

Re-reading Political Theory from a Woman's Perspective

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When the contemporary wave of feminism swelled in the early 1970s, it was one of the avowed tasks of the movement to retrieve for women their own historical and cultural heritage. Turning to the history of political thought, feminists discovered that there was a tradition of women's political writing dating from at least the late 17th century whose concern was with social and gender relations. Many such thinkers have been subsequently unearthed and it has indeed been possible to publish large tomes on their work.¹ A few of these women, like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), were already well known although rarely taught. Others, such as Harriet Taylor, were often referred to because of their 'influence' on the males with whom they were associated, although little effort was made to distinguish their actual contribution. Many writings by women had been simply suppressed and marginalized, but there are also obvious sociological reasons why the majority of their sex had been simply excluded from the genre of political writing. Feminists were thus able to retrieve some visibility for women and to rediscover some of the 'founding mothers' of their own movement although the latter had, it seemed, made little impact on the tradition itself. For these early women writers had relied on pre-existing theoretical frameworks—liberal, utilitarian, socialist—and sought only their more consistent application to women, whilst accepting the basic assumptions of those frameworks, such as the distinction between private and public and the sexual division of labour.

If the history of political thought has not been especially fertile ground for the retrieval of a feminine culture, however, feminists have discovered that the men who authored the tradition actually had a great deal to say about women and the family. It is only their exegetes who have ceased to pay attention to such topics.² Now, while such subjects are of course treated within a masculine perspective, they are not irrelevant to feminists, since political thought has itself played a key role in justifying women's subordination and public invisibility. Politics has been consistently presented as a male preserve³ and reasons

¹ See for example, Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas (and what men have done to them): from Aphra Benn to Adrienne Rich* (London, Ark Paperbacks, 1982).

² Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 11.

³ Simone de Beauvoir argues that powers ascribed to women have always been outside of the human realm, to which they have been described as 'other'. 'Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men. Public or simply social authority always belongs to men, declares Levi-Strauss at the end of his study of primitive societies.' *The Second Sex* (translated by H. M. Parshley) (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), p. 102.

have been offered for women's exclusion, ranging from their incapacity for politics (they lack reason, autonomy, stamina, time etc.) to their 'natural' duties as wives and mothers. These latter duties have nevertheless been viewed as ripe with political implications, since it is women who reproduce and socialize the new (male) citizens and who according to some thinkers, are the guardians of virtue. The significance of women's indirect contributions to the polity has therefore been acknowledged (and appropriate character traits prescribed) whilst their direct participation in public affairs has been explicitly presented as undesirable, even impossible. By examining the seminal political texts, women can therefore discover explanations for their relatively powerless position in society.

In disclosing deeply-rooted beliefs about women, feminists have therefore been forced into an ambivalent attitude towards the political tradition. On the one hand they have looked for women's contributions to it and have found there a feminist heritage as well as the basic building blocks of their own theory. But on the other hand, they have discovered in political thought an ideological process that has articulated and perpetuated arguments and prejudices espousing their own subordination. The latter realization suggests that feminists might well be advised to abandon a tradition so thoroughly imbued with patriarchal assumptions and begin again. Such has indeed been the impulse of Radical Feminists like Mary Daly,⁴ although at the price of becoming apolitical. Most feminists have recognized that despite—or because of—its biases, political thought cannot be simply abandoned. This is for two main reasons.

Firstly, the concepts used by women to demand their liberation, indeed the term liberation itself, are ones whose meaning has evolved within traditional political discourse. Freedom, equality, justice, consent, emancipation, solidarity, power, oppression etc., are all terms whose significance lies embedded in centuries of theorizing about politics and the Good Life. It is difficult to imagine any theory concerned with social change that would not make use of these terms, even if it stretches their application and enriches them with additional meaning. Because the women's movement challenges crucial aspects of mainstream politics like hierarchical and bureaucratic organization, as well as obscure theorizing that must remain inaccessible to all but an élite, this does not mean that it can dispense with a whole political vocabulary. Many feminists have also found some of the traditional methodologies useful, notably that of Marxism whose historical, materialist and dialectical approach has been quite self-consciously appropriated even by Radical Feminists like Firestone, who give priority to sex, rather than class, oppression.⁵ More recent developments in Marxism, such as the Althusserian stress on the relative autonomy of ideology, have made it even more attractive as a means of analysing women's oppression. Other examples abound of feminist uses of pre-existing theoretical structures—such as Simone de Beauvoir's application of Sartrean Existentialism.

⁴ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London, The Women's Press, 1979), p. xiii.

⁵ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* (London, The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 11–15.

Secondly, political theory cannot be divorced from the institutions that manifest the power of which it speaks and which it legitimizes or criticizes. Insofar as feminists challenge these institutions, they must also therefore challenge and understand the theoretical assumptions on which they rest. As Okin says:

It is important to realise from the outset that the analysis and criticism of the thoughts of political theorists of the past is not an arcane academic pursuit, but an important means of comprehending and laying bare the assumptions behind deeply rooted modes of thought that continue to affect people's lives in major ways.⁶

Thus feminists have both a positive relation to mainstream ('Male-Stream') political thought insofar as they use it to make their own demands and a negative one in that they must extrapolate and criticize the gender bias that finds expression in both the tradition and the institutions that embody it. For political thought in the latter capacity emerges as a major ideological source of women's subordination and by discovering the premises on which it rests, feminists can gain a better understanding of the depths to which their assault on sexual divisions within society must reach.

It seems obvious, however, that political theory also stands to gain from being interpreted from this additional perspective. Indeed, to the extent that a whole dimension, which major thinkers from Plato to J. S. Mill saw as crucial to their political thought, has been given cursory or separate treatment, it actually corrects a distortion in conventional scholarship. A focus on accounts of women and the family reveals continuities and fills in gaps, although more often the contribution of such re-readings is a disclosure of inconsistencies which can be related to assumptions and contradictions at the heart of a doctrine. Above all though, the renewed interest in the history of political thought that is inspired by new movements and problematics, demonstrates the extent to which it is a living tradition, open to further development and a plurality of perspectives. In criticizing it, we penetrate it more deeply and strive to overcome its flaws and particularity. Indeed in the case of the women's movement, our very conception of the political has been considerably broadened. Feminist theory itself develops certain possibilities only latent in the tradition; it shares with it a concern with the conditions for the Good Life and thus participates in the broader project of theorizing, the ultimate concern of which lies in the free development of all persons. As Hester Eisenstein wrote recently:

In my understanding of the term 'feminist', then, I see an element of visionary, futurist thought. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that, as part of the eventual liberation of women, will change all human relationships for the better. Although centrally about women, their experience, condition, or 'estate'..., feminism is therefore also fundamentally about men, and about social change.⁸

⁶ Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (London, Virago, 1980), p. 3

⁷ O'Brien's term in *Politics of Reproduction*.

⁸ Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. xiv.

Thus feminism not only contributes to our understanding of past political thinkers, but itself participates in the unfolding of political ideas towards the future.

This contribution towards our understanding of the past nevertheless raises questions of interpretation. An apparent criticism of feminist critiques of classic works is that the latter were written in centuries when women's inferiority and lack of a public persona were taken for granted. It would have occurred to neither audience nor author that it could be otherwise, and so of course women were treated thus and their exclusion from politics was in no need of articulation. Even if a thinker had the imagination to believe otherwise, it is hardly likely that he would have invited public derision by making so audacious a suggestion (after all, it was predominantly men who read these texts and pamphlets).

Nevertheless, such claims cannot be sustained. Assumptions within our political legacy cannot be taken for granted just because of their historical nature. As far as liberalism is concerned, for example, market relations first appeared in a society where there was rough economic equality between the sexes⁹ and this could have provided the basis in the 17th century for a theory of sexual equality. Instead, liberal theorists actually proffered new justifications for women's exclusion from political and economic life. These justifications in turn reinforced women's poor economic opportunities by legitimizing and advocating their dependence on male breadwinners. Their relative status worsened considerably as capitalism became established, but there was no initial political or economic reason why women's case could not have been espoused alongside that of men, once modernity had undermined ideas of a natural order of divine sanction. After all, liberal claims were revolutionary in the 17th century and their exponents had not been shy in attacking the natural authority of fathers and rulers. We need to ask then, why beliefs about women's subordinate status were so widespread as to often demand no articulation, and at least part of the answer lies in the political tradition itself. This is one reason why a re-reading must go back at least to the Greeks, for misogynist themes have abounded since the earliest stages of political thought and more recent works often but reiterate ancient arguments. As Okin points out: 'Giant figures in modern sociology and psychology present arguments about women that parallel those of Aristotle and Rousseau.'¹⁰ Until we have exorcized the foundations of these (naturalist and functionalist) arguments, they will simply keep reappearing in new guises. What we need to document, then, is a phenomenology of gender construction within political philosophy, to see how certain meanings associated with the masculine and feminine have evolved there. We also need a dialectical approach that tries to distinguish between relatively 'neutral' concepts of use to feminists and those that are too heavily imbued with generic ideology. This is well illustrated by Mary O'Brien in the introduction to her *Politics of Reproduction*:

⁹ See Christopher Middleton, 'The Sexual Division of Labour in Feudal England', *New Left Review*, 114 (1979); also Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

¹⁰ Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, p. 11 and p. xiv.

We do not say that the tradition must be rejected in a wholesale way. Indeed, we argue that most of it is part of a heritage of human achievement of which the race can quite properly be proud. What we do, therefore, is work in a dialectical way. We seek to uncover contradictions in traditional thought: to root these contradictions in the realities of male experience; to point out that they have been valid in specific historical circumstances; to say why they are no longer valid; to conserve what is valuable and to transcend what is not; to create something new which is none the less continuous with history and creative of a future.¹¹

Criteria of neutrality are themselves however a matter of perception. Broadly speaking, the balance between ideology and neutrality has been shifted in favour of the former as the women's movement has become increasingly aware of the multiplicity of levels of discrimination. Thus early liberal feminists found no *theoretical* difficulties in discerning problems and solutions; they believed liberal ideas generally adequate for this and sought only their consistent application such that women would be conceived like men as human (rational), rather than merely sexual, beings. Early socialists also believed that their ideas were gender neutral and that men and women would be equally emancipated once State and Family withered away with the elimination of their mutual *raison d'être* in private property and with the equal contribution of both sexes to social production. Again, while there might be omissions here and there, the analysis itself was sound. But as feminist theory has evolved, so has the perspective from which this re-reading is undertaken. The tradition must be penetrated ever more profoundly in order to disclose gender bias in the most radical fashion. It seems reasonable to anticipate that the further a reading moves in this direction, the less it will be integrated with other readings in political thought and the more it will make a more autonomous contribution in the fields of women's studies and feminist theory. It should also be evident that women's interest in traditional political thought is motivated by practical concerns in the present. The second part of this paper considers some of the woman-centred interpretations in order to discern the levels on which political theory has been examined from this perspective.

II

Over the last decade, major political theorists have been subjected to a reading from a woman's perspective. Several book-length studies have appeared, notably Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* (1980), Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981) and Martha Lee Osborne's more philosophical *Women in Western Thought* (1979). Quite a large number of articles have also been published, although these remain scattered across a variety of journals and by no means confined to those with a specific interest in political theory. The majority of works nonetheless fit well into conventional scholarship within the discipline and may be readily integrated into it. Their authors have been largely, though not exclusively, women academics who have also identified themselves as feminists.

¹¹ O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, p. 13.

At its most superficial, a feminist treatment of traditional political thought might simply write off the tradition because its authors are men who expressed more or less explicitly misogynist views, or it might content itself with cataloguing what traditional thinkers said about women and let the words speak for themselves. Fortunately, such cavalier approaches are uncommon, although Elshtain felt compelled to complain in 1981 that 'we now possess so many anthologies containing the sexist utterings of men through the ages that we have enough to keep us angry and miserable for years to come'.¹² To condemn the tradition simply on the basis of personal sexist prejudices clearly does not get us very far. To list what the tradition has said about women has more value, but must miss precisely the unstated assumptions and implications that animate and give sense to those statements. Particular themes relating to women's presentation in political thought are certainly important: for example we must ask what the tradition says about women's rôle in the family, or in civil society, or in the party; what claims it makes regarding their 'natural' or 'biological' or 'rational' capacities. But such questions invite us to place statements relevant to women within the broader context of a thinker's work and also lead us to appreciate what is *not* said, as well as what is. Rousseau's prescriptions for Sophie, for example, make no sense without an appreciation of the rôle he saw for domestic values within the polity or of the value he ascribed to the natural. Equally, the paucity of references to women in Marx's writing have led some feminists to question whether this might not be ultimately attributed to his lack of interest in, or appreciation of, women's problems, rather than to simple confidence in the gender-neutrality of socialist benefits.

Once we move to a more integrated analysis of women's treatment within the tradition, some shifts in focus are at once apparent. Texts different from those usually emphasized take on a renewed significance. For instance, Locke's *First Treatise*, in which he attacks Patriarchal Theory, now becomes as important as the *Second*, in which his alternative consent theory is sketched. Rousseau's *Emile*, with its moral education for the male and female, as well as the less read *Lettre D'Alembert* and the novel *La Nouvelle Heloise*, become at least as significant as the *Social Contract*. Similarly, J. S. Mill's *Subjection of Women* and Engels's *Origin of the Family* take on a new importance, due to their subject matter and because of the light this casts on other aspects of their authors' thought.

History of political thought courses that look at the canon tend to focus on a similar list of 'greats'. This obscures the fact that the list is subject to a certain amount of fashion which is in turn guided by contemporary interests. Since today we live in a capitalist, liberal, democracy with limited socialist compromises, it is not gratuitous that we should concentrate on those who are deemed to be 'founding fathers' of these traditions. But once we see that we also live in a patriarchal state and our interests shift to women's place in society, some different thinkers gain in importance. Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna

¹² Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1981) p. xv. Juliet Mitchell, writing of Freud in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974), gives us a good example equivalent to the first approach when she condemns those who would write off psychoanalysis by seeing it as but the product of 'a small-minded "Victorian" patriarch confronted by incredible numbers of sex-starved women . . .' (p. xx).

Wheeler and William Thompson, Harriet Taylor, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, August Bebel and Alexandra Kollontai, become as important as Rousseau, James and J. S. Mill, Marx and Lenin. New themes also demand our attention: education, marriage, the family, reproduction, the sexual division of labour.

The remainder of the paper looks in more detail at a few of the recent readings from a woman's perspective, beginning with a number of articles that concentrate on the inconsistencies which it has introduced into our usual interpretations. This is followed by a brief discussion of interpretations that, on the contrary, claim a new level of consistency and rigour to appear once the rôle of women and the family are recognized as essential components of a theory. Finally, the article considers two recent works that attempt a more profound penetration into the attitudes underlying the political tradition as such, which associate the political and theoretical worlds themselves with masculinity.

One of the most common approaches to a woman-centred analysis of political texts has been to reveal inconsistencies the perspective shows up. This aspect of the enterprise in many ways resembles C. B. Macpherson's work in the 1950s and 1960s,¹³ and indeed several critics, although concerned with gender rather than class, cite Macpherson in a way that suggests they are aware of the parallel.¹⁴

Macpherson began with a recognition of the theoretical inadequacy of 17th-century liberal principles for the 20th-century state. Those principles are still used as a foundation, but Macpherson believed that they needed repair. He located their inadequacy in a definition of the individual as proprietor of his person and capacities, owing nothing to society for them. Not only did he find this notion of possessive individualism intrinsically problematic, but he also claimed that it had remained an *implicit* assumption accepted as universally valid and thus unsubjected to criticism. 'The social assumptions whose importance in 17th-century political theory I have sought to establish have not generally been clearly identified and, therefore, I believe, have not generally been given sufficient weight.'¹⁵ By eliciting these assumptions, Macpherson hoped to show that they were only of historical, hence relative, validity, and that it was this limitation that underlay liberalism's contemporary inadequacy. He therefore saw himself contributing to social change via a re-reading of traditional theories. He surmised the reasons for the originally unstated nature of their assumptions, as being either their remaining common enough to be taken for granted, or their authors being unclearly aware of them. What he offered, in order to elicit them, was a historical interpretation; one 'not concerned with motives' but with the 'probable content' of assumptions that could be gleaned by looking at a thinker in his socioeconomic context, in order to discern the model of society that would have constituted his horizons and

¹³ C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁴ For example, Theresa Brennan and Carole Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth: Women and the Origins of Liberalism', *Political Studies*, 27 (1979), p. 195 and Christine Di Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology in Political Theory: Hobbesian Man Considered', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6: 6 (1983), p. 634.

¹⁵ Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, p. 4.

hence assumptions.¹⁶ The virtue of such an approach was that while it disclosed inconsistencies within liberal theory in general, it simultaneously revealed a broader level of consistency within the work of individual theorists.

It should be obvious why Macpherson's approach finds an analogue in the more recent women-centred interpretations and I have outlined it both as an illustration of this type of approach and because we can see, with hindsight, how radical re-interpretation can be integrated alongside previous readings, which they also challenge, to enrich our studies. As in Macpherson's case of excluded classes, feminists since Mary Wollstonecraft have found inconsistencies between the universal claims made by liberalism and its particular application to women. More recently feminists have been aware, like Macpherson, of the link between problems in modern democracies and the principles on which they rest. They, too, have therefore penetrated the older texts in order to elucidate unspoken and taken-for-granted presuppositions, only now pertaining to women.¹⁷ An obvious overlap occurs precisely because women's lack of status rested on their *not* being defined as possessive individuals with proprietorship of their person and capacities. However, while Macpherson's interest in the 17th century was reinforced by his association of it with the rise of capitalism and of a working class whose status he saw as one of the major contemporary problems bequeathed by the tradition, women's oppression has clearly been of much greater duration (if only because women themselves have existed for a lot longer than the proletariat and required no economic shifts for their appearance). It has therefore been necessary, from their perspective, to subject much earlier phases of the tradition to this sort of analysis even though the liberal phase remains privileged as our most potent legacy and as the location of the most glaring inconsistencies *vis-à-vis* women. But because women's subordination has been so near universal (even if exhibiting a variety of forms), it has been more of a challenge to demonstrate its historical relativity and unnatural foundations. These foundations, moreover, appear to lie less in specific modes of production than in profound mythical and cultural beliefs. This has made it more difficult to elicit a context that can explain the specificity of assumptions and has forced studies concerned with gender into a far more penetrating interrogation than class readings required. If much recent woman-centred interpretation has been analogous to Macpherson's approach, then, we might perhaps see more radical readings as more akin to Marx's treatment of political economy in the *1844 Manuscripts*. For here Marx turned the discipline upside down to transform it by rewriting it from the perspective of the proletariat rather than simply asking what position was ascribed to the workers by classical economists.

Let us begin, however, with some of the more modest attempts at a feminist reading which do utilize a methodology similar to Macpherson's. Revelations

¹⁶ Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁷ See, for example, Jean Bethke Elshtain's account of her approach in *Public Man, Private Woman*, p. xiv: 'I begin, then, with the resources of ordinary language and move toward critique by unpacking latent meanings, nuances, and shades of interpretation others may have missed or ignored. In rethinking unreflectively held notions and concepts, our ability to sift out the more from the less important is enhanced. Slowly, as we begin to articulate more coherently an awareness of the connections between diverse activities, reasons and passions, our self-identities as active, meaning-bearing, and meaning-creating agents is enhanced.'

of inconsistency related to gender arise especially clearly out of liberal theories, since it is these which speak of universality and must therefore smuggle in conflicting criteria if women's subordination (like that of the labouring classes) is to be sustained. The inconsistent *application* of concepts like justice and equality which pertain to 'the rights of man' has long been evident (Mitchell quotes Mary Astell's impassioned question of 1700: 'If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?'¹⁸), but does not point to any chronic breakdown in the logic of liberal doctrine itself. What is more serious is the recognition of an internal hiatus within liberal thought which renders its principles inadequate for a sexually egalitarian society.

Recent articles have confronted this hiatus as it affects a number of concepts central to the liberal litany. Thus Mitchell, in her 'Women and Equality', looks at the uneven use of notions of freedom and equality. She adds to the familiar Marxist criticism that legal equalities do nothing to ameliorate economic inequalities the feminist one that freedom from arbitrary power in the state was not extended to challenge the arbitrary power of men in the family, even though the logic of liberal principles would seem to demand it. The main thrust of her essay nevertheless lies in the contradictions between the experienced oppression of women and the ideology of liberty and equality espoused.

Okin, as well as Brennan and Pateman, offers more insight into how such inconsistencies are sustained when they are found concealed within the doctrine itself by thinkers who speak of male-headed families rather than individuals.¹⁹ This introduces a conflict into an ostensible atomic individualism. Thus Hobbes claims that authority between such individuals must be always conventional, yet he never shows the women who began on an equal footing with men in a state of nature consenting to their subordination in either family or state, despite the former's being patriarchal and the latter absolute. Women simply disappear from the argument and must do so because of a contradiction between Hobbes's logic and his assumptions:

The problem that leads to all this inconsistency arises from the fact that Hobbes was not prepared to decide the issue of the equality of the sexes one way or the other. If the basis of his individualism was to be firm, he needed to argue that individual women were equal with individual men, just as weaker men were with stronger ones. His assumptions about the necessity for male dominance in both the family and society at large however, made him unable to let his argument proceed to its logical conclusions.²⁰

Brennan and Pateman claim that this inconsistency has gone unnoticed because assumptions that women have good reason to submit to (stronger, wiser and so on) male authority are embedded in 300 years of liberal theory. Indeed, it is the assumption that individual freedom refers to males who, nevertheless, have natural authority over their wives, that is at the root of much liberal inconsistency. Thus James Mill's model of conflicting self-interested actors is belied by the harmony he must assume in the family when he argues that

¹⁸ Juliet Mitchell, 'Women and Equality', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), p. 387.

¹⁹ Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, pp. 10, 199, 202; Brennan and Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries', pp. 185, 195.

²⁰ Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, p. 199.

women's interests can be represented by husbands and fathers, in order to deny them suffrage. Sheila Rowbotham shows this to be a historical disjunction: the family remains founded on feudal-type relationships (women have something in common with both slaves and peasants) in conflict with the 'sex-blind' contractual bases of capitalism, such that women who inhabit both the familial and the social productive spheres must continually live this contradiction.

Patriarchal authority is based on male control over the woman's productive capacity, and over her person. This control existed before the development of capitalist commodity production. It belonged to a society in which the persons of human beings were owned by others. Patriarchy, however, is contradicted by the dominant mode of production in capitalism because in capitalism the owner of capital owns and controls the labour power but not the persons of his labourers.²¹

The demonstration of liberal inconsistencies and their effects on contemporary gender relations, is taken further in articles by Brennan and Pateman²² and Pateman.²³ Both focus on the notion of consent. In their 'Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth', Brennan and Pateman claim that women, and especially married women, are a permanent problem for liberal theory: 'liberal theorists still have to confront, and answer, a very embarrassing question, namely, why it is that a free and equal female individual should always be assumed to place herself under the authority of a free and equal male individual'.²⁴ The solution liberalism offers only perpetuates this problem, since it represents a compromise between consent theory and the very patriarchalism this was designed to challenge. For while that challenge was mounted against fathers' authority over adult sons and hence against natural authority in the state, such natural authority was presumed to endure when it came to relations between husband and wife. Thus Locke may have spoken of marriage itself in contractual terms, but once married, he assumed that the wife would submit to the husband who was the 'abler and stronger' of the two.²⁵ He also gave fathers alone the right to bequeath property to their children²⁶ and,

²¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p. 117.

²² Brennan and Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries'.

²³ Carole Pateman, 'Women and Consent', *Political Theory* (May 1980).

²⁴ Brennan and Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries', p. 183.

²⁵ P. Laslett (ed.), *John Locke, Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960), II § 82.

²⁶ Laslett (ed.) *John Locke, Two Treatises*, II § 116. G. Scholet, in his *Patriarchalism and Political Thought* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1975) goes on to argue that this accommodation to paternal bequeathment will tend to give the father influence over his children's later political choices, thus overcoming the constraints placed by liberalism on patriarchal authority even in the political realm. If this does indeed follow, then Locke's treatment of the family with its paternal power, must undermine even his seemingly more consistent claims about political consent.

Certainly, Locke begins by speaking of parental power in the family, based on a common duty acquired in the joint begetting of children (II § 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 66, 70, 78), but he then lapses into referring only to paternal power (II § 65, 72, 82, 116). For other assessments of Locke's rather inconsistent views on women, see Linda Clarke, 'Women and Locke: Who Owns the Apples in the Garden of Eden?', in L. Clarke and L. Lange (eds), *The Sexism of Social and Political Thought* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1979); Melissa Butler, 'Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and The Critique of Patriarchy', *American Political Science Review*, 72 (1978); John Charvet, *Feminism* (London, Dent, 1982).

these authors claim, used a man's status as head of his family as the criterion for the rationality that was seen as a prerequisite for political participation.²⁷

This aspect of patriarchalism is generally ignored, although the status of wives and mothers within the family remains an unsolved problem at the heart of liberal theory. Contemporary theorists conspicuously fail to address themselves to the question of how a husband's authority over a wife is to be justified without giving up some basic principles of liberal theory.²⁸

Brennan and Pateman conclude that this unwarranted claim for a natural status division between sexes continues to haunt the liberal tradition and this, together with women's economic dependence on husbands—foisted upon them by capitalism—explains why they are still seen as less capable of a political life despite civic equality with men. In other words, the inconsistencies that jingle within 17th-century liberalism arise from enduring pre-liberal beliefs and continue three centuries later when formal equalities are belied by deeply-rooted patriarchal assumptions about women's natural inferiority and lack of autonomy.

Pateman gives us a more detailed illustration of the legacies of liberal inconsistencies in her 'Women and Consent', where she relates the question of consent to current laws governing rape. She argues that, despite its centrality as a concept, consent has received little development since Locke's espousal of tacit consent—and thus it continues to bear his patriarchal assumptions. This is of daily significance since consent applies to questions of sex and marriage as well as to those of the state's legitimacy. Beyond the marriage contract with its naturalistic imperatives, Locke did not give women the status of consenting individuals. This status was reinforced by Rousseau, who despite his emphasis on a General Will and appeal to originally free and equal individuals, again excluded women, now on grounds of their natural allegiance to particularity. Terrified that their sexual nature would destroy civic virtue, he advised their confinement in the home. But even here, as Pateman points out, he found them incapable of giving or refusing consent. Because he gave to women the rôle of restraining men's passion through a 'natural' modesty (more reliable than men's own reason), they could never be too forthright even when they acquiesced. 'The lips always say "No"', and rightly so', Rousseau writes in *Emile*, 'but the tone is not always the same, and that cannot lie'.²⁹ He leaves it to men's discretion to interpret what must always be an ambiguous response, but in so doing, makes it difficult to see how women might express withdrawal of consent. Pateman argues that this problem persists in cases of rape. Although penetration without consent is seen as a crime (though this is not necessarily true within marriage), the question of whether or not a woman tacitly consented is often interpreted very loosely and in Rousseauian manner. Such problems arise for women in daily life because of the ambiguous status accorded them by liberal theory, Pateman claims. Political theory does not however open up this dilemma because its male exponents assume the

²⁷ Brennan and Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries', p. 195.

²⁸ Brennan and Pateman, 'Mere Auxiliaries', p. 185.

²⁹ J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* (London, Everyman, 1911), p. 348; also quoted by Pateman, 'Women and Consent'.

individuals of whom they write are men, whose proper sphere is political life.

Pateman is thus able to offer a clear example of the way in which feminists can discern inconsistencies in the treatment of women by political thinkers, which continue to undermine their apparently equal status today. Consent theory, like liberalism in general, is shown to be riven with internal contradictions still embodied in social practices. Pateman thus goes beyond Mitchell's demonstration of the inconsistent application of liberal principles, by showing that universal rights are not just not applied to women by default, but actively exclude them due to a retention of naturalistic assumptions which underlay the thought of an earlier age and were never challenged by liberalism.

A further approach to political thought integrates women-related themes rather than showing up inconsistencies. While women may disappear from arguments and patriarchal assumptions might conflict with liberal claims, it is also the case that attention to themes dealing with women and their rôle in the family can often shed light on an entire theory. Indeed, a crucial rôle in the reproduction of good citizens has been frequently ascribed to the family, as a critical link in the transition from a corrupt to a moral civic culture. If the nature of this link is ignored, then theorists appear to be caught in a vicious circle when they come to explain how selfish individuals are to become genuine members of a community. It is in the family, the socializing agent *par excellence*, that this cycle is to be broken. Such is the case for both Rousseau and J. S. Mill.

Mary O'Brien offers us an example of this integrating approach in her condensed account of Rousseau's thought.³⁰ Here she conveys the immense significance that Sophie's rôle holds for his entire political theory. Sophie appears in *Emile* and it is this work that allows Rousseau to explain how the corrupted citizens of the *Second Discourse* are to be transformed into those moral beings who participate in the General Will in the *Social Contract*. Emile receives moral education that befits him for the latter realm but he is also, O'Brien explains, 'a progenitor, whose reproductive activities are to reproduce a stock of citizens, as opposed to the ordinary but extraordinarily decadent people. . . .'³¹ The citizen sons, whom Emile and his wife Sophie produce, will be able to advance toward the natural society because the 'grossness' of civil society will have been modified for them by the 'decent values of domestic life'.

Despite Rousseau's misogynist account of Sophie, it is an account, O'Brien argues, that is crucial to his vision of the good society and it shows the centrality of reproduction to political considerations.

Much misunderstanding of the social operation of the general and particular wills can be avoided once it is grasped that Rousseau, *prior* to the foundation of his rational contractual society, has already made arrangements for the defusing of the irrational propensities of particular wills. The potency principle is shut up in the private realm willingly and perpetually guarded by Sophie.³²

Without the functions attributed by Rousseau to marriage, women and the

³⁰ O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, pp. 94–7.

³¹ O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, p. 95.

³² O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, p. 95.

family, the transition to a just society becomes incomprehensible. 'Marriage purifies the passions of particularity, thus making the private realm purely ethical and the source for a more humane citizen body, which can then express the general will in the public realm.'³³ Concomitantly, Rousseau wants to see those virtues that are usually consigned to a private domestic realm—love, affection, solidarity, sympathy—integrated into public life (a synthesis similarly described in Hegel's *Ethical Life*). While Rousseau is rightly chastised for excluding women from the rational humanity that would be self-governing—an inconsistency already recognized by Wollstonecraft in her 1792 *Vindication*—it is also true that his work becomes comprehensible only when we grasp the significance of the rôle he ascribed to women. And if that rôle was to have a reactionary influence on perceptions of women's nature for a long time to come, we can still see in its expression an effort by Rousseau to move beyond the sterile private—public, nature—morality dichotomies.

Continuity is similarly enhanced if we integrate J. S. Mill's *Subjection of Women* into his other writings. Mill himself is clear that he does not see the cause of women's enfranchisement as a peripheral quest and some of the arguments he offers for women's emancipation rest on broader appeals to public utility than women's advantage alone requires. For, like Rousseau, Mill aspires to a participant democracy of self-determining individuals, whose moral and intellectual strength allows them to transcend narrow material interests. In equipping people for life in such a culture, he again places great store on the correct ethos of family life, both to socialize virtuous citizens and in its own right:

Citizenship, in free countries, is partly a school of society in equality, but citizenship fills only a small place in modern life, and does not come near the daily habits in most sentiments. The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom... What is needed is, love... The moral training of mankind will never be adapted to the conditions of the life for which all other human progress is a preparation, until they practice in the family the same moral rôle which is adapted to the normal constitution of human society.³⁴

Only when men and women are equal in marriage, will they and their children be schooled in the moral rather than despotic sentiments requisite to a liberal polity. Mill argues, indeed, that the 19th-century relation between men and women is the source of all 'the selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference, which exist among mankind'.³⁵ To concentrate on essays like 'On Liberty' and to see the *Subjection* as a marginal text without import for the rest of Mill's work is therefore to miss the locus of change on which Mill put such great store. As Krouse rightly says, Mill recognized that democratic association would need to pervade all levels of life and it is the family that provides him with a 'political sociology of everyday life'.³⁶ Of course Mill must

³³ O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, p. 95.

³⁴ J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London, Everyman, 1929) pp. 260–1.

³⁵ Mill, *Subjection*, p. 296. Mill possibly got such a notion of marriage from Robert Owen, who expressed a similar opinion and whose views on such matters impressed Mill.

³⁶ Richard Krouse, 'Patriarchal Liberalism and Beyond', in J. B. Elshtain (ed.), *The Family in Political Thought* (Brighton, Harvester, 1982) p. 170.

be criticized for the limits of his vision concerning domestic arrangements (he approves of the 19th-century sexual division of labour for all but a minority of talented women). But he does recognize the importance of those domestic arrangements to public well-being. They are by no means irrelevant to politics.

Any reading of the western political tradition must, because of the latter's richness and diversity, concentrate on some themes rather than others. To some extent the criterion for selection will reside in contemporary interests and this is clearly the case with feminist interpretations. However, it now appears that themes relating to women and the family are often vital to a theory's inner logic. The way these realms have been treated is generally unacceptable, but their significance to the public realm is indubitable. Indeed, recent books like Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman* are able to use a theme of crucial importance to women, the public-private dimension, to elucidate and to give a meaning to, the entire tradition. Elshtain uses her particular gender-related dichotomy 'as a conceptual prism through which to see the story of women and politics from Plato to the present'.³⁷ In a subsequent work her focus is on the family and she speaks of an 'imaginative and critical reordering of that tradition (of Western political thought) as a way of informing and instructing the present'.³⁸ Mary O'Brien, in *The Politics of Reproduction*, looks at the tradition from the perspective of what its exponents have said about reproduction, acknowledging the one-sidedness of this approach but justifying it as a 'corrective bias' that will allow the extrapolation of conceptual and analytic tools needed to reform the tradition. She promises thereby, 'new and illuminating reappraisals' of male-stream thought.³⁹ O'Brien's and Elshtain's work thus moves toward a more radical re-reading of the tradition since it aims to shift our whole way of looking at it, rather than offering an internal critique of conventional themes or a supplement by additional ones.

As feminist theory has progressed, its exponents have been continually forced to recognize more profound levels on which gender distinctions are drawn to women's advantage. So insidious are these distinctions that women unwittingly collude in their own degradation. A bias in favour of things masculine cannot then be easily extrapolated since beneath sexist claims and assumptions still more primordial and subterranean processes are at work. Psychoanalysis in particular has been coopted by feminists as a means for explaining this collusion by way of the unconscious determinations and symbolism of gender. This has affected the way in which 'mainstream' political thought has been looked at, further eroding its own claims to theoretical and conceptual neutrality.

For if the whole tradition of political philosophy is haunted by equations between the feminine and the inferior, a much more radical re-reading and repairing is required than those interpretations discussed so far. In this context two recent studies will be discussed. The first is an article by Christine Di

³⁷ Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, p. xiv.

³⁸ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *The Family in Political Thought*, p. 4.

³⁹ O'Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, p. 12.

Stephano.⁴⁰ The second is a short book by Genevieve Lloyd.⁴¹ Stephano uses a psychoanalytic approach to political theory while Lloyd examines symbolic associations with gender common from the inception of the tradition.

Stephano begins by making clear the relationship between advances in feminist theory and reinterpretations of political theory:

We have reached that point in the development of feminist consciousness, practice and theory where it makes sense and becomes possible to explore the notion that male hegemony in political theory inhabits and structures that body of knowledge in a multiplicity of complex and significant ways. The simultaneous appreciation of male dominance, gender differences and the material rootedness of knowledge lends itself to a new and exciting critical focus in political theory.⁴²

She then goes on to outline this 'new and exciting' method which will extricate a 'subtext' or 'deep structure' with implications 'beyond the limited interests of political theorists':

This focus enables the identification of masculinity as an ideological structure with specific cognitive and perceptual tendencies which reflect and reproduce the special interests of men as men. I would suggest that this ideological form may be usefully thought of as a 'deep structure'. By 'deep structure' is meant that masculinity is an ideology comprised of systematically interrelated elements which do not necessarily manifest themselves at the surface of theoretical discourse in direct or transparent ways, although they do exert a powerful influence on it. Identifying such an ideological structure, or subtext requires an interpretative method akin to that used in psychoanalytic explanations of symptoms and outward behaviour, which reconstruct the hidden systems of meaning and logic embedded and presupposed, usually in opaque form, in their visible and other manifestations.⁴³

Stephano uses this method on Hobbes to show that he does not merely exclude women from civic life, but also operates a gender-bias on the levels of 'logic, epistemology, ontology and intellectual style'.⁴⁴ She finds this bias still operative in contemporary politics, hence the relevance of her illustration. To elicit the masculine ideology that animates the 'deep structures' of Hobbes's thought, she uses psychoanalytic concepts developed by Radical Feminist post-Freudians. This allows her to explain patriarchy as men's attempts to overthrow female control of reproduction and masculinity as a response to the pre-Oedipal mother. For the boy, maternal power is seen as threatening and its denial makes it only more so. Horror of identification with the mother leads to

⁴⁰ Christine Di Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology in Political Thought: Hobbesian Man considered', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6: 16 (1983).

⁴¹ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London, Methuen, 1984).

⁴² Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', p. 634.

⁴³ Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', p. 634. This sort of approach is also used by Hanna Pitkin in *Fortune in a Woman: Gender and Politics in the thought of Niccolo Machiavelli* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984).

⁴⁴ Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', p. 634.

a brittle self-identification of masculinity. Stephano thus equates certain psychological traits with masculinity and translates these (perhaps rather disingenuously) into philosophical positions. Basically, her males are authoritarian personalities (high F-scorers), lacking tolerance for ambiguity and therefore having a proclivity for rigidly dichotomous thought coupled with a rampant individualism that reflects the requirements of a vulnerable self-identity in pursuit of autonomy. While this is expressed in hostility towards others, it is not insignificant that the origins of hostility and vulnerability should lie in the threat posed by the mother. When we turn to Hobbes, we find him concerned with the survival of a self defined in these masculine terms. The survival of each strictly differentiated but threatened ego 'recapitulates' earlier processes of masculine identity development against a female presence (the mother). Thus the Hobbesian state of nature is 'effectively built on the foundation of denied maternity'.⁴⁵

To sustain this equation between the state of nature and denied maternity, Stephano makes much of a fungoid metaphor used by Hobbes in *De Cive*. His depiction of men springing from the earth like fully matured mushrooms allows a symbolic denial that men are born of, or nurtured by, women. Cultivation is unnecessary in this natural state and so, by implication, is the mother. Mushrooms also reproduce in an apparently asexual manner: again the mother is denied and the autonomy of men asserted. This has ramifications for Hobbes's view of civil society. Maternal power is intensely personal and extends far beyond anything conveyed in contractual bonds. It is therefore anathema to the type of authority Hobbes wishes to sanction and so the mother must be deauthorized. When Hobbes does discuss the family, it is modelled on civil bonds—on relations of utility rather than organic identity. Conversely, the personal identity of the sovereign is a purely contingent matter. Hobbesian men thus remain unified and discrete egos, unassailable except in combative terms and approachable only via contracted and nominalist exchanges. They exemplify masculine traits that arise from the denial of the mother which is symbolically communicated via the mushroom metaphor. Hobbes's depiction of the human subject 'necessarily ignores and debases the female presence in and contribution to social life'.⁴⁶ What Hobbes offers us, Stephano concludes, is an 'unwitting exploration of a masculine politics'. Thus while she acknowledges that her account may not adequately capture the origins and development of his thought, she does believe that it explains the resonance he strikes in his readers and its continued appeal to them. Besides the motherless state of nature and the masculine personalities depicted there, Hobbes adopts a male standpoint in his prose and also casts himself as an epic hero; that is, one who through memorable deeds (here thought acts) asserts claims to self-sufficient manhood through competition—a fight to the death—with others. This rests on an equation between heroism, masculinity and willingness to risk life (which Stephano claims Hobbes did by writing political works during the civil war and which women have been historically less willing to do).

Stephano's bold analysis raises a number of problems. The fit between

⁴⁵ Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', p. 637.

⁴⁶ Stephano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', p. 643.

psychological gender traits and philosophical orientations is too tight to be credible. Furthermore, if the translation is valid, why do we not find philosophies of aggressive individualism arising until the 17th century? Even if we cited changes in child-rearing (to more exclusively mother-centred practices), this would not explain why later philosophers like Hegel emphasized the very relatedness and transcendence of self-other oppositions which masculinity is supposed to find so threatening. The article would also have been more purposive had Stephano spoken of the feminine identity that supposedly emerges from the same psychoanalytic account of pre-Oedipal mothering. More secure in her feminine identity which accords with that of the mother, the girl is more 'oceanic', happier in her relations with the world and less differentiated from it because of a lesser need to reject the mother and the feminine in herself. If Stephano's 'resonance' theory works, we would then expect theories of community to resonate better with the female mind. But in any case, there are pitfalls for feminism in treading the path of psychological gender distinction if there is any suggestion that these are innate or inevitable rather than culturally transmitted by (contingent) child-bearing practices.⁴⁷ If we do accept the latter position however, this reinforces the suggestion (found in a weaker form in Rousseau and Mill) that it is the form of the family that shapes that of the polity because it is here that citizens are reproduced.

Freud himself had argued that the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' were not very helpful beyond the small biological differences between the sexes since although psychoanalysis used them to signify active and passive behaviours respectively, this equation rested on purely conventional usage.⁴⁸ He found a combination of both in each sex. This suggests that we need to explore those conventions further if we are to discover their sources and this is what Lloyd does when she traces them to the origins of western philosophy.

Lloyd looks, like Stephano, for 'deep structure', this time in the philosophical tradition as it extends from ancient Greece. Unlike Stephano, Lloyd does not depend on psychoanalysis though she does rely on a categorization of masculine traits deemed typical. Her case rests on claims regarding a symbolic equation between femininity and nature that runs through the tradition and that she ultimately finds responsible for centuries of women's debasement and exclusion from politics. However nature is treated, this has had implications for perceptions of women.

Lloyd's basic claim is that the priorities associated with a well-lived life have centred on character ideals associated with Reason which have been inherently male. In dialectical fashion, ideas of Reason have historically excluded the feminine (thus acting as an obstacle to a feminine constitution of Reason) while femininity has itself been constituted through this exclusion. She traces

⁴⁷ For Freud there are no innate gender traits, though he does recognize psychological gender distinctions at an increasingly early age: he begins by locating them at puberty and concludes with a recognition of the significance of asymmetrical pre-Oedipal experience (since it is women who are the first love-objects of girls and boys alike). Freud does, however, suggest a propensity for appropriate sex-gender linkages to assert themselves during the Oedipus Complex, regardless of the nature of particular families.

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis* (translated by J. Strachey) (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), pp.147-8.

genderic equations back to the Greeks, who connected women with nature because of a mutual fertility. Their understanding of reproduction also led them to equate women with passivity: the mother merely provided the matter for new life to which the father actively gave form. Thus matter, passivity and females were linked and opposed by form, activity and males. Women's association with nature and the body was juxtaposed to the man's with knowledge and mind, for it is the latter that give shape to nature, transcending the given in a creative way. Lloyd finds such equations already extant in Pythagorean tables of the 6th century BC, where the masculine is further lined up with the superior. The mind-body dualism adopted by the early Plato (and the rational versus non-rational division within the soul he later devised) and by the Judeo-Christian tradition, therefore bore a symbolism of gender whereby the mind/male was to control and transcend the body/female. Women's association with the flesh further meant their association with sense perception and the passions which distorted reason, morality and will unless strictly controlled. In the Middle Ages, women were not necessarily seen as less rational but their nature was associated with their bodily functions which in turn linked them to lust, temptation and so on, and thus to threats against virtue.

What I find unclear in Lloyd's book is the relationship between the Greeks' perception of biological sexual differences and their symbolic usage of associated gender differences. The early active/passive distinction, for example, seems to rest on a direct interpretation of male/female contributions to reproduction, while the plethora of masculine/feminine equations derived from it evoke only symbolic resonances that do not appear to be linked *necessarily* with how women and men are actually perceived. This connection between the perceived and symbolic levels of sex-gender distinction is important because it does not follow necessarily that women must be explicitly associated with feminine traits (as we saw with Freud); for example, while the feminine symbolizes the non-rational, not all philosophers who used this imagery saw women themselves as irrational—as Lloyd indeed acknowledges in the cases of Aquinas and Augustine. In fact the latter, she says, tried to distinguish between allegorical and literal male/female traits, although it is not clear in her account how or when they became confused. But as she also argues, the symbolism only works because of the derogation of women, which expressions related to femininity evoke. To the extent that women, femininity, passivity, inferiority and non-rationality remain symbolically tied together for us, however, changes in social and economic arrangements are unlikely to have the desired effects.

In any case, Lloyd does not find Greek and medieval gender equations as insidious as their Enlightenment counterparts. For while the Greeks had associated femaleness with matter to be transcended, it was only in the 17th century that transcendence was to be of the feminine *per se*. Scientific method was related by Bacon and Descartes to a knowledge that manipulated and dominated nature. Bacon used explicitly sexual imagery to equate the good knower with the right manly qualities; nature was to be seduced through respect and constraint. Descartes had appeared to democratize Reason by equating it with a rigorous and disciplined approach anyone could muster as long as they had space for it away from the distractions of daily life. Lloyd's point is sociological rather than philosophical here: women rarely had such space, given their

daily round of domestic duties. By the time Rousseau and Kant wrote in the 18th century, this sort of intellectual activity was seen as inappropriate for women as well as unlikely since their lack of reasoning power was by now accepted as given. For Rousseau in particular, the woman–nature equation remained strong and so his treatment of nature (to be transcended, but reattained as an ideal through right reason) allowed him to see women as both submissive and exemplary.⁴⁹ Reason as a goal of humanity is thus an explicitly masculine goal. Lloyd concludes by pointing out that transcendence of nature/flesh is a male project that has been linked to humanity as such. As Simone de Beauvoir argues, woman is simply depicted as ‘other’ to male culture. But if Lloyd is right, then women cannot simply escape their reproductive rôles to join in an androgynous project of transcendence because transcendence is defined in terms of overcoming the feminine.

The implication must be that women need a different ideal of Reason and of the Good Life and that they have little to gain from the cultural ideal espoused by traditional thought. For as Lloyd says: ‘it is not a question of the applicability to women of neutrally specified ideas of rationality, but rather of the genderization of the ideals themselves.’⁵⁰

This article has suggested that there are a number of more or less radical ways in which the political tradition can be re-read from a women’s perspective. It has also pointed to various beneficiaries of such a re-reading and argued that the study of political thought itself gains from the criticisms and contributions this approach makes. This suggests that themes relevant to women must not be marginalized since they are an integral part of a complex story. Yet at the same time, as Okin says:

It is by no means a simple matter to integrate the female half of the human race into a tradition of political theory which has been based, almost without exception, upon the belief that women must be defined exclusively by their rôle within the family, and which has thus defined them, and intra-familial relationships, as outside the scope of the political. There is no way in which we can include women, formerly minor characters, as major ones within the political drama without challenging basic and age-old assumptions about the family, its traditional sex rôles, and its relation to the wider world of political society.⁵¹

Part of our way of looking at women in political thought therefore lies in perceiving and accounting for their exclusion. The interpretation from their/our perspective is necessarily a critical venture and it is part of a broader critique of political practices and institutions; of our very conception of the political. This suggests that women must evolve their own theory, but this article has pointed out a number of ways in which this process nevertheless benefits from a reading of the tradition. Feminists find there their own legacy as

⁴⁹ Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, p. 64. Even J. S. Mill retains something of this notion of a female mind better equipped for practical than abstract thought.

⁵⁰ Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, p. 286.

well as concepts and methods which they may utilize for their own analyses. They also find buried there some of the most fundamental ideological arguments for and symbols of, their oppression, and these need to be extricated and dissected if they are to be exorcised. To the extent that an autonomous feminist theory evolves out of this critique, this article has left open the question of how far it rejects the tradition and begins again and how far it adds a new phase to that tradition of political thought.