noted that the exercise of decision responsibility involves the same processes of critical self-constitution in the context of our relations with others which, as we have already seen, characterises autonomous agency.

The second aspect of moral responsibility in pregnancy, which I call parental responsibility, is the one which a person assumes when a commitment has been made to maternity.[13] What this kind of assumption of responsibility involves is a responsibility not just to maintaining the existence of the foetus, nor even just a commitment to providing the care and nurturance needed for it to flourish, but a commitment to bringing into existence a future child. Often, though not necessarily, it also involves a commitment to long-term care and nurturance of that future child. My claim is that the decision to abort is a decision, for whatever reason, that one is not prepared to bring such a child into existence.

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13. As I have indicated decision responsibility is a process, not a single decision. Thus a woman may change her mind a number of times before finally assuming parental responsibility. She may also change her mind after having assumed it. For reasons which I explain below I think there is a significant moral difference between such a change of mind in the first trimester or early in the second trimester and a change of mind during the latter half of pregnancy – except of course where such a change is made for medical reasons or because of foetal deformity discoverable only by amniocentesis during the second trimester. It does not follow from this however that women should be legally prevented from obtaining abortions for other reasons later in pregnancy. I discuss the distinction between moral and legal responsibility below.

It should be pointed out here that with respect to all aspects of responsibility the situation of men and women – in pregnancy at least – is asymmetrical. The asymmetry is that while men and women are equally responsible for pregnancy in the causal sense, causal responsibility and decision responsibility are in effect completely separable for men, but inseparable for women. This is because a woman's bodily connection with the foetus makes causal responsibility and hence decision responsibility inescapable for her.[14] On the other hand men's bodily alienation from the consequences of their actions and from the physical, psychic and emotional experience of pregnancy means that they may be in a position where they are either unaware of their causal responsibility for the existence of the foetus or choose not to acknowledge their causal responsibility or assume decision responsibility.

A sensitivity to this difference illuminates two important points. Firstly, if causal and decision responsibility are inseparable for women, then pregnancy cannot be thought of simply as a merely 'natural' event which just *happens* to women and in relation to which they are passive. Although pregnancy certainly involves biological processes which are beyond the woman's control, these processes are always mediated by the cultural meanings of pregnancy, by the woman's personal and social context, and by the way she constitutes herself in response to these factors through the decisions she makes. In other words, pregnancy is never simply a biological process, it is always an active process of shaping for oneself a bodily and a moral perspective.[15] For this reason, the moral issues associated with pregnancy and abortion cannot be viewed in abstraction from the first-person perspective of the woman concerned.

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14. I discuss the nature of this bodily connection in detail in Section IV below.

15. I develop this point in more detail in Section IV below.

Secondly, because of the particularity of the woman's situation in pregnancy, in cases of conflict over abortion ultimately it should be up to the woman to decide whether or not she will choose abortion.[16] To say this however does not imply that, in situations where men are aware of and do acknowledge causal responsibility, they have no say in an abortion decision. In such circumstances, because the decision made will obviously affect their autonomy, they should also be party to, and involved in, both decision responsibility and, where appropriate, parental responsibility. Indeed after birth they may assume most, or even all, parental responsibility. Nevertheless prior to birth the impact upon their autonomy of any decision is very different from its impact on the autonomy of the woman. This is why in cases of conflict the woman's decision should prevail.

Two objections are likely to be raised at this point. The first is that a woman may also choose to relinquish moral responsibility, for example to others through adoption. Further it is often argued that abortion is just a relinquishing of moral responsibility for the foetus. From the preceding discussion it should be clear that this objection conflates the two senses of moral responsibility distinguished above. Deciding against assuming parental responsibility does not mean that one has relinquished moral responsibility, not even for the foetus. For no matter what she decides – maternity, abortion, adoption – a woman is still responsible to herself, to others, to the child if there is one, for the decision she has made. In fact, as I have just argued, it is through such decisions that a person constitutes

16. I have in mind here recent cases in the UK and Australia where men have attempted to obtain court orders, on the grounds of paternal right, to prevent women from obtaining abortion. My analysis of the asymmetry in the positions of men and women with respect to responsibility in pregnancy should make it clear why feminists have been so outraged by the men's presumption in these cases that they should be able to overrule the decisions of the women concerned.

herself in relation to others. Further, as I have already pointed out, the decision to abort is often the most morally responsible course of action.

The second objection is that I have placed a great deal of moral weight on a decision process which in some cases just never occurs. For some women's lives are so chaotic and so little under their control that they cannot be said to be making any autonomous decisions about their own welfare, let alone about the welfare of any foetus that may be developing inside their bodies. My response to this objection, as I have already indicated, is to say that in such a case I would not even attribute causal responsibility to women in this situation. Thus the question of their moral responsibility does not arise. However given the difficulty of actually deciding, in any given case, whether or not a woman does have any causal responsibility for a pregnancy, what the objection forces us to recognise is that a distinction needs to be made between our moral assessment of a situation and the question of legal sanctions. Although I have argued that the decision to continue with a pregnancy entails some kind of parental responsibility, this is quite different from claiming that women should be legally liable for the foetus' welfare. Arguments to this effect must be vigorously resisted for they wrongly presume that foetuses are the moral and legal equivalents of women. In fact, as Mary Anne Warren has argued, 'There is room for only one person with full and equal [legal] rights inside a single human skin'.[17]

While this analysis of responsibility still leaves unanswered questions about the intrinsic moral status of the foetus it does tend to suggest that, at least in part, its moral status is dependent on the relational properties it has with others and that the abortion issue cannot adequately be broached if we

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17. My insert. Warren, 'The Moral Significance of Birth', *op. cit.*, p. 63.

focus on intrinsic properties alone.[18] This relational aspect of the foetus' moral standing is best captured through the notion of moral guardianship. I want to suggest that although a foetus cannot be a bearer of full moral rights because, as I shall argue in the next section, it lacks the requisite intrinsic properties (namely personhood), nevertheless in a context in which some one or more members of the moral community have decided to take parental responsibility for its future well-being, it has moral significance by virtue of its relations with her or them. We might say that in such a case it has *de facto* significance through her or them, until such a point when it can be considered a full moral being in its own right. This significance does not guarantee the foetus a 'right to life' which overrides all other possible competing claims, but rather provides some grounds for the foetus' claims to nurturance and care that is, guardianship, from the woman who bears it and protection from harm from others.

In this context it should be noted that once again the situation of men and women with regard to moral guardianship is inescapably asymmetrical in pregnancy. A man, no matter how well-intentioned, cannot act as the primary guardian of an *in utero* foetus. The reason for this asymmetry is not hard to discern, namely the physical inseparability of the foetus from the woman, but its moral implications are often overlooked. The main implications are firstly that, as I argued earlier, in cases of conflict it should be the woman who has the right to decide the fate of the foetus. Secondly, this asymmetry makes it clear that, as Warren has argued, the event of birth is morally significant.[19] Its significance lies in the fact that at birth the infant becomes a member of the human moral community in its own right because its relationship with its mother and other human beings changes

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18. Warren makes a similar claim in 'The Moral Significance of Birth', *op. cit.*

19. Warren, 'The Moral Significance of Birth', *op. cit.*

significantly. Not only is its body now separate from that of its mother, but it no longer needs to stand in a relation of moral and physical dependence on her in particular. Any responsible human adult will now be able to provide it with the care, nurturance and moral protection required for it to flourish.

Having assessed the relational moral status of the foetus I want now to justify my earlier claim that causal responsibility for the existence of the foetus entails decision responsibility because the foetus is a morally significant being. A useful starting point for this discussion is Warren's account of foetal status.

III. Foetal Status and Potentiality

If, following Warren, we distinguish between "human beings" and "persons" and argue that only persons can be members of the moral community, then it seems clear that the foetus is not a bearer of moral rights in the same sense that a person is and so does not have the same "right to life" as a person.[20] Nevertheless, as Warren herself argues with respect to infants, it does not follow from the fact that, because anyone who is a person is entitled to strong moral protections, that it is wrong to extend

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20. Warren, 'On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion', *op.cit.* Warren supports this distinction by outlining five criteria for personhood, specifying that a person need not satisfy all these criteria but that a being which satisfied none of them could not be considered a person. The five criteria are:

1. Consciousness (of objects and events external and/or internal to the being), and in particular the capacity to feel pain;
2. Reasoning (the developed capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems);
3. Self-motivated activity (activity which is relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control);
4. The capacity to communicate, by whatever means, messages of an indefinite variety of types, that is, not just with an indefinite number of possible contents, but on indefinitely many possible topics;
5. The presence of self-concepts, and self-awareness, either individual or racial, or both.

moral protections to beings that are not persons.[21] The more personlike the being, the more it should be treated as a person. The question arises therefore of how far advanced since conception a human being needs to be before it begins to have a right to life by virtue of being like a person, that is, at what stage should we start treating a foetus as if it were a person? On this point Warren in her earlier paper claims that the foetus of 7 or 8 months is no more personlike, or even less personlike, than the average fish and thus should not be treated as a person. For although, like the fish, the late term foetus is sentient, sentience is not sufficient for personhood. Contra Thomson, she thus concludes that "whether or not it would be indecent (whatever that means) for a woman in her seventh month to obtain an abortion just to avoid having to postpone a trip to Europe, it would not, in itself, be immoral, and therefore it ought to be permitted".[22]

Warren's comparison between foetuses and fish occurs in the context of a discussion of the nature of personhood. The intention of the comparison is to show that, while the foetus is indeed a member of the human species, as far as personhood and hence claims to rights are concerned the foetus is morally on a par with a fish. With respect to driving home the distinction between human beings and persons I do not dispute the effectiveness of Warren's comparison. However I want to suggest that the metaphor is problematic for two reasons. Firstly it invites us to ignore the fact that, contingent though it may be, personhood is constituted by a complex of

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21. Warren, ' The Moral Significance of Birth', *op.cit.* I follow Warren here in using the term 'person' because I think that in the context of abortion the distinction between 'human beings' and 'persons' is an important distinction to maintain. However I am not happy with the legalistic and individualist connotations of the term which tend to downplay the intersubjective processes of development by means of which infants become self-conscious subjects.

22. Warren, 'On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion, *op. cit.* p. 133

properties which supervene on a specific physical constitution.[23] Yet despite its contingency, or perhaps because of it, I want to argue that this fact is morally significant. Secondly, although the foetus/fish metaphor should not be read as providing a model of the relationship between a woman and a foetus, it has the serious, if unintended, effect of downplaying the moral significance and particularity of this relationship. In particular it has the effect of de-emphasising both the woman's role as moral guardian and her parental responsibility for the present and future well-being of the foetus. My claim is that the force of the feminist defence of abortion must lie in its highlighting of the moral particularity of the relationship between a woman and a foetus.

On the question of foetal status and potentiality my claim is that foetuses are morally significant beings by virtue of the fact that they are potential persons. This makes them morally different in kind from fish. However I think it is plausible to suggest that the moral value of the foetus' potential personhood is not static, but changes during the course of a normal pregnancy. This is because potential for personhood is not the only thing that bestows moral status on the being with that potentiality. Rather, the moral value of a being's potential personhood is related to the physical or biological basis of the potentiality, in particular it is grounded in the degree of complexity and development of this physical basis. Thus the more physically complex and developed the being is, the more value we attribute to its potential for personhood. There are two ways in which this claim could be developed. One way would accept an on/off view of potentiality

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23. I see this point as connected with my claim, in the Introduction to this part of the thesis, that our selfhood emerges through our increasing bodily capacities and through the processes by means of which we learn bodily self-direction. In stressing the connection between the development of subjectivity and physical development however I am not denying the significance of the social relationships in the context of which these developments must occur.

and argue that potential for personhood remains constant although its moral significance changes. On this view conceptus and late term foetus both have the same potentiality but the moral value of those beings is different because the physical basis of the potentiality is different. In the one case we have a clump of undifferentiated cells, in the other a highly complex organism. Thus in the one case we have a being very far from being able to actualise its potentialities because it lacks the very physical basis to do so, in the other we have a being fairly close to being able to actualise its potentialities to the extent that the physical basis of those potentialities is highly developed.[24] Another way would be to question the on/off view of potentiality and to argue that potential for personhood itself changes as the foetus develops physically.[25]

For my purposes in this chapter nothing hinges on the differences between these positions. But what is appealing about the general suggestion is that it enables us to agree with Warren's criteria of personhood while nevertheless resisting the counter intuitive implications of these criteria, viz that a being has no intrinsic moral significance unless it is a person and that there is no important moral difference between a conceptus and a late term foetus. For now it can be argued that the intrinsic moral status of the foetus changes in direct relation to its changing physical basis. Thus, at least in terms of its intrinsic properties, an early stage foetus does not have great value. With respect to a highly developed foetus, although it is not a being

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24. This argument is a simplified version of an argument of John Bigelow and Robert Pargetter. See 'Morality, Potential Persons and Abortion', American Philosophical Quarterly, vol. 25, no. 2, April 1988

25. An argument for this view is presented by Michaelis Michael in 'The Moral Significance of Potential for Personhood' (unpublished paper, Monash University, 1986). His view there is that the potential a being has to give to a rise to a person is the function from situations the being is (normally) in to the probabilities of its giving rise to a person from those situations. We have greater potential when we have one function dominating another.

with full moral rights, its gradually increasing moral significance warrants our treating it, in most circumstances at least, as if it were such a being.

Combining this view with the guardianship view outlined earlier we get the idea that the moral position of the foetus changes over the course of pregnancy. At the early stages its moral standing is defined in relational terms, that is by virtue of the fact that it is a being with moral significance for the woman in whose body it develops and who acts as its moral guardian. As the foetus develops physically however its intrinsic moral significance increases. Its moral standing is less and less dependent on its relational properties with the woman in whose body it develops and more and more tied to its own intrinsic value. This does not mean, however, that the foetus is ever the moral equivalent of the woman. Hence in cases where the foetus' continued existence severely threatens the woman's physical or mental survival, her interests should always prevail up until the moment of birth. It does however suggest that late term abortion is morally different from early abortion and that they cannot be justified on the same grounds.

On the question of guardianship, I suggested above that the rationale behind Warren's defence of abortion (namely that the foetus is not a person), particularly in the context of the foetus/fish comparison, has the effect of downplaying the moral significance of the woman's parental responsibility for the present and future well-being of the foetus. This effect is reinforced by Warren's claim, which she justifies on the grounds of a woman's right to bodily autonomy, that a decision to abort is morally permissible up until the moment of birth. For now it looks as though the foetus is a potential threat to the woman's bodily autonomy up until the moment of birth, rather than a being in relation to whom the woman has a unique bodily and moral connection. In the next section I want to argue that this view is based on a flawed conception of bodily autonomy. Here I

simply want to point out that in pregnancy the assumption of parental responsibility necessarily involves a certain commitment of one's body. In other words, the decision to continue a pregnancy (and presumably by 7 months some prior decision has been made) is a decision to assume responsibility (even if only for 9 months) for the well-being of the foetus and this entails providing bodily nurturance for it, perhaps even at some bodily risk to yourself. Now obviously there are limits to this risk. I am not suggesting that women have responsibility to the foetus whatever the risk. As I have already indicated, I am also not suggesting that parties other than the woman, for example the medical establishment, or the state-legal apparatus, have a right to determine the limits of that risk. Like many other feminists, including Warren, I am alarmed by the recent movements advocating both so-called 'foetal rights' and the introduction of charges of 'foetal abuse' against women who do not do what is required to nurture the foetus in the uterus. Further the whole question of what is 'required' for adequate nurturance is open to much interpretation against women's autonomy as persons. Nevertheless, I think that my accounts of potentiality, guardianship and responsibility explain why there is a genuine moral requirement upon a woman to protect and nurture a foetus once she has assumed parental responsibility for its future well-being, without that requirement involving any infringement of her autonomy. In this context it should be noted that Warren's downplaying of the question of responsibility also fails to stress men's obligations with respect to a pregnancy.

IV. Pregnant Embodiment and Bodily Autonomy

I have argued so far that, at least in the early stages of its development, the moral standing of a foetus is dependent upon its relationship with the woman who bears it and who acts as its moral guardian. In terms of its own intrinsic properties its moral standing is not particularly significant. This is

a necessary condition for the permissibility of abortion, but it is not sufficient. For it fails to explain why the availability of abortion is necessary for the moral autonomy of women and hence why a restriction on its accessibility violates their autonomy. In this section I attempt to explain and justify this claim. From my discussion it will also become clear why, in order to secure women's autonomy, abortion must be understood as foetal death rather than foetal evacuation.

What has emerged so far is that in order to understand the kind of autonomy that is exercised by women in pregnancy and abortion we must be attentive to the moral particularity of pregnancy. As we have seen there are a number of different factors which make pregnancy morally unique. To begin with, pregnancy is not simply a biological event with respect to which women are passive. Rather it is an active process and a social process which places women in a situation of moral responsibility – which I earlier called decision responsibility. This responsibility is due in part to the foetus' potential moral significance, but it is also due to the fact that the decision to commit or not to commit oneself to the existence of such a future person has far-reaching implications for the woman's own life as well as, possibly, for the lives of others – for example, the "father" of the possible future child, other children, relatives, friends and so on. But pregnancy is also morally unique because the physical connection between the woman and the foetus, and the physical processes which occur during pregnancy, give rise to a unique bodily perspective.

In what follows I want to draw on a phenomenological account of pregnant embodiment in order to give an account of the kind of reflective bodily perspective that emerges out of the experience of pregnancy. I also want to suggest that the experience of moral responsibility in pregnancy which I have detailed above is mediated by this reflective bodily perspective, which both structures and points to the moral particularity of the relationship

between woman and foetus – especially to the fact that this relationship and the responsibilities it entails cannot be conceived of as extrinsic to the woman's subjectivity. It should be clear from my discussion of the notion of a bodily perspective in the Introduction to Part IV that this phenomenological description is not a description of the subjective feelings of individual women, but is rather a normative and reflective apprehension of the way in which conscious experience is structured by our (bodily) situations, perspectives and modes of perception. The phenomenological experience I describe is therefore not meant to be an empirical description of the way in which all women experience or feel about their pregnancies, since, as I argued earlier, women's individual bodily perspectives, feelings and experiences depend upon a wide range of factors, including the cultural, social and historical context in which they live their lives.[26]

My suggestion is that although in some senses (for example, biologically) it makes sense to speak of the foetus as a separate being from the woman, in other ways (for example in terms of talking of a conflict of rights), it makes no sense at all – especially in the early stages of pregnancy.[27] Phenomenologically, the experience of pregnancy, particularly in the early stages, is unique in the sense that it defies a sharp opposition between self and other, between the inside and the outside of the body. From the perspective of the woman, there is no clear-cut boundary between herself

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26. My account here builds on psychoanalytic insights into the mother-child relation; on some of the descriptions of pregnancy and maternity in the work of Julia Kristeva; on Iris Young's phenomenology of pregnant embodiment; and on my own *a posteriori* reconstructions. See Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini' in Desire in Language (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) and 'Stabat Mater' in Moi (ed.) The Kristeva Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, 9 (1984).

27. The rights-based model has also been criticised on different but related grounds by other feminists. See Janet Farrell Smith, 'Rights-conflict, Pregnancy and Abortion' in Carol Gould (ed.) Beyond Domination (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984).

and the foetus, between her body boundaries and the body boundaries of the foetus. The foetus, to the extent that it is experienced as part of the woman's body, is also experienced as part of her self, but as a part that is also other than herself. On the one hand it is another being, but it is another being growing inside her body, a being whose separateness is not fully realised as such by her. This is the case even with an unwanted pregnancy. The uniqueness and intimacy of this kind of relationship, one where the distinction between self and other is blurred, suggests that the welfare of the foetus, at least early on, is not easily separable from that of the woman. The foetus is not simply an entity extrinsic to her which happens to be developing inside her body and which she desires either to remove or to allow to develop. It is a being, both inseparable from and yet separate to her, both part of and yet soon to be independent from her, whose existence calls into question her own present and future identity.

The changing phenomenology of pregnancy also concurs with the account I have given of foetal status. For it seems to me that one of the main reasons for the experience I have described is that in early pregnancy, although the woman's body is undergoing massive changes, the foetus itself is not physically developed very much at all. The foetus' separateness is thus neither physically well established nor is it felt as such by the woman. What happens as pregnancy continues is that, as the foetus develops physically, a triple process occurs. Firstly, from the perspective of the woman, the foetus becomes more and more physically differentiated from her as her own body boundaries alter. Secondly this gradual physical differentiation (which becomes very pronounced as soon as the foetus starts moving around – perhaps explaining why 'quickening' used to be considered morally significant) is paralleled by and gives rise to a gradual psychic differentiation, in the experience of the woman, between herself and the foetus. In other words, as the foetus' body develops so it seems to

become less and less a part of the woman's body and less and less a part of herself although, as psychoanalysis reminds us, the psychic experiences of unity and differentiation continue to resonate for both mother and child right through infancy and early childhood. Thirdly, physical and psychic differentiation are usually accompanied by an increasing emotional attachment of the woman to the foetus, an attachment which is based both in her physical connection with the foetus and in an anticipation of her future relationship with a separate being who is also intimately related to her.

From the reflective perspective of the woman the foetus thus has a double and ambivalent status. On the one hand, it is experienced as interior to her own subjectivity, and this sense of interiority is grounded in the bodily connection between the woman and the foetus. On the other hand, this experience of interiority and connection is interrupted by an awareness that, if the pregnancy continues, this being which is now a part of her will become a separate being for whose welfare she is morally responsible. But this awareness itself arises in part from the woman's bodily experiences – for example from the changes to her body shape and from feelings of the strangeness of her body to her – which remind her of the other being which is growing within her. I think it is this double character of the foetus' bodily and moral relationship to the woman that explains both why questions of responsibility are central to the experience of pregnancy and why the right of determination of the fate of the foetus is essential for a woman's autonomy.[28]

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28 At this point I would like to respond to an objection which is often made against the view I have proposed here. It could be argued that the woman's experience of the foetus as part of herself and as interior to her subjectivity is simply mistaken. So why should any moral weight be given to this experience? How is it different for example, from the experience of a slave-owner who regards his slaves as a part of himself and thinks that because of this he has a right to determine their fate? My response to this suggestion is that these cases are completely disanalogous, and for two reasons. Firstly, I have argued that a necessary condition for the permissibility of abortion is that the foetus, especially in the early stages of

I think this reflective perspective also explains why it is a mistake to construe bodily autonomy in pregnancy and abortion simply as a matter of preserving the integrity of one's body boundaries. It is this kind of understanding of bodily autonomy which seems to inform the views of Thomson and Warren, at least in her early paper, who construe the right to bodily integrity along the lines of a property-right. The idea seems to be that a woman has a right to preserve the integrity of her body boundaries, and to control what happens in and to her body, in the same way as she has a right to dispose of her property as she sees fit, and that the denial to women of access to abortion might be said to be akin to a system of coverture. I think this idea is quite explicit in such feminist slogans as "Keep <u>your</u> filthy laws off <u>my</u> body" and in some of Thomson's metaphors – for example, the metaphor of the body as a house. Now it seems to me that underlying this view of the body is the mistaken idea that I am the owner of my body and my body parts and that, as their owner, I can dispose of them, use them, or contract them out for use as I see fit. This view of the body often underlies

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pregnancy, has little moral value in and of itself, although it may have a great deal of value for the woman in whose body it develops. This is not a merely arbitrary claim, like the claim of the slave-owner who may think that his slaves have little moral value in and of themselves. Rather it is justified by the fact that the foetus simply does not yet have the capacities which ground the moral worth of persons, and by the fact that the foetus' possible potential for personhood has little significance until those capacities are close to being actualised.

But secondly, this objection ignores what I have been insisting on throughout this chapter, namely that the relationship of the woman to the foetus is morally unique. It is not a relationship of domination and subordination and inhuman ownership, as in the case of the slave-owner. Rather it is a relationship in which one human being grows and develops *inside* the body of another, and in which the moral significance of the foetus is in part bound up with its significance for the woman. The moral particularity of this situation, in other words, is grounded in the nature of the bodily connection between woman and foetus. The woman's sense of the foetus as in some senses a part of herself is thus not arbitrary. It arises, as I have tried to show, from her own reflective bodily perspective and from the kind of moral reflection to which pregnancy gives rise.

Certainly it is possible to think up all kinds of examples in which the relationship between the woman and the foetus might have been different – as in Thomson's examples. But my point is that these examples cannot give us an adequate understanding of the moral complexities of the issues raised by pregnancy and abortion precisely because they overlook the context out of which these complexities arise, namely the bodily and moral connection between the woman and the foetus.

defences of surrogacy but I think it is also evident in Thomson's assumptions about pregnancy. In her argument pregnancy emerges as a kind of contract between the woman and the foetus such that she contracts with it for it to use her body for the required period until it will be able to survive without her. Thus in Thomson's violinist example the idea seems to be that the unwanted foetus is attempting to use a woman's body without her having contracted with it to do so and it is this which makes abortion permissible. A similar kind of presumption seems to be operating in Warren's view that the foetus represents a potential threat to the woman's bodily autonomy up to the moment of birth.

For the remainder of the chapter I want to argue that this conception of bodily autonomy as well as the rights-based model which provides the framework for it, are seriously flawed. My first set of objections to this way of defending abortion is that it misrepresents both the nature of pregnancy and the woman-foetus relationship. As a result it is unable to come to terms with the question of moral responsibility in pregnancy. The second and connected objection is that it justifies the demand for abortion in terms of a right to an evacuated uterus, rather than in terms of a right to autonomy with respect to one's own life. This misrepresents the nature of the abortion decision. These two objections are explained in the next two subsections.

IV.i. Bodily Autonomy, Subjectivity and Responsibility

It seems that underlying the property-contract model of bodily autonomy is a very inert view of pregnancy in which pregnancy is represented as a purely biological process which in some ways just takes over a woman's body and with respect to which women are passive. It is as though, having agreed to the terms of the contract, the woman then simply allows her body to be used by the foetus. But this view of pregnancy blinds us to the fact that

the relationship between the woman and the foetus is a special relationship of a very particular nature. The foetus is not a stranger contracting with the woman for use of her body but another, not yet separate, being growing within her body, a being implicated in her own sense of self and whose very existence places her in a situation of moral responsibility.

However if we take seriously both the issue of responsibility in pregnancy and the kind of reflective bodily perspective that I have argued emerges from the process of pregnancy, then pregnancy seems to defy the making of a sharp distinction between a passive, unconscious, biological process and an active, conscious, rational process. To a large extent the biological processes occurring in a woman's body are beyond her control. Nevertheless, as I have already argued, these processes are always mediated by the cultural meanings of pregnancy, by the woman's personal and social context, and by the way she constitutes herself in response to these factors through the decisions she makes. Thus coming to terms with pregnancy and its implications, taking responsibility of whatever kind for the future of the foetus, are the activities of an autonomous moral agent. Bodily autonomy in pregnancy and abortion thus cannot be construed simply as the right to bodily integrity. Rather it is a question of being able to shape for oneself an integrated bodily perspective, a perspective by means of which a woman can respond to the bodily processes which she experiences in a way with which she identifies, and which is consistent with the decision she makes concerning her future moral relationship with the foetus.

To think that the question of autonomy in abortion is just a question about preserving the integrity of one's body boundaries, and to see the foetus merely as an occupant of the woman's uterus, is thus to divorce women's bodies from their subjectivities. Ironically it comes close to regarding women's bodies simply as foetal containers – the very charge which many feminists have levelled against the 'foetal rights' movement. If however

we see our subjectivities as constituted through the constitution of our bodily perspectives, then my body is no more my property than I myself am my own property. Rather my body is my mode of being-in-the-world. Consequently changes to my body or to my perceptions of my body-image must affect my relation to the world. The experience of pregnant embodiment, that is, the gradual differentiation and development from within her own body of another being which is now a part of herself, thus affects a woman's mode of being-in-the-world both physically and morally and as a consequence, in terms of her sense of self. She is now no longer just herself but herself and another, but this other is not yet separate from herself. It is because of this psychic and bodily connectedness between the woman and the foetus that in pregnancy questions about the fate of the foetus cannot be separated out from the issue of a woman's right to self-determination.

IV.ii. Evacuation and Abortion

If, as I have argued, the early stage foetus is both morally insignificant (in terms of its own intrinsic properties) and its identity and very existence are as yet indistinguishable from that of the woman, it becomes nonsensical to speak of a conflict of rights between them because we cannot talk about the needs and rights of the foetus in abstraction from those of the woman.[29] The idea of such a conflict only makes any sense later in pregnancy where the foetus is physically well developed and differentiated from the woman and where this physical basis now grounds a definite and significant moral value. Combining my earlier discussion of the moral insignificance of the early stage foetus with my claim that the early stage foetus is phenomenologically and psychically experienced by the woman as both part

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29. This does not of course mean that we cannot talk of what is physically harmful or beneficial to the development of the foetus.

and not part of herself thus grounds the moral permissibility of securing its death. At present the foetus is in itself a morally insignificant part of herself but it is a part of herself which, if the pregnancy continues, will become a separate, independent and significant being for whose future existence she will be required to take parental responsibility and to whom she will become increasingly emotionally attached. What the abortion decision involves is a decision that this part of herself should not become a being in relation to whom such questions of parental responsibility and emotional attachment arise. In other words abortion is not a matter of wanting to kill this particular being, which is, after all, as yet indistinguishable from oneself. It is rather a matter of not wanting there to be a future child, so intimately related to oneself, for which one either has to take responsibility or give up to another.

Because property-contract models of bodily autonomy are inattentive to the phenomenological experience of pregnancy and ignore questions of moral responsibility they misrepresent the nature of this decision. For if the demand for abortion is just the demand to control one's own body and use its parts as one sees fit, then abortion cannot involve the right to choose whether or not to bring a child into existence but only the right to evacuate a foetus from one's body. While Thomson and Warren explicitly acknowledge this as an implication of their account of bodily autonomy, they do not defend the position to which they are committed. In her discussion of abortion in Ethics and Human Reproduction however, Christine Overall does attempt to defend this position even though she is explicitly critical of a property-contract view of women's bodies. My argument is that such a position is inconsistent with a concern for women's

autonomy.[30] In what follows I want to develop this argument via a critical analysis of Overall's discussion.

Overall argues that abortion consists of two conceptually and morally distinct events which, though inseparable in current gynaecological practice may yet, with the advancing state of technology, become practicably separable. These are: (1) the evacuation of the foetus from the uterus, and (2) the destruction of the foetus. Overall's argument is that while (1) is morally permissible, (2) is not. In other words, if the foetus could be kept alive in some kind of incubator or were some form of foetal transplant and adoption possible – that is, the evacuation of the foetus from one's woman's uterus and its implantation in the uterus of another – then such procedures, rather than abortion resulting in the death of the foetus, would be morally required.

Overall's argument, which is very similar to a double-effect argument, involves a reconstrual of the alleged rights conflict in abortion. Where the original formulation is a conflict between (a) the foetuses' right to life, and (b) women's right to bodily autonomy, she reconstrues this, in terms of an absence of rights, as a conflict between (c) the pregnant woman (or anyone else, eg. a physician) has no right to kill the embryo/foetus, and (d) the embryo/foetus has no right to occupancy of its mother's (or anyone else's) uterus. Overall's claim is that the right to bodily autonomy reconstrued as (d) does not entail (2). (d) involves a simple taking-over of Thomson's formulation without further argumentation. Overall's main argument in defense of (c) is an appeal to the foetus' potential personhood, but "appeal" is all it is because Overall does not really discuss the criteria for personhood

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30. Anne Donchin has expressed similar worries about the implications of Overall's position. See her review essay 'The Growing Feminist Debate Over the New Reproductive Technologies', Hypatia, *op. cit.*

nor does she explain how we should understand the claim that foetuses are potential persons. What we need to show is why translating (b) into (d) misconstrues the feminist defense of abortion. Overall offers three supposedly analogous cases which are supposed to back up this appeal and to show why the right to bodily autonomy, reconstrued as (d), does not entail a woman's right to demand (2), that is, the destruction of the foetus. The problem with these cases however is that Overall fails to make any moral discriminations between different stages of foetal development. The cases are as follows:

(A) If an aborted foetus lives we have no right to kill it, although we are not morally obliged to keep it alive. Here Overall seems to be appealing to the acts and omissions doctrine which in this context I would reject on paternalistic grounds. If the foetus is likely to die and will presumably suffer more if simply allowed to die (which is pretty certain if we are talking about an abortion prior to 20 weeks), it seems morally preferable that we kill it.

(B) We have no right to kill premature babies in a case, for example, where the mother might have wanted an abortion but was prevented from obtaining one. But if there is no moral difference between a 26 week premature baby and a 26 week in utero foetus, it should be just as morally wrong to kill the foetus as the baby. Overall's argument here appeals to the claim that all foetuses, at whatever stage of development, are morally indistinguishable. I have already argued against this claim and have agreed that the killing of a late term foetus is morally different from killing an early foetus, although I have also indicated that I would not rule it out *a priori*, for example, in cases where it is unlikely it would ever acquire the complex physical basis required for personhood. I would agree though with Overall that <u>were</u> it possible to abort a late term foetus alive, in most cases where the foetus was likely to survive and become a healthy infant the

mother would not have the right to kill it. Having said that I would nevertheless take issue with Overall's claim that there is no moral difference between a 26 week premature baby and a 26 week *in utero* foetus. Her claim assumes that birth has no moral significance. This is an assumption which I have already contested.

(C) At the other end of the process, Overall claims that neither foetus nor embryo are the property of the parents. Thus, she argues, just as parents involved in *in vitro* fertilization programmes should not have the right to demand the destruction of embryos, neither do women have the right to secure the death of the foetus. While I would agree with Overall that neither conceptus nor foetus are the property of its parents, I disagree that it is only on such grounds that we might regard it as their right to determine its fate. I don't want here to tackle the issue of the 'disposal' of *in vitro* fertilization embryos and/or foetal tissue. Suffice it to say here that Overall's argument once again trades on the unargued claim that foetuses at all stages of development have intrinsic moral worth as 'potential' persons.

Overall is aware that her position gives rise to many difficult questions – ought we to save all aborted foetuses? Should we try to adopt them out were that possible? What if foetal adoption caused more suffering for women or for foetuses? She attempts to avoid some of these and to resolve the conflict between conflicting rights (c) and (d) by arguing that they apply to different periods of pregnancy, that is, that while right (d) may be regarded as overriding in early pregnancy (with the result of abortion then being the foreseeable but unintended death of the foetus), right (c) may be regarded as overriding in late pregnancy.

While I agree with Overall that, in most cases, it is morally indefensible to demand the death of a late term foetus, the problem with her argument is

that she offers no reasons as to why this should be the case, nor does she offer an explanation as to why, if, as she thinks, there is no significant difference in moral standing between a conceptus and a late term foetus, the foreseeable consequence of the foetus' death should be any more allowable early in pregnancy than later on. In fact she assumes a basic similarity to all three cases and takes this to show that neither the woman nor anybody else has a right to require the death of either conceptus or an embryo/foetus. As I have shown however, there are a number of reasons why there is a morally significant difference between these cases and it is this difference which makes foetal death in early abortions morally permissible. I conclude then that Overall's defense of abortion as foetal evacuation fails.

More importantly however, Overall's failure to make any significant moral discriminations between these cases renders her "solution" to the conflict between (c) and (d) arbitrary and far too contingent upon what is technologically feasible. For were it to become possible to evacuate an early stage foetus from the uterus of one woman and implant it into the uterus of another or to rear it in an incubator, Overall would be committed to the moral desirability of this procedure. Not only that, she would be committed to arguing that such a procedure, rather than abortion, is morally required. For the reasons outlined in this chapter, it seems to me disturbing that this outcome should seem to follow from a feminist defense of abortion. Apart from oversimplifying the complex issue of foetal status, this position ignores the fact that much more is at stake in the demand for abortion than the misconceived demand to dispose of or use one's own body parts as one sees fit. What is at issue is women's moral autonomy, an autonomy which, because of the specificity of women's embodiment, must include autonomy with respect to the fate of any foetus developing within her body. Because of the connection between the foetus, which is both part and not part of herself, and the woman's moral and bodily subjecthood, to allow the fate of

the foetus to be settled by what is or is not technologically feasible once again removes from women what the availability of abortion helps make possible – the right to autonomous moral agency with respect to one's own life.

V. Conclusion: Metaphors, Experience and Moral Thinking

I want to conclude this chapter with some brief reflections on the methodological implications of the analysis I have given. A survey of the philosophical literature on abortion, including some of the feminist philosophical literature, shows that philosophical thinking on this topic has been dominated by bizarre metaphors and fantastic examples (Warren's fish, Tooley's kittens, Thomson's violinists, people-seeds, houses and so on) and has given rise to abstruse metaphysical speculations about the nature of personal identity (Parfit). These examples and speculations have undoubtedly served to question certain common unreflective prejudices and to highlight the philosophical ramifications and complexities of some of the questions raised by abortion. Unfortunately they have also contributed to the representation of pregnancy as a mere *event* which simply takes over women's lives and with respect to which women are passive. In addition, they have focused philosophical and moral reflection away from the contexts in which deliberations about abortion are usually made and away from the concerns and experiences which motivate those involved in the processes of deliberation. The result of this is that philosophical analyses of abortion often seem beside the point, if not completely irrelevant, to the lives of the countless women who daily not only have to make moral decisions about abortion but more importantly who often face serious risks to their lives in contexts where abortion is not a safe and readily accessible procedure. While I do not pretend to have addressed the social, religious, political and legal obstacles which give rise to this abhorrent situation I do hope to have explained why the morality of

abortion is not simply or even primarily about questions concerning personhood and foetal status but more fundamentally is about women's self-determination. I also hope to have shown, though this example, why an account of autonomy must incorporate a recognition both of the embededness and of the specific bodily perspectives of moral agents.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to show that, within an important strand of our philosophical and cultural heritage, autonomy has come to be defined in opposition to femininity and, as a result, has been presented as an achievement which is difficult for women to attain. My argument has been that this exclusion has been effected both by conceptual structures which locate women's ethical life primarily in the realm of affective relations with particular others, and by symbolic and cultural representations of women's bodies and bodily processes as passive and as resistant to control by the will. I have also tried to show that these representations of 'Woman' do not operate at a merely discursive or symbolic level. Not only are they incorporated into the structures of our social, political and ethical life, but they are also causally efficacious in shaping women's bodily perspectives and experiences, as well as their relations with others. I am aware that a more detailed account than the one I have so far given, of exactly how such symbolic representations can be causally efficacious, could be provided. Nevertheless I hope to have shown that such representations latch on in part through the self-constitution of a person's bodily perspective. This is why resistance to certain representations of women's bodies is so important in underpinning women's claims to the autonomy necessary for them to be regarded as moral agents.

I have also tried to show what is involved in an adequate response to the tensions between our ideals of femininity and of autonomy. On this issue my argument has been that feminists must neither reject the ideal of autonomy, nor simply attempt uncritically to appropriate existing ideals for women. I have also argued that while a feminist perspective reveals the inadequacies with some of our philosophical and cultural ideals of autonomy, the aim of a feminist critique should not be to articulate a sexually specific ethic for women. Rather what is required is a re-shaping of

the ideal of autonomy in general, so that autonomy becomes not merely an individual but also an intersubjective achievement, and one which also affords due weight to the recognition of the ethical significance of a person's bodily perspective. For it is only through such a recognition that we can understand what it is for women to exercise autonomy in circumstances which are specific to women, such as pregnancy and abortion. In my discussion of the kind of autonomy that is exercised in abortion decisions I hope to have shown what might be the ethical implications of such a recognition. Once again I am aware that there is scope for a more detailed elaboration of the suggestions I have made, as well as for an investigation of what their implications might be for a host of other issues – ranging from surrogate motherhood and *in vitro* fertilization technology through to prostitution and pornography. However what I hope my discussion has shown is that in any such investigation we must recognise that moral agents are not abstract persons who happen to be embodied in this or that kind of body. The complexion of a moral problem depends crucially on the context out of which it arises and on the particular bodily perspectives of the agents involved.

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