4. Implications for a Feminist Epistemology

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CHAPTER FOUR

Implications for a Feminist Epistemology

GENDER PSYCHOLOGY suggests an alternative epistemology and moral methodology that have existed as long as the dominant masculine ideology but have been repressed and ignored except in the inner sanctum of women’s “private world” experience and the “inessential” material activities and work that have defined and dominated women’s lives, at least in the modern era. The theory highlights the notion that our understanding of the world as it is expressed through the ideology and institutions of the public realm is not the universal understanding it purports to be but may have a specifically gendered bias. As Gilligan notes: “Theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and evaluative bias. Then the presumed neutrality of science, like that of language itself, gives way to the recognition that categories of knowledge are human constructions . . . when we begin to notice how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men’s eyes.”

This noticing can help us begin to understand the ways in which the problems of political obligation are generated by masculinist perspectives. But it can further help us understand that the problem goes much deeper than, for instance, translating “man” in Locke’s theory as “men and women.” We cannot simply add women to existing categories of thought, because such thought is premised on a distortion of women’s “nature” which is described only as it is experienced by men or seen through men’s eyes. As Sandra Harding says, “The prevailing

Theories of the social and natural sciences draw on and legitimate a conceptual screen that systematically distorts our vision of women and their lives. How can we "plug" women in to a political theory that systematically denigrates the activity in which they have historically engaged? That marks as periods of great progress times when women suffered severe setbacks in social recognition and their ability "to act as historical and rational agents"? And even if we do gender neutralize liberal theory and declare that women's "natures" are identical to men's, then why, we may ask, have not women created theories and conducted wars like men? The obvious answer would seem to lead to a theory of "natural" inferiority. In such a world, of course, "woman" will appear inferior: the world as created by men is not hers, and the standards by which her achievements are judged are alien to the values on which her practices rely.

The epistemological dimensions of the arguments I have constructed in earlier chapters of this book, and particularly in the previous chapter, strike at the heart of the structural sexism of political theory. It is not merely the case that Locke or Rousseau created theories of political society that favored men and oppressed women. If this were the case, the remedy would be straightforwardly to alter the specific aspects of such theories that adversely affect women. The problems, as I have indicated, lie deeper within the theories. They reach down to the understanding of the world from which the theorists write to the definitional "bedrock" concepts they employ, the conceptual framework that defines what they know and how they know it. The questions I have posed about obligations—what values and ideas these theories accommodate, what questions they do and do not allow—can thus be seen as epistemological questions.

The Ontological Dimensions of Epistemology

The claim that these questions are epistemological is, to put it mildly, controversial. Particularly in light of my use of object relations and psychology, is it not ontology, the nature of being, that is at issue? Certainly my theory is concerned with the concept of being: what it means to be male or female, for instance. In the rationalist and

3Ibid., p. 47.
4Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 85, para. 217. Wittgenstein uses the metaphorical phrasing "I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say 'This is simply what I do'" to explain the fact that there are certain fundamentals to language and concepts, certain givens, that cannot be so much explained as accepted.
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empiricist epistemologies of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Mill, and Kant, which dominate liberal theory and western thinking, ontology and epistemology are separate and distinct. If true knowledge must be objective, then it is vital that what is known be radically divorced from whoever the knower is; or at least, whoever the knower is should be irrelevant. Objective knowledge should be true for all.

Yet part of what gender psychology suggests is that epistemology is very closely related to ontology, that indeed it is at best difficult to separate them. If the processes of psychic development produce differences in views of the self as either fundamentally separate or connected, then these will inform one’s view of the world, which in turn will shade one’s perception and interpretation of “truth” or “reality.” Perception, one might reply, is hardly the same as epistemology (although, one might argue, they were importantly related for the empiricists, particularly Hume). Nevertheless, gender psychology can provide a critical perspective on our understanding of epistemology and can offer some insights into the ways our dominant epistemology is biased.

A significant part of this bias is the dichotomy itself. From the perspective of object relations, in fact, we can see that the dichotomy between epistemology and ontology, which characterizes both rationalist and empiricist epistemologies, is specifically masculinist, for it follows from, or at least echoes, the mind-body duality: if the body is separate and distinct from the mind, then theories of knowledge and the ways we conceptualize knowing must be distinct from theories of existence and the ways we conceptualize being.

The major themes of these positivist epistemologies, revolving around the concepts of objectivity and interiority, support this notion. These concepts are particularly masculine in their replication of pre-oedipal themes of rejection and repression of the mother. The boy, in perceiving himself as radically separate from the world, turns inward to confirm reality rather than outward to the object world, which he must subjugate to his own existence and self. Or more precisely, he relies on the external—for instance rules and roles that form a positional identification—only insofar as he has been able to exert, or to convince himself that he exerts, control over it. Thus objectivity becomes a useful means of classifying and understanding the world; but it achieves its importance because it derives from the objectification of the woman/mother, a central task of masculine development that is undertaken as a means to escape the mother and solidify masculine identity.

The bias of modern epistemologies affects the kinds of questions that are asked, the modes of inquiry that are used and considered
legitimate, and what is taken as evidence of particular knowledge claims; it ensures "that certain questions and ways of answering them become constitutive of philosophy." In creating the split between epistemology and ontology, rationalist and empiricist epistemologies created a particular concept of knowing that revolves around objectivity. Once this category of objectivity was developed, the epistemologies could claim the status that they created. The assertion that epistemology and ontology are entirely separate is granted the status of objective truth, and epistemology comes to be further defined as excluding ontological considerations. In a sense, the split between ontology and epistemology is itself an epistemological claim: it is part of the rational and empiricist theories of knowledge that knowing is divorced from being. That is just what epistemology means. Thus, by "explicitly ignor[ing] gender while implicitly exploiting distinctively masculine meanings of knowledge seeking," these epistemologies were able to mask their own bias.

But the claim to objectivity must be recognized as circular. As Harding argues, "Once we stop thinking of modern Western epistemologies as a set of philosophical givens, we can begin to examine them instead as historical justificatory strategies—as culturally specific modes of constructing and exploiting cultural meanings in support of new kinds of knowledge claims." I maintain that feminist theorists writing on questions of epistemology are in fact recasting epistemology in terms that allow for ontology, if not melding the two completely. Bordo, Flax, Harding, and Hartsock all work from the implicit or explicit claim that the way epistemology is defined and its false juxtaposition to ontology not only limit and (mis)direct the kinds of questions that philosophy and political theory ask but also thereby misrepresent the nature of social relations. As Flax most explicitly points out, "In philosophy, being (ontology) has been divorced from knowing (epistemology), and both have been separated from either ethics or politics." We need to recognize the overlap of all four if we are to avoid the "frozen postures" of patriarchal social relations and achieve more comprehensive and accurate ways of knowing.

The conceptualization of these ways of knowing that is my primary focus has been expressed by Nancy Hartsock as "the feminist standpoint." This is a variation on the more general conceptualization of Marxian "standpoint epistemology," which was specifically formulated as "the standpoint of the proletariat." Feminist standpoint epis-

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7Ibid.
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temology rejects the idea that epistemology is objective or universal; it holds that epistemology is itself a product of particular social relations. Not just knowledge, or what we know, is shaped by particular experience and the relations we have to others, but how we know and how we conceive of knowledge are also similarly shaped. Unlike a Kantian or Cartesian epistemology, feminist standpoint epistemology rejects the concept of pure objectivity, or the "purity" of "true" knowledge.

But what do I mean by standpoint? A standpoint is the perspective from which one views the world, social relations—reality, if you will. It is composed of factors such as race, class, gender, and the kind of work one does; I would also add psychosexual development. The idea behind a standpoint is that different people will develop different knowledge frameworks depending on their experiences and circumstances. Out of these experiences is formed a crucible for perception, interpretation, and understanding, as many of the unconscious aspects of experience are moved into the realm of consciousness. To the degree that a particular group of people share socially and politically significant characteristics—for instance, women—they will share a standpoint. Since "epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life," the standpoint "structures epistemology in a particular way" that reflects experience.\(^{10}\) If that experience differs among people—as I have suggested it does for men and women under mother-only child rearing—then, according to the concept of a standpoint, their epistemological orientations will be different.

The feminist standpoint, however, is not "natural" to all women; it is not a feminine standpoint but must be achieved or at least acknowledged. Hartsock calls it an "engaged" position; that is, it is not a mere unconscious bias but must be struggled for. This is where feminist theory enters. The role political theory can play is to help identify, articulate, and explain the standpoint through an analysis of women's experience. In particular, female feminist theorists can engage in the description of their own experience, as well as in the analysis that gives added meaning to experience. Political theory can help us translate experience into political meaning or can articulate the political significance of women's experience. The project of feminist theory is thus part of the political struggle in which, according to Hartsock at least, women need to engage in order to achieve a feminist standpoint.

This epistemological approach is obviously controversial. But its advantage from a methodological point of view is that it reveals that "there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-

\(^{10}\)bid.
intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and the natural world are not visible.” The standpoint of an oppressed group, she asserts, provides a certain advantage in enabling members of the group to see, if not “objectively,” at least more sides of a question. Just as the proletariat has a potentially superior vantage point from which to understand the relationship between worker and capitalist, so do women have the greater ability to understand more fully the relationship between men and women. That relationship is defined by male privilege or the system of male domination. This makes it difficult for males to see the problems of gender relations. As Harding points out, “Objectively, no individual man can succeed in renouncing sexist privilege any more than individual whites can succeed in renouncing racist privilege—the benefits of gender and race accrue regardless of the wishes of the individuals who bear them.”

Thus, the myths that have developed to explain women’s inequality cannot be seen as readily by men, even when men specifically look for them, because men do not experience them as myths, and do not directly suffer from this experience.

This analysis might suggest that a feminist standpoint is gender exclusive, but many theorists would disagree. Although a feminist standpoint derives from the particular experiences of women, Hartsock specifically uses the term feminist rather than female to point out both “the achieved character of a standpoint and that a standpoint by definition carries a liberatory potential.” It also suggests that a feminist standpoint is not limited to women; the process of feminist struggle welcomes male participants. Other theorists, such as Harding, are much more ambivalent about this conclusion, not because they do not want men to be feminists but because they doubt whether the standpoint approach will allow them to participate in the “struggle.” Advocates of a feminist standpoint approach maintain that it can reveal, or help uncover, ways in which the current society and dominant ideology deny or ignore “real relations of humans” because of a masculinist bias. As Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka have put it, it can help us to “dis-cover” reality. Object relations theory can pro-

11Ibid.
14See Harding (1986), esp. chap. 6. But see Harding (1991) for arguments that men should strive to achieve feminist standpoints in spite of the difficulties.
15Hartsock in particular uses the language of feminist struggle. Within this imagery perhaps we could say that men can be soldiers but not generals, though this begs the question as to whether a true feminist struggle would involve military hierarchies.
16Harding and Hintikka (1983).
vide an important aspect of a feminist standpoint. By identifying individual development as in part the product of created institutions, it can translate individual experience into cultural phenomena, or at least explain the institutional and cultural aspects of a supposedly individual experience.

Furthermore, object relations can help us see the importance of a feminist standpoint for political obligation by highlighting questions of epistemology. If people experience and display differences in defining the self as either fundamentally separate or connected, and if this definition then serves as the framework for one’s perceptions, understanding, and interpretation of the external world, then to a significant degree the processes of psychic development shape our concept of reality for us: they shape our knowledge and our framework of knowledge. To the degree that such self-conceptions—as isolated or connected—are at least historically gender related, the accompanying world view will differ by gender as well. Thus, I suggest that the dominant epistemology that defines political concepts such as obligation, as well as the method of our dominant political theoretical discourses, may themselves be an important locus of gender bias. So object relations can be a means to understanding how the problems of liberal democratic theory go beyond the empirical exclusion of women from politics to the fact that the epistemology from which these theories operate is premised on that exclusion. And in fact, by examining the epistemological implications of object relations theory, we may be able to tease out some ways in which the problems of consent are a result of this bias.

Let us begin this task by returning to the dichotomization of ontology and epistemology characteristic of rationalist and empiricist epistemologies. I have suggested that we need to consider these two entities as related. My earlier discussion of object relations and moral psychology highlighted the overlap between epistemology and ontology; that is, how individuals conceptualize themselves, how they view their being, influences the way they conceptualize and know the world. In object relations, the fact that boys and girls conceive their self-identities in particular ways gives rise to different frameworks for understanding the relations between self and other, subject and object, and hence of interpreting and giving voice to the objects of the world. In Gilligan’s work it is the ontologically based assumptions underlying moral reasoning and not the content of moral judgments themselves that account for the crucial differences in rights and care responses. Amy’s ontological perspective of connection yields her reconstruction of the question being asked, her understanding of the world and of the psychological inquiry of knowledge. Not merely
what she knows but *how* she knows, the framework that guides her interpretation of the information provided by the interviewer, is influenced and shaped by her ontological perspective.

Object relations theory can help us see not only that modern positivist epistemologies are gender biased but also that this separation of epistemology from ontology is itself a masculinist ideology. Because masculinist ontology gives rise to dualism, it creates an epistemological orientation that conceives of the world in oppositional categories. We know things because we, as subjects, observe objects, which are entirely distinct from us, and this observation gives us an "objective" assessment of meaning. This constitutes the rationale for the rejection of so-called feminine ontology from the world of the public; the ontological assumption of connection creates an epistemology that rejects dualism. Indeed, it cannot even be granted the status of epistemology within modernist discourse, precisely because it rejects dualisms of mind and body, subject and object, fact and value, and ultimately of epistemology and ontology.

Theorists have been quite willing to allow that women have a different ontology. That women’s being is defined by their bodies is essential to the justification of their exclusion from the public realm. But to allow that this ontology indicates a separate epistemology is threatening on several levels. Not only does it suggest that women may have ways of knowing just as valuable as men’s, but also such an admission questions the very concept of knowledge as it is defined by (male-created) empiricist epistemologies. If knowledge is conceived of as pure, dependent only on true thought, achieved only by the rigorous exercise of the mind, if such a conceptualization of thought is a way to reject the body, if this rejection is necessary to achieve masculinity by rejecting the feminine, then the admission that knowing can come from being is a contradiction not only of this definition of knowledge and epistemology but of the (unconscious) purpose of defining and developing epistemology in this way in the first place. That is, the very concept of a "feminine" epistemology that invokes the interaction of ontology is fundamentally at odds with the values of western ideology and with the (unrecognized) values underlying its conceptualization and construction as well.

Having said that, however, I should immediately reformulate the concept of a feminine epistemology in favor of a concept of feminist epistemology, something quite distinct. To say that women have a different epistemology by virtue of their psychic development and other experiences does not in itself address the degree to which these experiences are the product of patriarchal social relations. Although I have outlined, and will continue to discuss, differences between mas-
culine and feminine experiences and the ramifications of these differences, it is vital to remember that much of women's experience itself can be seen as a product of masculine action through patriarchy. After all, Chodorow, Flax, and Dinnerstein all point out that mother-only child rearing is itself an institution of patriarchy, a self-perpetuating practice that facilitates men's fulfillment of the very needs that it creates and inhibits women from resolving the very dilemmas it brings about.

So it is not the case that by looking at women's experience we can achieve some "pure" theory or analysis based on a nonmasculine world. Perhaps part of women's historical, psychic, and epistemological opposition to dichotomy involves a recognition of the fact that even the practices within which women express and define themselves are not directly opposed to masculinity and masculinism but are themselves products of it. That women's reality differs from men's does not mean we can or should simply reject a masculine point of view: "Men's power to structure social relations in their own image means that women too must participate in social relations that manifest and express abstract masculinity."18

Problems and Challenges

This last point implicitly raises some questions about my use of gender psychology in the development of feminist standpoint epistemology. A variety of gender-related aspects of women's experience are explored by feminist theorists in the development of feminist theory; these range from being daughters of women, to pregnancy and childbirth, to housework, to sexual harassment in the workplace. I agree with the authors of these theories that attention needs to be paid to all aspects of women's experience in developing this epistemology: pregnancy may well provide a woman with a different historical consciousness,19 the daily necessity confronting the housewife may be qualitatively different from the material necessity facing the factory worker, and will likely produce a different material consciousness;20 women's "kinwork" structures their perspectives on familial

17French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous are obvious exceptions as they try to create "écriture féminine," which "writes from the body." But even this, I would argue, is deeply entrenched in the world of masculinism, particularly given its indebtedness to Lacanian psychoanalysis. See particulary Cixous (1980), Irigaray (1985), and Marks and de Courtivron (1980).
and social relations; and mothering as a practice most likely produces different perspectives on the world.

The obvious reason for my limited focus in this essay on the psychological and psychoanalytic aspects already discussed is one of space; adequate treatment of all aspects would require several books. But there is also a reason of priority. Just as the psychic development of one’s early years sets the stage for the rest of one’s life, so does our institutionalized practice of mother-only child rearing set the stage for our collective social and political life. A psychoanalytic approach can help strengthen other kinds of analysis and provide a way for different approaches to work interactively. For instance, socialization is an important but not a sufficient explanation for the continued sexual division of labor into adult life and even after supposed feminist enlightenment. Socialization theories may lend themselves too readily to the standard criticism that women “merely” need to choose not to accept these roles any longer, thus denying the intricate complexity of gender’s social construction. Psychoanalytic theory can supplement socialization theories with an account of the deep-seated psychic origins that socialization then reinforces.

Similarly, biological aspects of womanhood such as pregnancy are important but insufficient to explain women’s status and place in society and may lend themselves to biodeterministic conclusions. Mary O’Brien’s work, which offers an insightful analysis of what she calls “malestream thought” based on a concept of “reproductive consciousness,” is a case in point. One may well ask of her theory whether women who cannot or choose not to bear children have access to this reproductive consciousness she postulates. O’Brien says that one need not be a mother because reproductive consciousness is a “universal consciousness, common to all women,” and she implies that this derives from the capacity to bear children and the consciousness of continuity that this engenders. But she leaves unclear where this consciousness comes from if not from biology; and at any rate, many women are not biologically capable of bearing children. Furthermore, although most women are capable of raising children, this is a capacity that they share with men.

Gender psychology can provide a more complete and plausible way to connect this theory to a more widely applicable theory of women. As I noted earlier, gender identity is established in a child at a very early age, and this identity consists largely in social and cultural expectations and messages communicated by the mother both con-

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22Ruddick (1984a); see also Ruddick (1989).
sciously and unconsciously as well as by the society at large. In addition, at a very early stage the girl’s intense primary identification with the mother gives way to a personal identification as her secondary, gendered identity; and this identity is more positive and secure than the abstract positional gender identification achieved by the boy.

The firmness of such gender identity in girls, and its nonbiological genesis, is documented in the literature: children who were mistakenly identified as girls at birth (children with unusual chromosomal configurations or with ambiguous genitalia) and subsequently raised as girls display equally strong gender identity as biological females. Subsequent discoveries of the lack of a vagina or reproductive organs or correct chromosomal makeup does not cast the gender identity into question. What is at issue for the individual is how to remedy the anatomical error (how to construct a vagina, whether in vitro fertilization would be successful and so on). Thus, gender identity is likely not to have a biological grounding. In fact, Robert J. Stoller argues that gender identity comes from parents’ confident belief in the child’s gender and their unambiguous treatment of the child according to that belief. Suzanne J. Kessler similarly cites evidence that “from the moment of birth the parent responds to the infant based on the infant’s gender.”

When the subsequent preadolescent discovery of where babies come from occurs, however, this information is transposed back onto one’s early found gender identity: I am like my mother (whether or not this is in fact biologically the case), therefore I too can have a child. Being a mother, in this additional biological sense, becomes a part of the girl because it is a part of her mother—indeed, it defines the mother in an important way for the girl—with whom she identifies intensely. (Note also that the awareness of pregnancy occurs at the same age that preoedipal issues tend to resurface for the girl.)

Thus psychoanalytic theory can shed light on theories oriented toward biology and make better sense of them. In this case it shows that the postulated existence of a reproductive consciousness has a high likelihood of truth, regardless of whether a woman has a child, wants to have one, or is even physically capable of bearing one.

So not only does psychoanalytic theory reveal a highly significant aspect of epistemology, but also it has great potential explanatory power. This still fails to account, however, for a final set of objections to my approach, which are perhaps more profound and sweeping. It might be argued that a feminist standpoint approach to gender psy-

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24 Stoller (1973); Kessler (1990), p. 9, n. 15. See also Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria (1974).
chology is problematic in its assumption that there is a “feminine experience.” Feminist standpoint’s key strength lies in its ability to challenge the supposed neutrality of current epistemological frameworks and resulting substantive theories. It is also powerful in its call for the recognition and revaluation of women’s experience and perspective. But critics contend that it fails to account for differences among women according to race, class, geographic location, nationality, and historical period. It may well assume that women means white women, just as blacks or Africans often implicitly means black or African men. Such questions also pose the postmodernist challenge once again. As I indicated earlier, I consider the relationship between postmodernism and feminism in my afterword; but for some readers these questions press imminently on the present discussion. To discuss gender psychology is totalizing enough in its declaration of what women and men are. But then to raise these constructions to the level of epistemology is to carry the evil of totalization dangerously further, for it is to elevate to a more profound level of truth claim the particularity of individual experiences, which must necessarily differ from all other individual experiences.

A feminist standpoint approach also may seem to cast reality in terms of duality, even as it ostensibly rejects dualism. It may seem to embrace the “flip side” mentality that seeks to reject all that is supposedly masculine and replace it with all that is supposedly feminine. Standpoint theory claims that the standpoint of oppressed persons is superior to the dominant ideology because the oppressed have a superior ability to see the reality of social relations and thus are more able to speak out about the truth of those relations. Are women, then, the vanguard? Certainly Hartsock’s approach in particular grants the possibility of males’ achieving a feminist standpoint. But this ability must be limited, according to her theory, since men do not experience women’s oppression. This potential dualism threatens gender psychology as well. Chodorow seems to indicate that men could become more like women if fathers took a larger role in early child care. The implication is that women would become more like men as well, but the theory is always cast in terms of men’s needing to develop “feminine” traits and abilities. This is true of Gilligan’s work as well. Although she is rightly critical of the rights model’s rejection of issues of care, she advocates an increased incorporation of the care conception without adequately addressing its weaknesses. Does this view present a gynocentric theory that excludes masculinity altogether?

36See Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982), and Harding (1986), chap. 7, for this point. More generally, for criticisms of Chodorow and Gilligan along these lines, see Fraser and Nicholson (1990), Gottlieb (1984), and Young (1984).
And what about the particular construction of femininity that gender psychology posits? Is it not essentialist and reductive, similarly ignoring differences in race, class, and historical period? Might there not be other factors in child-rearing relations that could compensate for or override the effects of being raised by a woman? Furthermore, there has been disagreement over whether mother-only child rearing is in fact a socially universal practice, with some evidence that men partake in child rearing in some nonwestern cultures. Michelle Rosaldo cites the Ilongots of the Philippines as one society where "men spend long hours with their children" and seem to share more in domestic responsibilities.27 Other objections attack the patriarchal-nuclear form of the family that object relations assumes. Chodorow's work, and object relations in general, has been criticized for ignoring the fact that many children today are raised in single-parent households.28 Where do we place women (and men) who do not fit the mold? This is a particularly pertinent question for today's infants (and perhaps tomorrow's political theorists), who are being raised in shared29 and single, heterosexual and homosexual parental relationships. Gilligan's work has been criticized on similar grounds, with critics contending the race and class bias of her sample yields a particularistic and even reified notion of feminine morality.

My first response to these objections is that it is still valid to explore the experiences of women past and present, even if those experiences are not universal, because of their significance for social reality as well as for political theory. Even though it is true that the ignorance of differences among women is potentially oppressive, that should not forestall the attempt to define a common ground on which women of various races, cultures, and historical periods can find multiple bases for shared experiences and standpoints. Object relations does suggest that the cultural phenomenon of mother-only child rearing can cut across a variety of family relations and structures; it can offer at least a "large historical narrative"30 and thus has the potential for providing such a common ground. There are many variations within child-rearing practices, but whether people have similar or different relations

28Bart (1984). Although I agree that object relations does not take a variety of variables into account, the single-mother model of parenthood is really not very different from the model object relations propounds; in fact the effects of the father's absence might be exaggerated, with boys' positional identification becoming even more abstract.
29This so-called objection in fact supports object relations; indeed, object relations applauds shared parenthood as the solution to the psychic ills produced by the sexual division of labor. Thus, according to the theory, people raised in this way should produce a more liberated society.
with their primary caretakers, to deny that it is women, and women alone, who have primary responsibility for child rearing in almost all cultures is to reject a large body of historical and anthropological evidence. For instance, in Rosaldo’s example, her finding that there is greater sexual equity among the Ilongots than in other cultures, leading to her conclusion that “an egalitarian ethos seems possible to the extent that men take on a domestic role,”31 reinforces rather than contradicts Chodorow’s thesis.

Furthermore, the present work is concerned with theories that have come out of societies in which child rearing is, on the whole, the responsibility of women—that is, the modern West—and Chodorow explicitly locates her theory in modern western capitalism.32 It is possible that there may have existed cultures in which women were not the primary caretakers, and for such cultures it may be that object relations theory has diminished explanatory force. But this is certainly not the case in the modern West. Since my argument centers around a body of thought—liberalism—that at least characterizes western capitalism, the argument really only need concern itself with the social relations of child rearing in the West and since the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the very least, object relations certainly characterizes the family structures of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment West out of which social contract theory emerged. Indeed, one could argue that object relations might well explain “the” Enlightenment family more accurately than “the” family of the late twentieth century.33 In this sense, to the degree that object relations does rely on a model of the family and child rearing that is sexist, racist, and classist, it becomes a useful vehicle for interpreting modern liberal theory as a sexist, racist, and classist ideology. In this light, it would contribute more effectively to a critique of social contract theory than to attempts to build a feminist theory of obligation in its place; but this issue will be addressed in my final chapters.

In other words, the claim for virtual universality must not be taken too grandly. Indeed, to do so is to fabricate a totality that is not being sought; but such are the strategies of modernists, not (supposedly) postmodernists. As Keller points out, “Although the patterns that give rise to” the gender differences posited by object relations theory “may be quasi-universal . . . the conditions that sustain them are not.” Thus,

31 Rosaldo (1974), p. 39. Rosaldo provides an overview of the anthropological literature that defends the claim that mother-only child rearing is virtually universal.


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in a culture that validates subsequent adult experiences that transcend the subject-object divide . . . these early identifications are counteracted—provided, that is, that such experiences are validated as essentially human rather than as "feminine" experience. However, in a culture such as ours, where primary validation is accorded to a science that has been premised on a radical dichotomy between subject and object, and where all other experiences are accorded secondary, "feminine" status, the early identifications can hardly fail to persist.34

Mother-only child rearing is a practice that is not coextensive with the western patriarchal nuclear family. Even though it is the model most object relations theorists tend to focus on, the theory is broadly applicable beyond this particular family structure to others where prominence of the mother and absence of the father are characteristic. Critics may point to the rise of single-parent families; people of color may experience communal parenting,35 lesbian mothers may question the need for fathers at all. But the fact remains that in the vast majority of these structures it is still women who bear responsibility for child rearing, and do so within patriarchal contexts; indeed, in all three of these examples absence of the father plays an important role in the structuring of mothering practices.

Furthermore, the father's absence must also be understood in terms of its symbolic content, particularly since gender is a learned category. In a patriarchal culture it is likely to be the absence of a father in the context of male cultural dominance, rather than the absence of a particular male person per se, that is significant. There can certainly be an intertwining of these two factors; for most people the cultural meaning of the masculine is symbolized by our fathers. But for people whose fathers were material presences in the family even if they were not involved in child rearing, the father's absence is significant because of a myriad of relations with him: loving, angry, conflicted, and ambivalent. Here the symbolic absence appears to cohere with the at least passive but concrete rejection by a particular man with whom one's emotional life is intimately tied. For others, for whom the father's absence entails a physical absence from the family altogether—let us say one was raised in a lesbian household and never knew one's father, or perhaps one's father died or abandoned one at birth—this deep emotional effect remains at a more purely representational and abstract level. But in both cases the significance of "the father" is still largely cultural; it still derives in circular fashion from the fact that, within patriarchy, gender is not only treated as an es-

35Collins (1987).
volent aspect of self-identity but is also oppositionally structured. Object relations theory suggests that the absence of the father for any reason results in positional identification for boys because of the cultural significance of gender identity to self-identity, and because masculinity must be conceived as not-female. Given this dualistic opposition in defining gender, and its perhaps artificial but certainly socially constructed prominence in conceptions of the self, the father's absence exists and develops its meaning in a context of mother-only child rearing.

So these arguments suggest that to denigrate the importance of women's role as mother is a typically sexist reaction. Although the effects of mother-only child rearing are likely to be modified by certain variables, the effects are too powerful to be completely eliminated. Indeed, denying its impact can be seen as a reaction perfectly in line with the predictions of object relations theory, a central tenet of which is that boys attempt to deny the supposed power of the mother, and do so by denying relationality. As Flax argues:

The repression, especially by men, of these primary relations and the relational aspects of our subjectivity is necessary for the replication of male-dominant cultures. A feminist theorist might well ask whether certain postmodernist deconstructors of the self are not merely the latest in a long line of philosophic strategies motivated by a need to evade, deny, or repress the importance of early childhood experiences, especially mother-child relationships, in the constitution of the self and the culture more generally. Perhaps it is less threatening to have no self than one pervaded by memories of, longing for, suppressed identification with, or terror of the powerful mother of infancy.\(^6\)

This response tends to ring with psychoanalytic smugness, but it does suggest that postmodernism can be seen as allied with postfeminism in its rejection of feminine experience as valid. This rejection, however, must itself be questioned. A number of theorists have done so, and powerfully.\(^7\) Their criticisms have not stilled debate, but they


\(^7\)For challenges to postmodernism, see particularly Hartsock (1987), Brown (1987), and the special issue of Differences 1, no. 2 (1989) devoted to feminist critiques of poststructuralism. An additional response on this issue is offered by Flax (1983). She addresses the problem of circumstances that might affect the impact of mother-only child rearing by discussing philosophers who are what she calls "pure case" examples, since they each lived in a historical period in which these mitigating factors were largely absent" (p. 245). Since three of the four philosophers she discusses—Plato, Descartes, Hobbes, and Rousseau—are also discussed in the present volume, I could rely on her argument to defend even more strongly my application of object relations to theories of obligation and epistemology. I am reluctant to do this, however, because I would not want to defend the "purity" of these cases. Rather, I suggest that although the effects of mother-only child rearing can be modified, they will not be eliminated completely.
highlight an important question: Why is it now, when women and racial minorities are finding their voices, when literary and political theory are providing ways for such voices to articulate their own theories and ways of seeing and constructing the world, that postmodernists—all of whom, at least originally, were white privileged males within the academy—suddenly tell us that voice is illegitimate? Is it precisely because the feminist claim to voice threatens masculinism’s need to repress connection, a need that I have argued is a theme traceable at least as far back as Hobbes? Indeed, I would further question whether postmodernism is not sexist in its attempts to perpetuate the ontological-epistemological split. By insisting on the separation of being from knowing—specifically by denying the degree to which people share an experience of being—postmodernists revert to the isolation and subjectivity of Descartes’s “cogito.”

This criticism of postmodernism is not limited to its attacks on gender psychology, of course; postmodern criticism of standpoint theory is similarly problematic. Indeed, I find that such criticism founds itself on a “straw woman,” as the essentialism it attributes to feminism is reductive, naturalistic, oversimplified. Perhaps ironically, this is particularly evident in the work of feminist postmodern theorists. Consider, for example, this criticism of essentialism by Denise Riley: “The tactical problem is in naming and specifying sexual difference where it has been ignored or misread; but without doing so in a way which guarantees it an eternal life of its own, a lonely trajectory across infinity which spreads out over the whole of being and the whole of society—as if the chance of one’s gendered conception mercilessly guaranteed every subsequent facet of one’s existence at all moments.”

There is little to disagree with in this passage; indeed, what feminist would want to? Perhaps some biodeterminists and political conservatives seek to create new images of women “in a way which guarantees it an eternal life of its own,” but no feminist theorists that I have read engage in such a strategy, and certainly none drawn on in the present argument do so. Even Chodorow and Gilligan, who are often criticized along such lines, display, as I have argued, a materialism that necessitates a concept of gender that is not naturalistic or biological, neither timeless nor inevitable, but rather responds to historical and social contexts. If those contexts—such as mother-only child rearing—have continued through long periods of history, then it might appear as if such characteristics are natural or inevitable, as patriarchs have long claimed; and in this case it would also appear that the theory endorses a naturalistic view of gender. But, as feminists have long argued in their attacks on patriarchal naturalism, such

appearances are superficial and misrepresentative, calling for deeper and more complex analysis. Why does this distinction between appearance and reality not apply to readings of feminist theory? Should feminists not be held accountable to these same standards when critiquing one of their own?

The feminist postmodernist Susan Hekman offers a similar defense of Gilligan against essentialist interpretations. She goes so far as to compare Gilligan to both Gadamer and Derrida, arguing that Gilligan is “deconstructing the rationalist model of morality.”39 Yet she fails to extend such a reading to standpoint arguments, claiming that Hartsock “has argued consistently that feminists must reject all epistemologies that are formulated by male theorists and adopt an epistemology that privileges the female standpoint.”40 As I noted earlier, Hartsock explicitly differentiates between female and feminist standpoints, partly because she wishes to acknowledge that there are male feminists in the world, partly because a standpoint does not come naturally or spontaneously to anyone but rather must be achieved through struggle, wherein lies its liberating potential. She further welcomes the efforts of male theorists to adopt feminist standpoints. The Derridean postmodernism Hekman endorses may seem feminist insofar as it treats women as symbolic, leading to a feminized epistemology that embodies multiplicity rather than unity. Yet such a theory is reductive and ignores the emphasis on concrete material experience so crucial to feminist standpoint methods. Although symbolism is vital to critical theory, and indeed to my own use of gender psychology, to treat woman as only a symbol, even as a symbol of multiplicity, is to deny a real concept of multiplicity among flesh-and-blood women, and to deny the real oppression that women face under patriarchy.

Flax’s claim that standpoint epistemology presupposes “that people will act rationally on their ‘interests’” is similarly misrepresentative. In the first place, it contradicts Hartsock’s lengthy and exhaustive critique of rational choice approaches, as well as her analysis of the concept of interest itself. Flax’s claim that the standpoint approach “assumes that the oppressed are not in some fundamental ways damaged by their social experience” is even more misrepresentative and confusing.41 Hartsock explicitly acknowledges the ways in which

41Flax (1990), p. 141. Furthermore, Flax cannot simultaneously critique the notion of a unified self and then talk about a “damaged” self (p. 141): damaged compared to what standard? My reading of Flax as a standpoint theorist thus becomes revised in light of her own condemnation of it. She seems to go beyond standpoint and even displays affinities with modernism.
Implications for a Feminist Epistemology

patriarchy informs women's experiences. Thus a feminist goal is not to "act out" women's experiences but to theorize them critically and to learn about women's responses to oppression as much as about the oppression itself. This is certainly consistent with my own use of standpoint.

I therefore find the postmodern challenge to standpoint epistemology and gender psychology to be seriously problematic in its anti-feminist potential; but I have another response to the objections I have just summarized that is much more sympathetic. Indeed, it involves highlighting the ways in which my own application of feminist standpoint borrows from postmodern insights. This begins with the recognition that I am looking at only one aspect of political philosophy, namely gender bias, and within that I consider gender psychology as only one source of explanation. My approach presumes to be neither comprehensive nor exclusive in either its methodology or conclusions, and it would be misleading to interpret my argument as seeking to replace one hegemony with another. My critique of consent theory in Chapters 1 and 2 obviously coheres with a postmodern suspicion and rejection of universalizing theories of human nature because such theories make invisible the particularity of difference in the experiences of women and other excluded groups. If liberal epistemology and dominant western theoretical discourses are reflective of specifically white male practitioners, then we need to uncover that bias and explore what is excluded. Gender is one such category. It is certainly not the only category, but it is an extremely significant one. The impact of gender bias and my own use of gender theory have potentially far-reaching implications, and I wish neither to minimize the importance of this work nor to dodge the controversy it raises. But it is crucial to remember that this work does not seek to construct a new, totalizing grand theory or ideology.

Nor am I attempting to create the definitive feminist standpoint epistemology here. Rather, I hope to raise some previously unasked—and unseen—questions about liberal theory and epistemology. Through this process multiple feminist standpoints should be revealed. Indeed, if I were to carry my argument to its logical conclusion, multiple standpoints of a variety of excluded groups would emerge. But by approaching standpoint epistemology through feminism and women's experiences, I am also attempting to explore some of the common and overlapping elements that feminist epistemologies share. In the process my argument develops new approaches to political theory that involve locality, contextuality, concreteness, and particularity. In this, as I will argue in my afterword, although I reject the idea of a feminist postmodernism, I believe I am utilizing an ap-
proach I would call postmodern feminism. For in combining the quasi-modernist characteristics of standpoint theory and gender psychology with some of the deconstructive and antiuniversal qualities of postmodernism, feminist theory can gain access to the deepest levels of the symbolic in cultural practices and institutions such as the patriarchal nuclear family, the liberal state, and the social contract.

As my method of standpoint epistemology borrows from postmodern insights, so are my reading and use of object relations and gender psychology similarly compatible with many aspects of postmodernism, the most prominent being the rejection of essentialized views of gender. In its locating personality development and accompanying epistemological frameworks in the context of institutionalized practices of child rearing and suggesting that changes in those practices will bring about changes in self-other conceptualizations and hence in gender, object relations theory can be seen as strongly compatible with postmodern aspects of fluid notions of selfhood and relationship. It is true that object relations speaks in terms of a "core self" that can be evaluated as "true" or "false." But, as Flax notes in her discussion of Winnicott, a true core self is precisely one that is fluid, that is not artificially static and afraid of ambivalence and change. That is, the core self of object relations theory is not a magic entity that exists inside each of us, unaffected by the external events that pummel our surface selves; a core self is simply that confidence in and security about our existence that allows us to cope with the ever-changing context that is life. The modernist notion of selfhood attempts to control this fluidity by posing a falsely universalized notion of autonomy as separateness. Object relations recognizes the ways in which the self is shaped by relationships. The core is thus a self-in-relationship. A disconnected self must engage in the false structures that deny the fragmentation which such disconnection necessarily entails. In other words, the masculinist self under patriarchy is not false in the sense that another (more) unified identity would be true; rather, the falseness comes from precisely this unified and static quality.

Thus, on the one hand, I have argued that my work is allied with elements of postmodernism; and on the other, I have argued that postmodernism is itself problematic in many of the areas in which it critiques gender psychology and feminist theory. Yet a third, perhaps more political response to the postmodern challenge is suggested by Harding. She has attempted to reconcile the tensions between postmodernism and feminism by arguing that standpoint epistemology is

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42Ibid., p. 110.
a necessary step in the development of feminist theory; it is crucial to develop the standpoint approach so that it can transcend itself. Methodologically, to engage in postmodernist dialogue without the standpoint is like giving feminists feathers to fight bayonets. In other words, one cannot arrive at postfeminism without completing the feminist enterprise. This makes a great deal of sense philosophically and politically. And though it may appear antithetical to postmodern method, Derrida himself can be read to suggest precisely such a strategy in Positions: “To overlook this phase of overturning [oppressive dualisms] is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a neutralization that in practice would leave the previous field untouched.”

So the present work should be seen as sympathetic to and compatible with postmodernism and yet suspicious and critical of it. None of these responses is final, of course, and my own intellectual ambivalence about postmodernism as well as standpoint epistemology and object relations theory remains. I highlight these responses not to argue that the objections are ill-founded; rather, I seek to clarify what my use of this controversial literature does—and does not—seek to achieve. But I also wish to convey to the reader that I do not think there are any easy, or even clear, answers to these issues at this point. That, I suppose, is what makes something controversial rather than absolute (or obsolete) and hence worthy of philosophical reflection. These issues need to be considered if the power of the symbolic implicit in the theories is to be realized. Accordingly, my analysis operates from a hypothetical acceptance of gender psychology; but it also operates from a reading of these works and of standpoint epistemology that carries them beyond what is articulated explicitly to their necessarily implicit symbolic quality. This needs to be done precisely because of the challenge these theories pose to our accepted notions of epistemology, ontology, and even substantive political concepts such as obligation. It also needs to be done because these theories have gained so much attention and are being adopted by feminist scholars in various disciplines, including political science. Amid all this attention, few have yet asked the question, If these theories are correct, what exactly are the implications for political theory? A consideration of epistemology in light of gender psychology can provide not only a better understanding of the ways in which liberal epistemology is inherently masculinist but also a basis for understanding how and why the substantive aspects of political theory—our under-

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44Derrida (1972), p. 41. This point will be returned to in the afterword.
standing of rights, freedom, justice, and obligation—display a similar bias.

Epistemology and the Patriarchal Unconscious

Susan Bordo, in her analysis of Descartes, supports this proposition by tracing the roots of Descartes's rationalist epistemology to a cultural and scientific revolution that "defeminized" culture and, not so coincidentally, corresponds to the beginnings of modern western capitalism's form of mother-only child rearing. As Bordo points out, the location of truth solely in the mind, the rejection of bodily or sensory experience, reflects a specifically masculinist conception of knowing and knowledge. The interiority of mental life, which, according to her, begins in the Renaissance—"the notion that the experience of individuals is fundamentally opaque, even inaccessible to others"—is most starkly presented in Descartes. The emphasis on "clarity, dispassion, and detachment . . . the imagery of objectivity" play a central role in Descartes's epistemology, and serve as the basis of "the model of knowledge that Descartes bequeathed to modern science."45

But this model of knowledge, she says, with its conceptions of objectivity and interiority and pure knowledge, can be seen as a specifically masculine response to cultural changes that echo preoedipal dilemmas. She asks, after a brief discussion of object relations theory:

May not such a process reverberate, too, on the cultural level? Perhaps some cultural eras compensate for the pain of individuation better than others through a mother imagery of the cosmos (such as was dominant, e.g., throughout the Chaucerian and Elizabethan eras) that assuages the anxiety of our actual separateness as individuals. On the other hand, during periods in which long-established images of symbiosis and cosmic unity break down (as they did during the period of the scientific revolution), may we not expect an increase in self-consciousness and anxiety over the distance between self and world—a constant concern, to paraphrase Mahler, over the whereabouts of the world? All these, as I have suggested, are central motifs in the Meditations.46

If social and cultural embodiments of "the feminine" broke down during the scientific revolution, then it is more than coincidence that the understanding of epistemology as separate from ontology devel-

46Ibid., p. 445.
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oped so fully in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, there is a specific reason and purpose relating to gender and mother-only child rearing. In this light, Descartes’s assertion that God is all that stands between the inner life and the object world takes on added significance. In social contract theories in particular, patriarchal figures such as God or the Sovereign serve useful purposes of preserving men from being lost in feminine “nature.” According to object relations, when threatened with engulfment by the mother, the boy turns to the abstract father, or more precisely to the rule-governed roles he provides, as a means to solidify his identity. The patriarchal figure is the constant and sole mediator between the individual boy’s interiority and the object world. But this “father” is an idealization; real fathers will likely display the same problems their sons are attempting to grapple with.

This last point is important to remember: as Bordo suggests, it is not merely the experiences of individual philosophers that have significance. In order to understand the gendered bias of epistemology and political theory, we must attend to the cultural dimensions of the supposedly individual experience of psychic development. If a culture contains certain practices, such as mother-only child rearing, that resonate psychically on individual members, this resonance will be mirrored in the culture those individuals in turn help create and transform. It is here that the greatest potential for the symbolic is situated. Cultural manifestations of psychic issues will likely represent idealized or even simplified translations of the variety that individual experience embodies; but this culture will in turn have its own effects on individual participants in a dynamic interaction. Thus Descartes’s concept of knowledge is not “merely” a manifestation of individual experience or of culture but instead reflects the interaction between these two.

Even so, this discussion ignores a final point which I find implicit in Bordo’s discussion. In spite of Descartes’s duality of mind and body, and the separation of epistemology and ontology that follows from that, his concept of knowing and knowledge follows very specifically from his concept of being. “Cogito ergo sum” and the concept of pure knowledge divorced from the body (and from the knower) operate centrally from a particular ontology. The definition of true being, of the true self, is conceptualized by Descartes as bodiless, but it is a concept of being nonetheless. And this concept influences his concept of knowledge. Perhaps, then, what is truly significant about Descartes’s philosophy is not the fact that his ontology actually does inform his epistemology but that Descartes—and the epistemologists who followed him—unconditionally denied this unity even as they implicitly operated from within it.
This same duplicity of the unconscious is explored by Flax. She even more explicitly likens Descartes's "cogito," with the insistence on pure, bodiless, rational thought, to the narcissistic phase of the preoedipal period, when the boy subjugates the mother's and the world's subjectivity to his self so that they are "seen purely as a creation of and an object for the self."47 She compares this to Plato's separation of mind and body, reason and appetite, involving an attempt to transcend the body. This further corresponds to his exclusion of (at least childbearing) women from public life. The victory of reason enables man to leave the cave/unconscious/womb, to control the world and woman/mother, to deny and subjugate her subjectivity for the security of his own.

According to object relations, the male child needs to repress and deny the subjectivity of the mother in excising the mother from the self. The female is less able to do so, both because of her greater psychic dependence on the mother and because she herself is female and therefore like her mother. Male positional identification as not-female involves the disparagement of the mother and the distancing of the self from her and all females. Recognizing this, and the fact that institutional frameworks of patriarchy have arisen interactively with this developmental process, Flax says, "Both individual male development and patriarchy are partially rooted in a need to deny the power and autonomy of women."48 The ability of boys to split off the "bad mother" is tied to patriarchy in an obvious way: if parents of both sexes shared early child rearing, then splitting off would not be an available defense maneuver, and with denial impossible, resolution would be required. As it is, the availability of this maneuver perpetuates male denigration of women, and hence perpetuates patriarchy and mother-only child rearing.

This masculine experience reverberates in political theory. Flax argues that in the rationalist theories of Descartes and Plato, the rejection of the body demonstrates a repressive solution to the oedipal dilemma and an inability to resolve satisfactorily the longings for symbiosis with the mother. Desire and the body must be split off from the self, which exists only in pure reason and knowledge, safely secured from passion and the darkness of nature. For both Plato and Descartes, "reason emerges only when nature (the female) is posited as the other with an 'inevitable' moment of domination." Through this process women "become the embodiments of the unconscious,

48Ibid., p. 245.
just as men become the embodiments of reason and law (the ego and the superego).”  

Application of object relations to social contract theories is particularly powerful, for this kind of epistemological orientation readily lends itself to hyperindividualism (or abstract individualism). Indeed, C. B. Macpherson’s criticism of Hobbes can be viewed from this perspective. The Hobbesian state of nature, marked by a high level of anxiety, particularly about wounds (which Flax specifically parallels to castration anxiety), death (destruction by the mother), deprivation of desired objects (mother’s warmth or her milk-giving breast), or frustration of passions (mother’s lack of response, punishment, repression of masturbatory impulses), is highly suggestive of the infant’s transition from the preoedipal to the oedipal phase. A central feature of Hobbes’s theory is the denial of any sort of primary human relatedness. Indeed his “mechanistic model of human nature . . . excludes the traits culturally attributed to females—sociability, nurturance, concern for dependent and helpless persons.”

The dominance of unleashed passion and desire, the prevalent fear of nongratification, of mutilation and death, as well as the inability to recognize others as autonomous and to create reciprocal relationships can be seen to parallel the infantile preoedipal dilemma. The Leviathan, represented by a single all-powerful male ruler whose word is law, provides an externalized superego with systems of rules to guide behavior. The key to Hobbes’s theory of the social contract is the belief that men cannot be self-regulating; the dangers of nature are far too powerful for mere mortal resistance. The will must be reinforced by an external system of rules, laws, and authority, which serve as powerful barriers against the self-destructive return to the state of nature.

Similarly, the boy, by attaching himself to the rules and principles of masculine roles through positional identification, relies on an externalized superego, or a system of rules external to the self, to prevent the return to symbiosis with the mother. Reliance on this external barrier involves and indeed facilitates the boy’s repression of the conflict between symbiosis and autonomy rather than its resolution. Similarly, the reliance on the Sovereign for protection from the state of nature does not resolve the conflict; this is why men “consent” to a monarchy rather than trying to govern themselves through a democ-

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49Ibid., p. 269. It should be noted that Plato’s view of women in the Republic differs from that found in the Laws, and this has generated some controversy over Plato’s views on women. See Okin (1979).

50Macpherson (1962).

racy. The moral is that man can never survive in the so-called state of nature, where the mother has the power of choice to "either nourish, or expose" the infant.52 Nor can he survive in a democratic world of reciprocity, trust, and mutuality, for in such a world the pull back toward nature and the state of war would be irresistible. Rather, men must turn to a Sovereign (the father) who creates a world of order out of perceived chaos, safety out of perceived peril, and effective freedom out of perceived absolute freedom and terror.

Although there are vast differences between Hobbes and Rousseau, Rousseau's theory also demonstrates this same psychic repression and denies any sort of primary relatedness as either natural or good. In his state of nature people are isolated from one another, contacts are fleeting, and even mothers and children separate and do not recognize each other after nursing is over. In The Origin of Inequality Rousseau argues that the ability to discern differences among people and recognize them produces an idea that cooperation is possible; but this cooperation yields mutual dependence and slavery. Love produces jealousy, inequality, violence, and finally a state of war. The solution is a social contract and a system of law.53 Again, analogies to object relations theory present themselves: the unregulated state of nature represents the very early infantile experience, where the infant is unable to differentiate the mother from anyone else and is totally self-oriented. The development of love, however, turns to fear of loss of the love object, jealousy, and slavery. The answer once again is an externalized superego, the turn to the father, and the triumph of external rules over the id. This creates the ability to separate and remain free by radical autonomy and moral freedom.

In Rousseau's polity, however, as citizens make their own laws together in the Sovereign, the rules are self-referential while at the same time they provide an external superego. I am not completely satisfied with Flax's interpretation of Rousseau because his participatory element and the structure it requires involve a high degree of contextuality and substantive fairness, which are important elements of feminist obligation. Yet Flax's framework offers some helpful interpretive tools for explaining and understanding many of Rousseau's inconsistencies. For instance, although Rousseau emphasizes moral freedom through self-legislation, he simultaneously leaps back from the precipice of that freedom to draw in the Great Legislator, a benevolent paternal figure. The prospect of individual citizens' working out their differences face to face and reaching an agreement evidently seems

52Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 254.
either too impractical or too frightening to Rousseau. Once again we see the conviction that cooperation and love yield mutual dependence and slavery, that relationships are not in men’s best interest. Connection is a dangerous thing to Rousseau and presents the risk of loss of one’s ability to perceive the general will, and thus the loss of one’s true self. Hence instead of having full access to one another, citizens should not be allowed to speak to one another prior to voting so as not to be swayed: otherwise factions and “partial associations are formed at the expense of the great association.” The self is not strong enough to withstand the will of others. External rules, as well as a patriarchal wise father, the Legislator, protect male citizens from sacrificing their true will.

Likewise, in *Emile*, Sophie is taught by patriarchal norms to repress her sexuality and autonomy so as to safeguard her husband’s. Emile cannot achieve moral freedom through an act of his own will because he is too weak; rather, Sophie herself must be repressed and dominated. The restraint that frees man’s will to obey itself comes from an object outside the self, and the superego is externalized once again. In turn, Rousseau’s fear of women’s powers results in his pointed exclusion of them from the social contract and the Assembly. Not only must women be repressed to preserve the moral freedom of men; and not only must women fulfill the role of slaves to enable democracy to continue. More significantly, women, or the mother, must be excluded from the Assembly because the Assembly makes the laws, which constitute the structure of the externalized superego. Admittance of the mother/woman to citizenship would thus destroy male autonomy: it would deny a sphere of existence totally separated and differentiated from the mother; it would undermine the rigid self-other distinction that the law is supposed to provide and on which male autonomy and moral freedom are predicated; it would destroy the barrier of safety that prevents men from being absorbed back into the darkness of nature and the no-man’s-land of cooperation and (symbiotic) connection.

Indeed, the entire society—which is structured in such a way precisely to preserve men’s liberty by the oppression of women—would fall apart. Only through women’s oppression can men discover the general will, and only through the general will can the moral freedom that civil society affords be ensured. The exaggerated fear Rousseau expresses of women echoes the male model of gender psychology: just as the boy totally rejects the mother and turns to the father and a womanless world as a fortress of safety to solidify his identity and

prevent return to the mother, so do Rousseau’s citizens forcibly keep women out of public life to protect their identity and autonomy.

The point of Bordo’s and Flax’s work, however, is not to psycho-analyze these political theorists as individuals but to develop a provocative yet plausible response to the problem of bias. As Flax asks, “What forms of social relations exist such that certain questions and ways of answering them become constitutive of philosophy?” In applying object relations directly to particular political theories, Bordo and Flax explore the dimensions of political theory that are rooted in social-structural forms of relationship; and in the process, I maintain, they reveal the ontological dimensions of the theories’ epistemologies. They reveal that the dichotomy between epistemology and ontology is not only false but a smokescreen that masks—even from the theorists themselves—their very intimate relationship.

The analysis afforded by this application of object relations theory is useful in providing a feminist methodological tool for a deeper understanding not merely of why women are excluded from the social contract but of why the conceptual frameworks require women’s exclusion. Indeed, this approach strikes at the heart of what a theory such as Macpherson’s argues: that the reality described by the social contract theorists is based on incorrect premises. This feminist interpretation suggests that these premises are not so much incorrect (or not simply incorrect) as they are the accurate representation of a faulty attempt at inner conflict resolution. That is, the description is not itself false: the experience it depicts, however, is biased and faulty. It cannot be dismissed as simply false because the world—and a kind of truth—has been created in this very image. The western world under capitalism has been to a large extent structured as a series of market relations, with the result that freedom must logically refer to the absence of external restraints, and obligation must refer to consent. In our language and conceptual history, this is what these terms mean to us. But that does not mean such a structure reflects human nature or that it describes as much of our lives as it claims to.

Relational Rationality

Another avenue taken by feminist theorists in applying gender theory to political theory lies more within the tradition of analytical philosophy than the history of thought. Theorists such as Sandra Harding and Evelyn Fox Keller focus on particular concepts that are central

to our understanding of liberal political theory in general. Harding in particular explores the concept of rationality, which is deeply operative in liberal theory. Writing from the perspective of the philosophy of science, Harding argues that the central issues and methods of modern science were (and are) specifically masculine efforts to overcome specifically feminine problems: that is, science and scientific method developed as the attempts of male scientists to master the problems posed by an unpredictable “feminine” nature.  

This enterprise ramifies on epistemology. If Descartes provided the model of knowledge for modern science, the empiricist epistemologies of Locke, Hume, and Mill resulted from the effort to make sense of the findings of modern science. Harding points out:

Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant were trying to make sense of the kind of knowledge-seeking exemplified by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. The creators of modern epistemologies were meditating upon what they understood to be a science created by individual “craft-laborers.” Their perceptions of the nature and activities of what they took to be the individual, “disembodied,” but human mind, beholden to no social commitments but the willful search for clear and certain truth, remain the foundations from which the questions we recognize as epistemological arise.

Yet we can push Harding even further here, extending her point to questions that are not normally recognized as epistemological; for her work, I contend, reveals that such questions are epistemological even though we may not commonly recognize them as such.

Arguing that science has a “social structure,” and even that “a critical and self-reflective social science,” rather than an idealized physics, “should be the model for all science,” Harding challenges the conceptualization of “objectivity,” found in modern science, which denies that the “social identity of the observer can be an important variable” in scientific research. Harding suggests that the emphasis on objectivity and the belief that truth can be achieved only through value neutrality echo specifically masculine developmental issues. As Keller argues in a similar vein, “The cognitive claims of science . . . grow out of an emotional substructure” defined by mother-only child rearing. As I discussed earlier, the male child cannot afford to recognize the mother’s subjectivity; such recognition would threaten his fragile autonomy. In order to preserve this reactive autonomy, he must see only the self as subject; (m)others must be objects. Yet this very fact

57This is also particularly noted in Keller (1985).
59Ibid., pp. 44, 26.
must itself be repressed: the male cannot recognize what he is doing, for that would equally allow the possibility of recognizing the mother’s subjectivity. If the mother is truly object, there can be nothing to repress.

Epistemology develops from these social relations of infancy. A boy’s need to distance himself from the mother and all others produces a perspective on the world, an ontology, and an epistemology that fulfill this intense need. In light of this interpretive framework, Harding and Keller both conclude that the concept of scientific objectivity developed as a gender-exclusive concept. Not only did it express the need of male practitioners to objectify and dominate the female (that is, nature), but furthermore, these practitioners could effectively deny "how women’s daily activities have shaped men’s very definitions of their worlds."61 That is, the nature of their activities allowed men to deny the reality of what they were doing. This, Harding argues, is where feminist standpoint epistemologies perform a crucial function, in creating the possibility of revealing the reality of these distorted relationships.

Rationality, the central concept of this positivist science and intimately intertwined with objectivity, is generally considered gender neutral in its scientific approach, but Harding points out its gendered character on a variety of levels. Throughout history men have ridiculed women’s thinking as irrational. But Harding insists that the concept of rationality as defined in western thought “is not only one-sided but also, in some respects, perverse.”62 The concept of rationality, viewed from the psychoanalytic perspective, can be seen as masculinist in its emphasis on rigid lines of argument and narrow channels of truth and in its appeal as independent of human construction. The very characterization of rational thought as objectivity in part reflects the male infant’s need to objectify the mother and to experience the self-other relationship as a dichotomy. Rationality so defined can be interpreted as the search for rules and norms— or the externalized superego which lies outside the mother’s domain— so characteristic of the boy’s attempt to seize masculine identity.63

Positivists will reply that rationality as a concept is something of a closed door. Like obligation, rationality has a very particular meaning in our language, which cannot be violated without our ceasing to use the word correctly. Objectivity, distance between self and other, pure deduction, and generalized, rule-governed experience constitute the definition of rationality, just as knowing divorced from being consti-

61Jbid., p. 31.
62Harding (1984), p. 44.
63See also Keller (1985), esp. chaps. 4–6.
tutes the dominant understanding of epistemology. Perhaps we need another word to express this feminist version. But my reading of Harding suggests that we must reject this response. In keeping with the standpoint assumption that “women’s subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings,” the dominant conception of rationality actively distorts both our thinking and the social relations that shape and are shaped by that thinking. The rigidity of the refusal to realize the man-made nature of the concept, the pointed exclusion of women from its exercise, its use as a tool to distance the self, and its exclusive valuation at the expense of other valuable, reasonable mental processes belie the supposed neutrality of rationality and call for a new understanding of the word.

In this light it is precisely the fact that masculine development, like feminine development, exhibits elements of pathology which influences the gender bias of institutions and theories. The elaborate creation of rules to establish “appropriate relations between mind and body, reason and the emotions, self and external world, will and desire” is so important precisely because these relationships were “painfully sundered for men in their infancy.” The girl’s less severe separation from the mother, relative to the boy’s experience—and hence her “inability” to objectify the mother—is seen as a failure to develop. Female experience is viewed as regressive compared with the standards set by male theorists to reflect their own experience. The construction of the world, on this view, has been structured precisely to answer the psychic needs of its creators.

Not so coincidentally, the dominant conception of rationality as objectivity also echoes Kohlberg’s sixth stage of moral development. By thinking rationally, anyone can scientifically apply the rules to arrive at a decision that is “just,” or “correct,” or “moral.” Yet Gilligan’s work suggests that rationality as procedure, with its emphasis on rules and process at the expense of substance and context, takes on a decidedly masculinist tint. The abstraction of rationality is not a universal good, nor even universal per se. Indeed, my earlier use of Gilligan’s argument is echoed in Harding’s assertion that a major goal of liberal theory is the adjudication of competing rights of “generalized

66In personal conversation Harding has taken issue with my choice of the words ability and failure, because she holds that girls’ nonobjectifying qualities are strengths of the female model of development. I do not imply any derogation in my reference to females’ “inability” to objectify the mother. I merely wish to emphasize that, whereas boys are psychically required to objectify the mother, it is exceedingly difficult for girls to do so even though they may wish to, because of their intense identification.
autonomous individuals." But the goal of "resolving conflicting responsibilities to particular and dependent others"—a question of greater concern historically and psychically to women—is not considered important. Indeed, it is not even granted the validity of conceptualization and articulation in mainstream thought.

The positivist still might reply that all we need to do is reevaluate what we consider rational and irrational along nonsexist lines; all we need is to be more "objective" in our assessment of objectivity and rationality. But this response fails to acknowledge the depth of the problems that rationality poses. For it is precisely the difference in conclusion—not the adherence to procedure—that has served as evidence of women's supposed irrationality. That is, the fact of different conclusions produces the assumption that the procedure has been misused. But this assumption implicitly requires very particular values as premises and conclusions, and these reflect particularly masculine experience. The gender bias of rationality, which exerts certain constraints on the content of thought and conclusions, belies rationality's status as a procedural tool for reaching conclusions based on particular premises. It highlights the fact that rationality is not in fact pure procedure but rather that procedure requires substantive values to serve as a framework for thought processes. After all, if rationality were truly only a procedure, then the fact of different conclusions historically reached by women—different values, priorities, and moral judgments—would be insufficient to establish the notion that women cannot think rationally. Such a claim betrays that rationality is not merely or purely procedure; and thus a myriad of values can be considered to fall within the framework of rationality.

The masculinist construction of rationality contradicts its own values. On this level the positivist's suggestion that we need to think nonsexistly about rationality is inadequate. On a deeper level, this construction of rationality also presupposes that procedure itself is singular and uniform and fails to recognize the ways in which substance informs and influences procedure. The assertion that rationality is pure procedure excludes women by the power of two. Not only is "pure" rationality not value free, contrary to its formal claims, but also the values that actually inform this concept of rationality work with and from the exclusion and objectification of women. Be-

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66This is the "feminist empiricist" conclusion, which Harding (1986) describes as a belief that "sexism and androcentrism are biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry" (p. 24). Harding rejects this approach, although she also maintains that the "successor science" project of the feminist standpoint is also problematic, as I have briefly indicated. See also Lloyd (1984) and Di Stefano (1990) for a discussion of the feminist rationalist argument.
cause of the formal claim to value neutrality, however, the attempt to identify these values is difficult at best. The masculinist model of rationality as pure thought divorced from concrete experience, the implicit claim that this reasoning is value free, and the automatic rejection of "the female" as rational ensure that women's experience, values, and thought, grounded in connectedness and human relationship, will always appear irrational by definition.

Rationality defined as objective thought is not only exclusive of women but harmful to them, because it is premised on particular concrete values, specifically on a notion of woman as object as a means to disempower and distance the mother. In contrast, a feminist construction of rationality, Harding's "relational rationality"—akin to Keller's "dynamic objectivity" and Ernest Schactel's "allocentric," or other-centered, perspective—embodies the values, experiences, and psychic needs of women's lives. Indeed, Keller defines dynamic objectivity as "a pursuit of knowledge that makes use of subjective experience . . . in the interests of a more effective objectivity." Likening the scientist's "attention to the natural world" to an "ideal attention to the human world," she calls it "a form of love." And she links both to dynamic autonomy: "The capacity for such attention, like the capacity for love and empathy, requires a sense of self secure enough to tolerate both difference and continuity; it presupposes the development of dynamic autonomy."70

Harding similarly argues that the concept of a rational person may represent (historically or otherwise) different values for women, such as the ability to empathize and connect with others. Like Gilligan and Chodorow in particular, she points to relationship, connection, and emotion as central values of this feminist model of rationality; thus a rational person "wants to learn more complex and satisfying ways to take the role of the particular other in relationships" as a means of understanding and solving problems resulting from relational life. On this model, "A rational person naturally has problems when there is too little connection with particular others and when she is expected only to take the role of the generalized other," a requirement of women under patriarchy and the masculinist definition of rationality.71 Beginning from these different premises, the procedural aspects of rationality yield vastly different conclusions from those reached by "malestream" thought. But, more important, these premises also suggest alternate procedures.

69Keller (1985), chap. 6, borrows from Schactel's Metamorphosis.
Of course, it would be incorrect to say that women cannot and do not think rationally along the masculinist model, and I do not intend this implication. Because this rationality is premised on the objectification of women, however, women's adaptation to this thought is not necessarily an unqualified good. Asserting that women can think rationally along the male model is not enough. It is insufficient to open the door and allow for a wider variety of underlying assumptions merely to change rationality's contingent connections with substantive beliefs and values that are of a masculinist character. As Helen Longino and Ruth Doell ask, is the problem of sexist science that it is "bad science," or "science as usual?"\footnote{Longino and Doell (1983), p. 207. See also Harding (1986), chap. 6, esp. p. 138.}

Perhaps it is a bit of both. The problem of a sexist conception of rationality is a problem of bad thinking or bad philosophy, but it is not just bad philosophy; it is also philosophy as usual. We need to recognize the sexist inconsistencies of our dominant conceptions of rationality—its contingent sexism. But this recognition further requires us to recognize its structural sexism, and thus to change the very definition of rationality and the methodology by which we achieve that definition. This is necessary to ensure that other modes of thought, and not just other thoughts, are recognized as valuable. Once we can do that, we may find that perhaps it is not justice formally defined that is the truly central concept in the political theory that is supposed to reflect our lives; perhaps it is what Harding calls "social welfare," and other values that Gilligan and Chodorow attribute to women. A feminist relational rationality would not only allow for women's entry into the public realm by providing recognition of their thought processes as valuable, and hence their access to knowledge as real; it could also thereby reconstitute the public and the political. It could redefine what is primary in our considerations of political and social life.

\textit{Power and Epistemology}

These arguments extend to more traditional and substantive concepts in political theory such as obligation, authority, and justice. Hartsock undertakes an analysis of dominant conceptions of power as specifically masculinist. In particular, she holds that the conceptualization of power as domination reflects specifically masculine psychosexual development under patriarchy. Like those of Bordo, Flax, and Harding, Hartsock's arguments unite epistemology and ontology.
The conception of power as domination has been a central force throughout history in shaping our political institutions and theories, such as obligation, as well as our conceptions of love, relationship, and community. It has arisen from and in turn strengthened and reinforced an epistemology centered on domination and a self-other dichotomy. But as Hartsock reveals, women’s material experience as wives and mothers and their psychosexual development as daughters generate a perspective on knowledge and reality that is at odds with this masculinist perspective. She traces the roots and development of the conception of power as domination and examines its ramifications for our thought, our theories, and our politics; and she also demonstrates that a feminist theory of power, reflecting the values and experiences of women’s lives, embodies notions of capacity, energy, and empowerment.

Of the theorists discussed in this chapter, Hartsock is the most overtly committed to standpoint epistemology. Indeed, her essay “The Feminist Standpoint” introduced the concept and method to feminist theory. Hartsock’s argument involves more than psychology, however; for her, the standpoint is based on material activity. Her analysis of this experience is multifaceted, working from a marxist-feminist notion that material life shapes consciousness. Although Marx may not have had anything in mind other than the relations of production when he suggested this, attention to and recognition of the material conditions of women’s lives and the processes of reproduction, housework, and family care lead us to understand how women’s consciousness and world view is oriented toward a concept of a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

In housework, a woman has “contact with material necessity,” something she shares with factory workers in distinction to capitalists, but her contact is different. First, she works longer hours (the double day) and is more involved in the production of use-values than of commodities. Second, the nature of repetition is different, for she produces for her family to consume: her meals are prepared to be eaten immediately, her laundry is cleaned so that it may be worn again and soiled. This contrasts qualitatively with the repetition of a factory worker; not only is it in his interest that people wish to replace products, for he is paid for his work (as the housewife is not), but also the futility is not nearly as apparent. An automobile transmission may break down after six years, a cog wear out after six months, but that is qualitatively different from the daily, even hourly replacement engaged in by women.³³ Third, the woman’s work is centered directly

on the production of people, most obviously in pregnancy and parturition, but also in daily nurturance, whether through being an understanding listener, preparing a favorite food, or getting a child ready for school. Women usually supply the emotional "glue" that keeps families and relationships going. Such affective work is a key aspect of women's labor which is generally ignored by male theorists.\textsuperscript{74} The significance is that "if the institutionalized structure of human activity generates an ontology and epistemology, and if the activity of women differs systematically from that of men, we must ask whether epistemology is structured by gender as well."\textsuperscript{75} Epistemology arises from ontology, ways of knowing from ways of being.

This materialist theory may seem to have little to do with my consideration of object relations theory, for the results Chodorow details might be seen to arise somewhat passively from mothering arrangements, and not necessarily from any particular or even consciously performed activities engaged in by women. Object relations may even seem inappropriately esoteric compared with a marxist materialism. Yet such a response considers mother-only child rearing abstractly. After all, the point of object relations' findings of gender differences depends on the active engagement of the mother in such daily caretaking activities as feeding, changing, cleaning, supervising, teaching, playing, and communicating. Without these activities, the child would not be able to develop normally, even to survive. My failure to focus heavily on such activities by no means implies a belief that they are unimportant. Thus, although I do not discuss in detail this aspect of Hartsock's work in favor of, in my view, the more important arguments she makes concerning eros and sexuality, such activities stand as an assumed background for my discussion of mother-only child rearing as a practice. This same reasoning may be why Hartsock refers to object relations theory as "materialist psychology."\textsuperscript{76} The analysis it provides, while focusing on the psychic development of the infant, bases that development not on biology (the absence or presence of a penis) or nature, but on a socially constructed relationship of affective production.

Central to Hartsock's argument is the notion that (masculine) sexuality and a particular concept of eros are at the root of the conceptualization of power as domination. It is this aspect of her work that holds the most potential for clarifying the ontological dimensions of epistemology. She only loosely connects this notion to liberal theory—she is far more concerned with ancient thought—but she does

\textsuperscript{74}See also di Leonardo (1984) and Ferguson (1984) for similar arguments.

\textsuperscript{75}Hartsock (1984), p. 9.

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., p. 238.
not discuss its full implication. Yet it is this aspect of her theory that is best able to explain the implications of power as domination, and masculinized eros, for obligation. Although she refers only relatively briefly to object relations (she focuses more on the psychology of sexuality, and particularly the work of Robert Stoller), it is my contention that a reading of her work from the perspective of object relations and moral psychology can reveal the ontological dimensions of her feminist standpoint epistemology.

Because men (as fathers) are divorced from reproduction and nurturance, and because of the sexual division of labor when men are raised by women, men’s experience (as sons grown up) has tended to be less continuous, more fragmented, both psychically and materially, than women’s. As feminist psychoanalytic theory allows us to see, the “key structuring experience” for men in mother-only child rearing is the “fear of ceasing to exist as a separate being . . . because of the threat posed by a woman.” Because of the son’s need to repress the mother and excise the female, connection with the mother/woman is seen as dangerous. The only way in which connection is allowable is through domination.

As I have shown, because of positional identification with abstract roles, masculinity develops negatively, as not-female; the son thus feels compelled to excise his primary female identity and repress his mother in himself. But these female aspects of his original psychic identity are too deeply embedded to be truly excised. And because gender is considered exclusionary, the intense struggle that results is resolved in the only way available. That is, the son devalues and dehumanizes his mother, denying her existence, belittling the importance of his relation to her. He tries to dominate her and his feelings for her by controlling who and what she is. This applies by extension to all other women as well: “Intimacy with a woman is so dangerous that she must be reduced to a nonentity or made into a thing.”

Because of the repression of this central relationship, the son is compelled to belittle the significance of all relationships, for he must fear connection with others as posing the danger of merging and loss of self. This is particularly true when a man engages in a love relationship with a woman, for in such a relationship is expressed “the dynamic of undoing childhood traumas and frustrations.” In sexual relations, particularly through intercourse for a man, a return to the mother is attempted; for him, intercourse is the “return to the
womb," a "return to oneness." Yet such interaction, while psychically gratifying, is dangerous, for it poses the risk of losing one's self and merging back into the (m)other. The solution is to repeat and perpetuate the same devaluation of the female love object as was done to the mother, and, most important, to dominate and control her.

Thus masculine eros reveals a central construction of relationship as domination. In masculine sexuality, Hartsock argues, domination is the prevalent characteristic, involving the subordination, objectification, and often the victimization and brutalization of women. Through sexual relations with a woman, the male tries to revisit his early frustrations experienced as an infant back onto his mother, as well as his "rage at giving up the early identification with the mother and concomitant ecstasies of fantasy, the fear of failing to differentiate oneself from the mother, and a need for revenge on her for putting one in this situation." This has resulted in a plethora of perversions of the concept of eros: the phallocentrism of heterosexual relations involving the denial and ignorance of female sexuality and sexual desire (or, even more effectively, its classification as perversion in itself); the far greater incidence, as Stoller notes, of "gross hostility or eroticized hatred" in masculine sexuality than feminine; the association of sex with violence and brutality and the eroticization of female victimization as depicted in literature, film, television, and popular music; the pervasiveness of rape, which, although an age-old offense, has in modern times a particularly gruesome connection with dismemberment and serial killings, and is currently on the rise in the United States; pornography, which bases itself on the victimization

82Ibid., p. 163.
83Ibid., p. 162. She documents this finding in the work of Stoller, Kinsey, Dworkin, Millet, and Maslow. See pp. 157–60 and her notes to chap. 7 for more specific references.
84According to the Uniform Crime Reports for the 1980s, rape has increased at a rate three times greater than the increase in overall violent crime. In 1980 there were 13,408,300 violent crimes and 82,990 rapes; in 1990 the overall violent crime rate rose to 14,393,915 for a 7.35 percent increase, while rape increased to 103,005, an increase of 21.12 percent (I thank the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee for this information). Increases in rape are often attributed to increased reporting of rape. But the Bureau of Justice Statistics survey for 1986 suggests that the incidence of rape has also increased in real numbers. That is, whereas rape in 1986 increased by 10.9 percent over 1985 (compared with an overall 5.5 percent decrease in all violent crimes), the survey indicates that reporting of rape to the police may have declined by 20.4 percent since 1985. See New York Times, April 13, 1986, B–4. For more recent statistics, see the following New York Times articles on the increase in rape: April 21, 1987, C–2; January 1, 1988,
Implications for a Feminist Epistemology

of women,⁶⁵ fetishism, which reduces a woman to a part of her body, to a thing, thus relieving the man of having to confront a woman as a person. These are all in part defensive maneuvers, Hartsock says, “to avoid intimacy and fusion with another,” to deny the humanity of women and thus assist men in maintaining their gender identity and ego boundaries.

Eros and power are deeply connected, and when eros takes negative, masculine forms that point toward death rather than life, the community as a whole will be structured by those dynamics. . . Masculine experience, when replicated as epistemology, leads to a world conceived of (and in fact) inhabited by a number of fundamentally hostile others whom one comes to know by means of opposition (even death struggle) and yet with whom one must construct a social relation in order to survive.⁶⁶

Masculine ontology gives rise to a way of looking at the world—an epistemology—which requires a conceptualization of power as domination. As Hartsock points out, male writers from Plato to Bataille and Mailer have defined human nature in such a way that death is life, birth is death; eros is destructive rather than liberating; the body is irrelevant to the self; what is true is not subject to natural change; relations exist by choice; love is power, domination, and hateful destruction; mistrust and hostility spur the only true creation; “political community as community exists only on the battlefield”; and glory and honor—immortality—are preeminent over life.⁶⁷ These inversions run contrary to women’s experience and perspective, in which birth is life, love creates, nature constantly changes what is real, and social


⁶⁵There is controversy among feminists about the issue of victimization. But even if there are many voluntary female participants in pornography, the prevalence of runaway teenagers’ being coerced into the industry is an undeniable social problem. Furthermore, many would argue that women’s “voluntary” participation demonstrates the success of the male pornography industry at masking the reality of victimization. See Griffin (1978, 1981), Dworkin (1981), Colker (1983), Lederer (1980), DeCew (1984).


⁶⁷Hartsock (1984), p. 188; see her chaps. 7 and 8 for more detailed discussion. One might point out that certain female writers also follow this norm; Hannah Arendt is famous for her scorn of the private sphere, claiming that the only truly human realm of action is the public. But Hartsock also points out that Arendt’s concept of power—like that of other female theorists who have written on the subject—rejects the masculinist conceptualization of domination in favor of the concept of empowerment. Here would be a case for the standpoint’s being specifically gender linked and not entirely self-conscious. See Hartsock (1984), chap. 9.
relations often exist not by choice though nonetheless desirably. A theory of power from a feminist standpoint would stress "aspects related to energy, capacity, and potential" rather than domination. Thus, a feminist standpoint, and theories deriving from it, reflect an "opposition to dualism, a sense of a variety of interconnectedness and continuity both with other persons and with the natural world." It embodies an ontology that hearkens more to Gilligan's "web of relationships" than to a linear series of dyadic oppositions. It embodies a multilevel and interactive complex of connections and relations. A feminist standpoint allows us to see the fundamental misconstruction of social relations in terms of hostility. It does this by recognizing that women cannot escape or repress the fact, because they live it, that "we are born helpless and begin life with a relation that can only with great difficulty be described as an exchange relation—that between mother and infant." Because of the sexual division of labor, men not only can repress and escape this fact but feel compelled to do so, and indeed have created theories and practices precisely to aid them in the effort to escape.

According to Hartsock, the masculinist concept of power and the "inversions" it entails are particularly realized in the literature of ancient Greece. The oedipal fears of intimacy, fusion, and loss of self are "memorialized in the construction of the agonal political world of the warrior-hero (and later the citizen) as a world of hostile and threatening others to whom one relates by means of rivalry and competition for dominance." But what about the implications for modern thought? Parallel to her discussion of eros and ancient Greece, Hartsock presents a marxist analysis of the market society of modern thought and liberal democratic society. She traces the development of "communities of exchange," market societies where the rules of exchange serve as the tenuous and abstract links between otherwise wholly discrete individuals. This community is "arbitrary and fragile, structured fundamentally by competition and dominance."

Yet Hartsock strongly differentiates between the community of exchange and the community of eros both as they affect women and as they have structured institutions, social relations, and epistemology. Although there are obvious parallels and synchronicities between the class domination produced by the market and the gender domination

88Ibid., p. 210. Once again Hartsock's materialist approach takes a slightly different direction than does my interpretation. She would argue that this concept of power more accurately reflects women's material experience of labor as people very much involved in empowering other people, especially their children, in helping them grow and develop their capacities and potential.

89Ibid., pp. 242, 41.

90Ibid., pp. 252, 38.
of community formed by masculine eros, the latter is far more pernicious and repressive to women than the former, she maintains. In market societies, even though the relation between buyer and seller is exploitive, at least “each left the market (even after the purchase or sale of labor power) with something they did not possess before the transaction (money or commodity).” In contrast, the ancient Greek “opposition of victory to death or dishonor does not present a situation in which one can argue that both sides gain, even if they do not gain equally.”

Nevertheless, her analysis of the community of masculine eros deepens our understanding of the domination found in market relations, and this is crucial to any comprehension of the structural sexism of its key concepts such as contract and obligation. Hartsock’s analysis of eros is particularly useful in showing how we can view market society and ideology as specifically masculinist constructs, as products of gender even more than class. Indeed, I think much of her analysis of eros can be applied to the market far more directly than she indicates. Even though the community of masculine eros apparent in ancient Greece may have overtly expressed the hostility of domination, I would offer the thesis that the community of exchange, or market society, represses the overt hostility and sublimates it into forms of action that express the same hostility, but in subtler—and perhaps more insidious—form.

The first point to note is that repression and sublimation do not equal resolution. That is, the market may present less ostensible violence against women, but the fact that the same fears are repressed and sublimated through the market, and not resolved by mutual recognition and equal respect, merely means that they will be expressed differently. Hartsock is correct that women of the eighteenth century were better off than women of ancient Greece. The principle of equality that the social contract theorists espoused logically required them to grant limited equality to women in the state of nature or even in

\[\text{\cite{Ibid.}, p. 202.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{9}}\text{In the final chapter of Fortune Is a Woman—an excellent example of the interpretive power to be found in the application of feminist psychoanalytic theory to individual political philosophers in the history of thought—Hanna Pitkin (1984) argues that although repression produces bad results, sublimation results in good things such as “artistic, scientific or cultural endeavor.” She says, “Without sublimation, without the rechanneling of libidinal energy into acculturation, we could not become human persons at all” (p. 317). It is correct to note, however, that sublimation can produce both good and bad effects and take positive and negative forms. After all, many “accepted” channels into which libidinal energy can be sublimated express the cultural repression of the fear of women: misogyny is “accepted.” Sublimation into a channel that culturally expresses a collective neurosis will not provide a release from that neurosis. Accordingly, resolution must be distinguished from sublimation.}\]
the family. But they all, including Locke (theoretically for reasons of efficiency in having the family speak with one voice, but also because of the Old Testament), assert the primacy of men as fathers, husbands, and citizens, which justifies robbing women of control over themselves, a political voice, and any form of power (masculinistly defined). As Rousseau most obviously demonstrated, men’s fear of the power of the mother/woman and the attempt to restrain her in self-defense results in her total exclusion from public life, her disempowerment.

There are many subtle ways in which the market is based on a deep hostility toward women comparable to that expressed in community based on eros. Indeed, the first and most basic form of sublimated violence found in the market can be seen to be the isolation of market man’s abstract individualism. Gilligan postulated that for men, violence is found in connection. In her studies men associated danger with images of connection and responded to pictures and narratives portraying intimacy and relationship by offering stories with violent resolutions that severed relationship and connection. Isolation is considered safe, so how can it be a sublimation for violence? In the first place, we should remember that the women in her study perceived violence in isolation; they constructed stories of brutality and death (usually happening to the woman in the story rather than being caused by her) resulting from isolation, whether it was isolation at the top of a hierarchy, on the edge of a circle, or in a dark alley. Safety and truth were seen in connection. Thus, from a rather simplistic perspective that considers only women’s point of view, we could say that isolation stimulates violence.

But the analysis goes much deeper than this. To say that isolation breeds violence just because women think so would be to replicate the masculinist methodology critiqued here. For if men see safety in isolation, and structure their social contacts to preserve that isolation, then why are men, as the literature on the subject documents, so much more violent than women? One possible response is that life cannot be constructed on the market model. Because of the centrality of human relationships to human life, men who view danger in relationship must nevertheless engage in relationships; hence, they are repeatedly forced to react violently. That is, we could take men’s greater violence as evidence that abstract individualism is indeed a myth, that it is a sublimation of men’s fear of connection, an attempt to repress that fear by denying it. The fear of connection—of re-merging with the mother—can be conquered only through domination of

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93 See Stoller (1973) and references in Hartsock (1984), chap. 7.
the other and by the false and exaggerated assertion of independence. This is the necessary implication of abstract individualism: an ideology that asserts one’s isolation and total independence serves as a barrier to the return to the mother. The isolation of abstract individualism can be seen in this way as an expression of hostility toward the mother, a further attempt to gain recognition through domination.

Abstract individualism results in a society that is hostile and harmful to the mother/woman in other ways. By extension, it creates and promotes as necessary and good competition between discrete individuals for the realization of their interests. Each individual tries to promote his or her interests and gain as much as she or he can while giving up as little as possible; that is, one tries to gain recognition through realization of one’s interests. Such recognition, as Hegel noted, requires granting the other some minimal recognition in turn to make one’s own recognition have value: what Jessica Benjamin dubs “the master’s dilemma.”94 Hence the self must give something—but just enough to make sure the other can grant worthy recognition, and not enough to lose the struggle for that recognition. On the market model, one seeks to gain dominance through commodities. The definition of a “good deal” (as opposed to a “fair price”) is one that allows us to gain more than we give. The standards for goodness in the market are measured by gain—and, by necessary extension, owing to the concept of limited resources, by the other’s loss. As Hartsock points out, the duality of the market ensures “reciprocal exclusion of ownership.” The epistemology created by the market model, Hartsock argues, is one of dualism: exchange/use, quantity/quality, society/nature, mind/body, and the “reciprocal exclusion of ownership concerning two sets of commodities” that is involved in wage labor. These dualisms define the very being of such communities, ordering the definition of community and humanity. Within Hartsock’s standpoint framework, this ontology of opposition and hostility create and work with a specific epistemology that reflects dualism as well: the “world conceived of (and in fact) inhabited by a number of fundamentally hostile others whom one comes to know by means of opposition (even death struggle) and yet with whom one must construct a social relation in order to survive” describes market society as well as ancient Greece.95 Indeed, in the best of deals, one “makes a killing” or “wipes out” the competition; one gains all at the expense of the other’s loss.

The social contract provides a system of rules, laws, and limitations

94Benjamin (1980).
on this interaction: it acts as an externalized superego. The social contract enables the (male) citizen to engage in the struggle for domination and recognition relatively safely. It preserves men from the return to seductive nature, which lures them to gain more and more by going to greater and more violent lengths to gain what they want (thus reverting to the state of war), an echo of the notion that the boy's positional identification with abstract roles and rules helps preserve him against the return to the tempting state of symbiosis. Furthermore, through the institutionalized division of private and public in the sexual division of labor, even men who fare less well or even fail in the market have in the private sphere a permanent other, a minimally recognized recognizer. Thus the market is also able to play off the dualisms it serves to perpetuate and which in turn perpetuate the market. The view of the home as a "haven in a heartless world" is just that for market man. It provides a replenishment of ensured recognition by an already securely dominated other, which enables man to reaffirm his identity in order to go forth the next day to compete with perhaps worthier but also more formidable opponents.

Indeed, this situation would seem to solve the "master's dilemma." By controlling the degree and forms of recognition of the other, by creating a separate sphere of real activity within which the other can work to provide real necessities and conveniences while at the same time maintaining a mythology that devalues this realm and eschews necessity as inhuman, the (masculine) self can sustain a controlled recognition of the (feminine) other: that is, just enough to make the other's uncontrolled and complete recognition of men worthwhile but not so much as to make the female other equal to the self, not enough to let the slave stop being a slave.

The attempt to gain dominance through commodities is an important link to the violence against women expressed in the market. Al-

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96Lasch (1977).

97This "replenishing" can be seen to mirror the "emotional refueling" that occurs in the practicing stage of preoedipal development. As we saw earlier (see especially Flax [1978]), the child explores her or his motor skills and independence but must return to the mother for the reassurance that she is still there and still part of the child. If we apply this observation to market society, however, this minimal recognition would seem to go only so far in granting men a secure base. For instance, many men committed suicide immediately after the stock market crash of 1929; "wiped out" in the market, they seemed to view this loss as worse than physical death. Their wives were equally affected in the economic sense yet did not commit suicide. Were these men overcome by their frailty and sense of loss against the monster of the market? Did being poor make them feel like a nobody, an unrecognized other? Was total loss considered total defeat, total domination? Did women not commit suicide because of their different moral orientation toward responsibility—that is, "having to live for the sake of the children," and so on—or because, as other already, they did not feel the effects of this ultimate loss? Or are both answers true?
though women are not sacrificed for battle or crops in market societies, they are commodified. As Gayle Rubin notes, women have been and still are viewed by much of the world as commodities, as objects to be bartered, traded, and offered as gifts of political reconciliation or alliance.  

This held true in modified form in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe and colonial America with the endurance of the dowry and the fact that women could not marry without paternal consent. For example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when social contract theory was developing and exerting its influence on political thinking, the concept of women as property was evident in the legal provision that “no man shall be deprived of his wife and children, no man’s goods or estate shall be taken away from him . . . unless it be by . . . some express law of the country.” Married women who were raped or were otherwise victims of assault could not bring suit for damages under tort law; only husbands could do so, and if the husband was missing, the woman was usually out of luck except for the possibility of a special bill granting her the right to bring suit in a particular instance. Furthermore, only the claims of white husbands were recognized.

In turn, husbands were sued for their wives’ tortious acts, but their liability extended only to financial compensation. Corporal punishment was meted out to women, thus extending a nonreciprocal and inconsistent position on the recognition of women as responsible agents under the law; that is, although denied equal rights, they were required to shoulder equal responsibility. The point here, however, is not just that women were denied rights but that they were controlled as objects, disempowered and made subject to men,

98Rubin (1975).
99Smith (1961), p. 209. Although it can also be argued that dowries granted women a degree of independence and status, the characterization of marriage as a market, so wittily depicted in the novels of Jane Austen, holds true to the theme of women as barter. Of course, women of wealth have always had more status and power than women of the lower classes.
100The Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1814), chap. 4, sec. 1, p. 44. I do not mean to imply that the social contract theories created these laws; the laws preexisted the theories. Rather, I wish to highlight that this political milieu cannot be isolated from the theories that developed in them.
103Morris (1959), p. 185.
104Indeed, in the case of rape the burden of responsibility lay squarely on the woman not to be raped. This is certainly not an uncommon notion, but it is highlighted by a remarkable case in seventeenth-century western Massachusetts. When one John Bennett was sued by John Stiles for defaming the latter’s wife, “saying that she was a light woman and that he could have a leape on her when he pleased,” the court gave the defendant nine days to prove his allegation! He could (or did) not and was forced to pay John Stiles forty shillings. Smith (1961), p. 236.
were made victims of violence without recourse, and were dominated as the commodified other.

In more obvious fashion, prostitution, and in more contemporary times pornography, are key aspects of the market involving the commodification of women. The essential nature of prostitution is that a man sells a woman to other men; he controls her, controls access to her, and controls the money her body brings. Whereas in prostitution it can be argued that some women have some control—not all prostitutes necessarily have pimps, and some procurers are women—pornography is a different matter. Pornography is a predominantly, if not totally, male-controlled industry and is based largely on the victimization of women and children, as Susan Griffin so compellingly argues. In pornography, not only are women’s bodies commodified, but their identity and subjectivity are also considered commodities. Their degradation—women being forced to eat excrement, women enjoying being beaten and raped—is the package to be sold. Indeed, so-called snuff films, in which the actress is apparently killed on screen, are the ultimate expression of the violence of such commodification of women. Here woman’s life is the commodity that a man takes by trickery in the course of market transactions. Here is the ultimate in market man’s “making a killing.”

These remarks are obviously meant to be suggestive rather than to provide an exhaustive defense; but they support the notion that the market is another form of the violent struggle for selfhood and identity. When we combine the supposedly gender-neutral struggle for identity with an understanding of object relations theory, we can see that this conception of recognition through struggle and dominance is a specifically masculinist vision. And when we see the ways it comports with women’s inferior status in the market as well as the active harm they receive at its hands, then the connection can be more clearly drawn between the exchange of the market and the violence of eros.

The significance of this connection goes beyond the substantive arguments of any of the theorists discussed in this chapter and leads to an understanding of how the epistemologies of obligation theories

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105I would not want to overstate the power of women in prostitution, however. The vast majority of procurers are male, and indeed prostitution is often virtually inseparable from procurement. Furthermore, the fact that female procurers are generally former prostitutes is significant in attesting to the patriarchal character of prostitution. See Barry (1979).

106Griffin (1981). I say “predominantly” rather than “entirely,” even though I refer to Griffin’s work, because of the controversy within feminism over pornography (see note 85). I distinguish here between erotica and pornography in assuming the latter involves the victimization of women.
Implications for a Feminist Epistemology

contain gender biases. If the theories' epistemological frameworks are an important source of the problem of political obligation, and if these frameworks are themselves masculinist responses to the need to dominate the female, then the sexism of these theories cannot be eliminated without a profound and fundamental alteration of the theories. This problem also suggests that the central concept of these theories—consent—may itself, like rationality, be epistemologically masculinist and may require a total reconstruction if it is to accommodate women as equals.

The feminist theories discussed here do not merely pick apart various elements of social contract theory and reveal them as sexist; they implicitly question the entire epistemological foundation of those theories. They reveal that the ideas from which social contract theory works—the intellectual device of the state of nature and, by extension, the ethical values of equality and particularly freedom that stem from it—are products of specific social relations (for example, child rearing) of a particular kind (that is, mother-only and patriarchal). It shows, furthermore, that these ideas are not just casual by-products of a "natural" relationship, or of "pure" knowledge, but are rather specifically and purposively created products, whether that purpose is conscious or not.

These feminist theories at least implicitly demand the reunion of epistemology and ontology and urge us to base the former on the latter. They are all—Harding's criticisms notwithstanding—standpoint theories. They hold that men and women have differing ontologies, in part because of different psychic development. These experiences create different epistemological frameworks from which politics and ethics are derived. This feminist perspective allows us to see that "precisely because knowing and being cannot be separated, we must know how to be. To do so requires a transformation of knowledge adequate to our being and which points us beyond its present distorted forms." By seeing the faults of our being—the gendered selves we develop out of socially constructed relations of

107 Harding is not the only theorist to appear ambivalent in adopting a standpoint approach. Flax (1986, 1990), in contrast to her 1983 essay, also seems to reject standpoint epistemology in favor of postmodernism. She says: "Any feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial. Each person who tries to think from the standpoint of women may illuminate some aspects of the social totality which have been previously suppressed with the dominant view. But none of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists except within a specific set of (already gendered) relations—to 'man' and to many concrete and different women." Flax (1986), p. 37. But, as Harding points out in both the 1983 and 1986 essays Flax really links postmodernism with standpoint epistemology. Harding (1986), pp. 151–55. Furthermore, in her 1991 book Harding allies herself more explicitly with standpoint epistemology once again.

108 Flax (1983), p. 271. In keeping with the standpoint's Hegelian and Marxian legacy, Flax suggests that dialectics is a way to begin the development of a "more adequate"
reproduction—we can more easily see what the faults of the dominant epistemology are and why those faults exist.

As I have argued, a central fault of modernist epistemologies is the contention that knowing, if not knowledge, is the same for everyone, though humans may feel and desire quite differently from one another. This assertion creates an image of a uniform public world that is knowable to all in the same way, and a private world that is not only unpredictable but inaccessible to all but the self. Since women solely occupy the private realm, they become the literal embodiment of such unpredictability and the locus of irrationality. This further justifies their exclusion from the public realm as it is defined to exclude the characteristics that it is designed to produce in women. Consent, as a central aspect of this epistemological framework, is thus similarly based on the exclusion of women. As Jean Bethke Elshtain points out, what makes contract possible, and makes it further an essentially public act, is that “the same knowledge is shared by all and that the public sphere is the only sphere in which this holds.” Contract, as the quintessential public act, is thus also the quintessential expression of this exclusion. “The ‘voice’ of woman . . . of privatized, irrational desire” and “cloying sentiment,” is absolutely incapable of speaking the language of contract, and hence of making contracts.\(^{109}\)

This is certainly true for Locke, for whom language is a “system of external signs” and symbols rather than a complex social activity that links inner and outer.”\(^{110}\) If women have a different voice, their lack of facility with the language of contract inhibits their ability to partake in the practice. In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* Locke holds that, because of the weakness of our senses, on which we are dependent for knowledge, we cannot know the “real essence” of things and of man. We can know only the “nominal essence”; that is, we can

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\(^{109}\)Elshtain (1981), p. 118. Certainly there are private components to consent, as in promising; but the contract is explicitly public. Some might point to marriage as a private contract, but this would deny the degree to which the state regulates the institution, from licenses to the legal status of women in marriage to divorce law. In some ways this is not a bad thing; for, given women’s political and social inferiority, marriage is in fact a public and very political relationship. My point here is that rather than simply remove the protections the state provides along with its intrusions, we must change the institution of marriage itself fundamentally if it is to become a truly “private” relationship.

know only a thing's nature as it is determined by the way in which we classify it. This classification is manifested in language, which is to a degree arbitrary; that is, words have no necessary relation to the things they represent. Language is a system of contingent or accidental regularities for Locke; it is not the product of rules or conventions. Although it enables us to communicate, this regularity cannot overcome the basic atomism of humans. A word or a name does not give us information to form ideas; one must develop thoughts or ideas directly from the phenomenon. This, of course, means that communication between humans is severely limited in its effectiveness. We will never be able to communicate our perceptions satisfactorily.

Yet simultaneous with this extremely individualistic view of knowledge and language, Locke wishes to situate individuals within a social context, namely, civil society. How can individuals with such severely limited abilities to communicate ever come to agreement on a social contract? The conflict between atomism and sociability gives rise to the conceptualization of man as "naturally" free, to the problem of inalienable rights, and especially to the problem of tacit consent.

It also at least contributes to the central but problematic role God plays in Locke's theory. Locke admittedly limits the effect of empiricism on his epistemology by inconsistently bringing in rationalist assumptions; he talks about the relations of ideas. He also allows for certainty of knowledge by intuition (which produces knowledge of ourselves) and by demonstration (which reveals God to us). "Sensitive" knowledge, he asserts, is the only imperfect knowledge. This could explain the central role of God and his law of nature to the success of the social contract, for if men can be certain only of themselves and of God, one of these must provide the key to forming the social contract. And since men's knowledge of themselves is part of what creates the problem of the state of war, God is the only answer to that problem. But this resolution suggests that the tensions between individual freedom and governmental authority demonstrate, at least in part, a tension between Locke's epistemological atomism and his political values.

A feminist perspective on epistemological frameworks can also deepen our readings of social contract theories in other ways. In the earlier discussion of Flax, for instance, I identified ways in which Hobbes and Rousseau demonstrate the return of the repressed. But what about Locke? From the perspective of gender psychology, and particularly feminist psychoanalytic theory, we can identify the genesis and forms of gender bias in his theory. For instance, in a Macpher-

\[11\] Pateman (1979) also makes this point.
sonian reading of Locke, the state of nature is marked by largely isolated individuals whose community consists in self-created relationships of exchange. Nonvoluntary relationships are viewed as coercive in the context of male citizens in the market because they violate the priority of liberty which defines humanity. Although Locke’s state of nature, governed by reason, is different from Rousseau’s and Hobbes’s, his emphasis on property and the need for the father/state to protect possessions is analogous to the infant’s focus on desired objects.

From the interpretation that Dunn gives, by contrast, individuals may not be quite so isolated, but this is because of the centrality of a patriarchal God. In Dunn’s reading of Locke, community does not consist in relations of exchange as much as in relations imposed on men by the laws of God the father.¹¹² This would allow for some nonvoluntary relationships, as long as they are consistent with the laws of nature, because such laws are in men’s true interests. These laws define choice and freedom rather than inhibiting them. In psychoanalytic terms, one could say that the picture Dunn presents fits the oedipal stage of the turn to the father and his rules which serve as externalized superego. The state of nature is a state in which rational individuals adhere to the laws God gives them. The social contract is a further solidification of those laws and men’s ability to obey them. Although all men are rational, the dark forces of nature are still powerful enough to make conflict inevitable. In such cases the lack of an independent judge makes resolution impossible. As do Hobbes and Rousseau, though in a qualitatively different way, Locke views face-to-face confrontation and communication pessimistically at best. It is safer and more effective, according to all three theorists, to depersonalize such engagements.

The role of God in Locke’s theory is important beyond Dunn’s interpretation. We cannot consent to slavery because we are God’s property, and only he has the right to bind us in such a manner. Locke’s inconsistency on consensual slavery probably best highlights the issues raised by gender psychology. Locke wants man to be absolutely independent and self-creative; hence the centrality of consent. Yet he recognizes that man cannot be the absolute arbiter because there are things that violate humanity, our ability to be rationally autonomous. But what can the criterion be for humanity in Locke’s framework if it is not self-creation and the ability to choose? If God provides the answer, what is to ensure accurate interpretation of his will without recourse to individual self-determination?

¹¹²Dunn (1980).
Gender psychology allows us to interpret Locke as saying that there are certain things that violate adulthood—defined as independent, rational autonomy—particularly the desire to return to the symbiosis of early infancy. The aversion to consensual slavery within a theoretical context that gives primacy to individual choice strongly suggests, in the context of the psychoanalytic framework, an attempt to build in a structural, rule-governed safeguard against the strong desire to return to the state of symbiosis with the mother. Locke’s solution—a turn to the all-powerful father, the patriarchal God—is a genuine expression of the oedipal drama. Rationality, scientific thought, and individual self-creation are necessary for independence. But when a serious contradiction is revealed, and the danger of the return to the mother (that is, dependence) presents itself to the unconscious, a turn to the father and the externalized rules he provides will yield our safe passage away from nature. This exclusive definition of obligation denies the obligations contained in women’s privatized experience.

The centrality of property to Locke’s theory is another significant factor for gender psychology. The institution of inheritance is important for Locke because of the centrality of property. But one could also argue that property is important because of the institution of inheritance. As I suggested in Chapter 1, property becomes a tool for creating an institutionalized rationale for developing ways for a man to be sure a child is his. It is not insignificant for Locke’s theory that for the most part women cannot hold property; nor is it insignificant that women were themselves considered property, if not explicitly by Locke then implicitly, by virtue of his unwillingness to challenge the status quo of women’s political position. Property, as the central political value, excludes women, much as contract does; yet it requires women to play a central though devalued and even subordinate role, and it defines that role very particularly.

Perhaps even more significant is Locke’s insistence on reason and objective rationality in presocial man. His arguments that both reason and rights are natural and that we can be bound only by our own voluntary acts can be compared to the oedipal boy’s efforts to assert his independence by constructing the world as he wants it to be and not as it is, thus giving him the illusion of control over his surroundings. The concept of obligation as only self-assumed ensures (and assumes) that the individual will be able to exert control over all connections with discrete others. It denies the son’s relationship to the mother, which is not voluntary, and any possible connection with any possible other that is not under the son’s control. The notion of natural rights and the need for government to carry them out ensures the institutionalization of the externalized superego; that is, the self’s
separation and independence are guaranteed by external structure. Under natural rights, one reason not from one's innate sense of connection to others but from "laws" that "naturally" exist independent of all men.

Natural rights within the context of scarce resources embodies notions of competition, separation, and alienation, as Macpherson notes. The market society is one of unrelated, competing beings. Rights are the means by which these abstract individuals intersect by making claims against one another; rights thus serve to articulate and solidify our separateness. As Charles Taylor argues, atomism is, and must logically be, the ontology underlying primacy-of-rights theories. Furthermore, by creating a world defined and controlled by natural laws and rationality, Locke creates a situation in which the individual is subject and all else is object. Abstract individualism is the ultimate expression of the subject-object or self-other dichotomy characteristic of the repressed oedipal dilemma.

Thus gender psychology demonstrates different ways in which the "problem of women" goes much deeper than contingently sexist values. It is a structural, ontological, and epistemological problem that permeates our very conception of political theory. The feminist reconceptualization of epistemology, its methodologies, and the models it builds for new feminist critical analyses and theories can help point the way to an analysis of exactly how political obligation is structured and why it is so.

For instance, Flax's and Bordo's theories suggest that one way to understand women's problematic relation to political obligation is to examine the culturally symbolic psychic roots of political obligation as consent. Their arguments can be taken to suggest that perhaps the concept of consent, and the need to base obligations on consent, may be rooted at least in part in men's need to escape and dominate the female. Their theories also implicitly suggest that these psychic issues can be considered epistemological issues, systematically structured and fundamental to dominant conceptions of obligation. Harding reinforces this last claim particularly, indicating the broader-ranging im-

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113 Taylor (1979a).
114 According to some theorists (Eisenstein [1981], Elshtain [1981]), Locke also denies that women are capable of rational thought; thus, the emphasis on rationality and its priority in the social contract is another way of distancing the self from the mother. Others, however (Smith [1984]), deny this, saying that Locke allows for women's rationality. I agree that Locke does not explicitly state that women cannot think rationally; but his refusal to challenge existing norms concerning property ownership, equality in marriage, and "women's lot" create a heavier burden on such challengers than the simple assertion that he never actually said it. It is part of the character of political theory that it often says what it never explicitly states.
Implications of masculinist conceptions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology for theory in general. Her work suggests that the method in which we approach theory may itself contribute to the substantive conclusions that are reached. The theoretical divorce of process from substance is a particular value claim that is built into the structure of our inquiries and the activity of theorizing.

Similarly, Hartsock’s analysis of power—both in its portrayal of how social relations and institutions are structured by the masculine psyche and in its analysis of the epistemological ramifications of such structure—suggests that the meaning of obligation may take on a very different significance once we comprehend the masculinist nature of the structure within which it is conceptualized. If we can understand the violence and misogyny underlying the market model of political theory, then we can better grasp the basis of market concepts, such as self-assumed obligation, as expressions of that violence.

Thus, a realization of the epistemological dimensions and ramifications of gender psychology is extremely valuable for a feminist analysis of the gender-biased structure of modern obligation theory, if not modern liberal theory in general. Instead of merely providing fuel for a basic disagreement (I reject your theory because it is premised on individualism) and hence a moral argument that breaks down, gender psychology can be used to cut through the dead end of liberal discourse and provide new insights as to why a theory takes a certain shape. An understanding of this “why” can provide stronger foundations for making judgments about theories. This would bring about the unity—or, more precisely, it would enable us to recognize the unity—of being and knowing with ethics and politics. Furthermore, these feminist theories point the way toward a feminist reconstruction of epistemology and obligation based on women’s experience; for the public ideology of consent not only denies women the opportunities to participate in the political and hence to assume political obligations—its contingent sexism—but it also makes invisible the kinds of obligations that women in fact have historically had in the private sphere. More precisely, while tacitly asserting through the public-private split that such obligations—caring for husbands and children, reproduction and nurturance—exist, liberal obligation theory obscures the fact that these obligations have an entirely separate genesis and character. Through the mythologizing dimensions of the social contract story, the theories deny the fact that the obligations historically imposed on women are not contractual within the terms set by consent theory. And by segregating women and their activities in the private sphere, and then devaluing that sphere, the theories ignore
the fact that the concepts and language of consent are not capable of accounting for the activities and relationships that such obligations have historically entailed. It is through this double obfuscation that liberal obligation theory has been able to exert its intellectual and epistemological hegemony. And because women’s disempowerment and silencing are so central to this obfuscation, it is in a feminist understanding of the masculinist structure of dominant epistemologies that the most powerful challenge to liberal obligation theory lies.