

Masculinity in Philosophy

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1. Feminism and philosophy

One important concern of contemporary feminism has been to identify and challenge (what might roughly be called) the 'sexism' of various academic disciplines; and this kind of critical work is now increasingly evident in the case of philosophy. For example Susan Okin, in *Women in Western Political Thought*, has examined the way in which theorists such as Aristotle, Locke and Rousseau tried to justify the exclusion of women from participation in the political domain, typically by claiming their 'natural' lack of whatever characteristics were held to be necessary for such activity; Genevieve Lloyd, in 'The Man of Reason', has shown how the philosophical proponents of certain conceptions of rationality have often both ascribed this exclusively to men, and articulated it in distinctively 'male' ways; Larry Blum, in 'Kant's and Hegel's Moral Rationalism: A Feminist Perspective' has explored those philosophers' views of the supposedly different moral virtues of men and women, and challenged their belief in the superiority of the former; and Margery Collins and Christine Pierce, in 'Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis', have criticized Sartre for the tendency, in both his philosophical and literary work, to present women as having 'fixed natures' which effectively render them incapable of the freedom that any human supposedly has, as a For-itself.

In presenting these as examples of the criticism of 'sexism' in philosophy, I am using a term which not all these writers themselves use, or make central; and given the way in which I shall later define this term, and distinguish it from what I shall call 'genderism', it could then be shown how some of their concerns are with the former, and others with the latter. For it is my main purpose here to argue for the importance of distinguishing between 'sexism' and 'genderism', and to outline the general character of what would be involved in identifying and challenging the latter, by contrast with the former. I shall illustrate this by trying to show the difference between claiming that Sartre's philosophy is sexist, and claiming that it is genderist. And I want also to suggest that the criticism of genderism in philosophy will involve issues that are more complex, and more far-reaching in their theoretical consequences, than that of sexism - though this is not to say that the latter is therefore 'unimportant' by comparison.

Before going on to specify in some detail the distinction between sexism and genderism, some initial sense of it may be given through a partly hypothetical example. Consider an ethical theory according to which some human characteristic - say 'rationality' - is taken to be the basis of people's

intrinsic worth or value, and thus of the respect that is due to them as moral beings. We can call this theory 'moral rationalism'. And now imagine a particular proponent of this theory, who also maintains that it is only men, and not women, that have or are capable of having this characteristic, and who thereby (at least implicitly) asserts the inferior moral status of women, and justifies their unequal and disadvantaged position in society. Such a person could be criticized for their sexism; and at least part of this criticism would consist in showing that the claim about women's lack of rationality was mistaken, particularly if this lack was said to be natural or innate.

But notice that, having succeeded in challenging the sexism of this particular proponent of moral rationalism, the theory itself remains untouched. What has been rejected is the exclusive attribution of the theoretically privileged characteristic to men; whilst no attention has been given to the question of whether that characteristic deserves its theoretical privilege. To criticize this would be to challenge the theory itself as distinct from challenging the additional sexist claims of its proponent; and it is at this point that the possibility of (the theory's) genderism arises.

For suppose that, in the society in which this moral theory is endorsed, the privileged characteristic of rationality forms part of the gender-ideal of 'masculinity': part of what is regarded as appropriate and valuable for men to be, something which any male must display in order to be a 'proper man', to be masculine. And suppose also that this characteristic is not part of the corresponding gender-ideal of 'femininity' (which might itself include some 'contrasting' feature, say 'emotionality'). Then - and especially if this is also a society in which men systematically dominate women - one would have some initial grounds for suspecting that this supposedly valuable 'human' characteristic is actually a (masculine) gender-characteristic; and that its theoretical privilege may be based upon an unjustified assumption of the superiority of the masculine gender. And if this initial suspicion were confirmed then one would have shown the moral theory to be (in the way I wish to use this term) 'genderist', as distinct from showing the claims made by its particular proponent, about men and women, to be 'sexist'.

2. Sex and gender

In order to develop this distinction between sexism and genderism in philosophy, I need now to introduce some (initially rather loosely formulated) claims

about the nature of gender and gender-differences. I take it that in all or most societies, there is and has been some fairly systematic differentiation between 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics: that is, between those features (such as types of behaviour, emotional and motivational structures, aspects of personality and character, and suchlike) that are regarded as appropriate to men as distinct from women, and to women as distinct from men. For example, in the opening chapter of her *Report on Male Sexuality*, 'Being Male', Shere Hite presents the answers given by the 7,000+ men who responded to her questionnaire, about what they regarded as typically 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics (see pp. 60-69, 108-110). The most frequently mentioned items for the former were these: being autonomous, independent, self-assured, in control, unafraid, fair-minded, strong, unemotional, unexpressive, rational, and decision-makers; whilst for the latter, there were: being loving, supportive, warm, gentle, compassionate, sensitive, docile, patient, self-sacrificing, and generally 'people-oriented'. And in reply to the further question of how they would react if something about them were said to be feminine or unmanly, most of them said that they would feel angry, insulted, humiliated, weak, hurt, and so on.

What we have here is one piece of evidence about what a certain group of men in a particular society, at a particular historical period, regarded as typical characteristics of masculinity and femininity, i.e. of these two *genders*. How far these men actually managed to *be* (in their terms) masculine, is of course another matter; and even from their reported replies, there is evidence of varying degrees of tension, ambivalence, and self-doubt about this, and about how far they themselves endorsed the values implicit in their conception of masculinity. But it can at least be said that most of these male respondents thought of their being perceived and recognized as masculine, and not feminine, as an important aspect of their self-esteem, and as something of considerable significance in the conduct of their lives, their relationships with others (both men and women), and so on. Whatever the gap between 'ideals and reality' here, it is highly unlikely that there is no, or only very slight, correspondence between the two; that is, I shall be assuming that systems of gender-differentiation do not *merely* express ideals or norms, but are also to a significant extent effectively realized [3].

Of course, questionnaire-replies of this kind are only *one* way in which the characteristics of gender-differences in a particular society may be identified; and even here, one would need to examine issues such as the degree of correspondence between the replies given by men, and by women, to the same questions. Further, one might go on to interpret such replies in terms of the possibly more basic and general concepts that may be presupposed by the relatively superficial and specific characteristics referred to by respondents; and it may often be possible to identify 'pairings' of masculine and feminine characteristics, involving some kind of contrast, opposition, or supposed complementarity (e.g. 'instrumental v. expressive', 'hard v. soft', 'impersonal v. personal', etc.).

I am using the terms 'male' and 'female' to refer to differences of 'sex', and the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' to differences of 'gender'. Thus a person's sex, as male or female, is determined by their chromosomal structures (XY for male, XX for female), and the presence of the differing reproductive organs, hormones, and physiological-anatomical features usually, but not always, associated with these. There are, admittedly, several complications

here [4]; but these need not concern us to the extent that for most people, for most practical purposes, their biological sex is at least *taken* to be a straightforward matter of fact by them and everyone else - so that, for example, there is little doubt about who would qualify as a man for the purposes of the Hite report on 'male' sexuality.

'Gender' is usually contrasted with 'sex' by saying that it, unlike sex, is a social or cultural rather than a biological matter. But this use of the terms commits one either to the view that no differences between men and women other than their sex-differences are in any way biologically, i.e. genetically, influenced; or to restricting gender-differences to those that are *not* so influenced, whatever they may turn out to be, and allocating all others that *are* so influenced to the category of sex-differences. I prefer, here, to use the term 'gender' in a way that involves neither of these commitments, and that instead includes all those characteristics that, in a particular society, are *regarded* as differentially appropriate to men and women, that tend (partly as a result of this) to actually so differ, and which do *not* consist in the relatively straightforward biological features of the male or female sex.

So, for example, whether or not - as has sometimes (though very dubiously) been claimed - men and women differ genetically with respect to their tendencies towards 'aggressiveness' or 'nurturance', such differences would count as characteristics of gender, and not of sex, in my proposed use of these terms. This usage enables me to remain, as it were 'agnostic' about this particular theoretical issue - not that I regard it as unimportant, but only as best kept separate in the account I shall be giving of the nature of genderism in philosophy.

There are a number of further issues about which I can also, hopefully, afford to remain-agnostic, by making no assumptions about them one way or the other. First, I assume no particular theory as to *how* men and women come to 'acquire' their gender-characteristics. This agnosticism includes, as just mentioned, the biological v. cultural debate; and it also includes such questions as the relative merits of role-learning v. psychoanalytic approaches. (I am, in fact, strongly in favour of the theory outlined in Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, but nothing I say later will depend on this.) Second, I make no assumptions about whether there is any uniformity, between societies, as to which characteristics 'belong' to which gender: about whether, that is, there are any cross-cultural universals of gender-differentiation. Likewise, I do not assume that within any particular society, there is just *one* system of gender-differentiation: for my purposes, it could perfectly well be that there are several such systems, varying with respect to class, ethnicity, age, and suchlike. Nor do I assume that *all* personal characteristics belong to the (or a) system of gender-differentiation: what I will be saying is consistent with there being some characteristics shared by members of both sexes; others that are, say, class-specific irrespective of sex; and so on.

So, as far as I am concerned here, whether or not some particular characteristic belongs to a system of gender-differentiation; whether, if it does, it is a masculine or feminine one; and through what kinds of processes people come to possess it, are all questions that have to be answered case by case, and in specific socio-historical contexts - the relevant contexts being, for my purposes, those in which the philosophical theory at issue has been developed, disseminated, accepted, and so on.

3. Sexism and genderism

Having tried to specify the conceptions of sex and gender that I am adopting, I can now make more explicit the corresponding conceptions of sexism and genderism involved in my earlier example of the distinction between (philosophical) criticisms of the two. The proponent of moral rationalism who claims that women are inferior to men because of their (relative) lack of 'rationality' provides an example of *sexism*, since this involves the potential justification of various practices that discriminate between men and women on the basis of their *sex*, and that work to the disadvantage of the latter. Criticism of this sexism will require either or both of the following: successfully challenging the existence of these supposedly 'natural' (i.e. biologically determined) differences between men and women; and showing how these practices do indeed operate, unjustifiably, to the disadvantage of women. (These, in effect, were the kinds of criticism central in late 18th- to mid-19th-century feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor, and John Stuart Mill.)

By contrast, criticism of the *genderism* of this moral rationalism would involve at least the following: identifying how the conception of rationality involved in this theory formed part of the specification of masculinity in the system of gender-differentiation of the relevant socio-historical context; and showing that this theory made an unjustified and unjustifiable assumption of the superiority of this masculine characteristic. (I say 'unjustified and unjustifiable' here so as to distinguish between (a) showing that no justification has been offered, and (b) challenging whatever justification has been, or might possibly be, offered.)

This attempt to define how sexism and genderism differ is by no means fully adequate, as it stands, and I shall try to improve upon it in certain ways later on, partly by working through its implications in a particular example, concerning Sartre's ontology, in the next two sections. But some further general comments about the distinction may be helpful before doing this.

First, the concepts of sexism and genderism could both, 'in principle', be applicable to cases where respectively, men were disadvantaged relative to women, and the masculine deemed inferior to the feminine. That is, I do not wish to define these concepts in such a way that these possibilities are *logically* excluded. However, the examples I have been and will be considering are all of the opposite kind; and this is mainly for the reason that, as a matter of fact, nearly all actual cases of sexism and genderism do involve the assumption of male dominance and masculine superiority - since, roughly speaking, all or most societies are and have been patriarchal.

Second, one consequence of the way I am distinguishing sexism from genderism is that *criticisms* of the former may themselves tend to display the latter. This is because very often, when someone is criticizing the 'sexism' of a claim that women are, by nature, inferior to men, with respect to some characteristic(s), attention will mainly be devoted to challenging the supposed 'naturalness' of this supposed difference; and it may be implicitly assumed, thereby, that *were* women to be like this, that would indeed make them 'inferior'. That is, the critic of sexism may implicitly accept the respective superiority or inferiority of these characteristics, in attempting to dispute the claim that 'women are inferior' by showing that they do not (by nature) differ from men with respect to these. So there is always some risk of genderism in the criticism of sexism - though it is certainly one that can be

avoided, with due caution. By contrast, though, there is less risk of criticisms of genderism themselves displaying sexism, since there is here no assumption that gender-characteristics are natural or innate. So, for example, in criticizing 'moral rationalism' as (masculinely) genderist, one is not assuming that this (masculine) characteristic of rationality *is* natural to men, and its absence to women: one is concerned *only* with the justifiability of the privileged status given to this characteristic.

Finally, there is no reason why genderism, to the extent that it exists in philosophy, should be expected *only* to exist in the areas of ethical, political, or (broadly) social theories, despite these being more immediately obvious ones for its occurrence. It may just as likely be present in the apparently more remote and esoteric areas of philosophy of mind, metaphysics, or epistemology. This is at least partly because many such theories involve claims or assumptions about the nature of 'the human subject'; and about that of 'objects' which are specified by contrast with the subject, and often by reference to the kind of relationship supposed to exist between the two. There is plenty of room here for genderist assumptions of the masculinity of these subjects, and of their relations to these objects - as I shall now try to illustrate, in the case of Sartre's ontology.

The relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being. It indicates, therefore, how far man's natural behaviour has become human, and how far his human essence has become a natural essence for him, how far his human nature has become nature for him.

Karl Marx.

1844 Manuscripts.

4. Sartre's sexism: the for-itself as male

In 'Holes and Slime' Collins and Pierce, as noted earlier, criticize Sartre for a pervasive 'sexism' (the term they use, and with a sense very close to the one in which I am using it) in his philosophical and literary works. Their main line of argument goes like this. Sartre's 'theory of human nature' is, as it were, that humans *have* no 'nature' in the sense of biologically fixed, or otherwise causally deterministic features that govern their lives. Rather humans are free beings, *For-itselfs*, and thus utterly distinct from the other central ontological category in Sartre's philosophy (at least, in *Being and Nothingness*), the *In-itself*. Further, Sartre is concerned to identify, and criticize, various ways in which the For-itself may display *bad faith*, in attempting to deny or ignore its freedom, for example by regarding itself as *having* some kind of fixed nature, as being an In-itself, and so on.

Such a view of humans, say Collins and Pierce, 'should' make Sartre particularly unsusceptible to any form of sexism which, after all, normally involves the belief that women *do* have a 'fixed nature', which is different from, and inferior to, that of men. Yet, as they go on to argue in some detail, Sartre in

practice denies the status of 'For-itself' to most, if not all, the female characters in his novels and plays, or at best presents them as almost inherently prone to excessive displays of bad faith. Further, they suggest that the same tendency is at work in *Being and Nothingness* itself, and comment critically on a number of passages where Sartre describes certain features of the In-itself, 'slime' and 'holes', as intrinsically 'feminine', and as somehow threatening to the For-itself.

I shall return to this last point shortly. But first I want to examine how, in the course of their overall argument, Collins and Pierce criticize an earlier commentator on Sartre, William Barrett, who had also claimed that Sartre's work was sexist. In *Irrational Men*, they note, Barrett argued 'that Sartre identifies Being-in-itself as female and For-itself as male by means of the characteristics he assigns to these two aspects of being' (p.113). Thus, claimed Barrett,

The For-itself ... is for Sartre the masculine aspect of human psychology: it is that in virtue of which man chooses himself in his radical liberty, makes projects, and thereby gives his life what strictly human meaning it has;

and correspondingly,

the In-itself is for him the archetype of nature: excessive, fruitful, blooming nature - the woman, the female.

(*Irrational Man*, p.254; quoted by Collins and Pierce, p.113)

Barrett then claimed that this implicit 'mapping' by Sartre of the For-itself v. In-itself on to the male v. female (or masculine v. feminine: which it is crucial, as I shall argue soon) is *sexist*, since it effectively identifies the (properly or ideally) human with the male, and thereby excludes women from this privileged status. What Sartre was doing, therefore, was to ignore or downgrade female life and female psychology. Consider, said Barrett,

... a totally ordinary woman, one of that great number whose being is the involvement with family and children, and some of whom are happy at it, or at least as humanly fulfilled by it as the male by his own essentially masculine projects. What sense does it make to say that such a woman's identity is constituted by her project? Her project is family and children, and these do in fact make up a total human commitment; but it is hardly a project that has issued out of the conscious ego. Her whole life with whatever freedom it reveals, is rather the unfolding of nature through her. As soon as we begin to think about the psychology of women, Sartre's psychology shows itself to be exclusively a masculine affair.

(*Irrational Man*, p.261; quoted, p.115)

But, argue Collins and Pierce, Barrett's criticism of Sartre's sexism is *itself* sexist, since it depends upon the assumption that men and women *do* have different natures, different psychologies, and correspondingly different types of activity to which they are suited. And they thus argue, as distinct from Barrett, that Sartre's sexism consists *not* in his exclusion of 'female nature' from 'human nature', but instead in his tendency to present women as *having* a 'nature', and hence as not (in his terms) fully human.

However, although I mainly agree with what Collins and Pierce say about Sartre's sexism, and with their criticism of Barrett's 'natural differences' assumptions, I want now to argue that there is nonetheless something valuable in Barrett's comments which can best be brought out by considering the question of Sartre's (possible) *genderism*, as distinct from his

sexism. Indeed, Barrett himself sometimes uses the words 'masculine' and 'feminine', and sometimes 'male' and 'female', without apparently recognizing the potential difference between these; and what I am proposing, in effect, is a reconstruction of his objections to Sartre in terms of the concept of gender, rather than sex. In doing so, I am trying not so much to criticize Collins and Pierce, as to indicate how the criticism of genderism differs from that of sexism. So let us now consider some of the relevant passages from *Being and Nothingness* - noting, in advance, the conceptual difficulty posed for translation by Sartre's use of the term 'feminine' which can mean either female or feminine.

5. Sartre's genderism: the for-itself as masculine

Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness* (Part IV, Chapter 2, Section 3) Sartre engages in what he calls 'a psychoanalysis of things' (p.600), in the course of which he 'analyzes' what he takes to be various qualities of the In-itself. The first of these is its 'sliminess' or 'viscosity' (he uses the adjective '*visqueux*', which Hazel Barnes translates as 'slimy'). The viscous/slimy, claims Sartre, is both terrifying and disgusting. Neither solid nor liquid, it presents itself as something to be possessed or appropriated by the For-itself; yet it is not only ungraspable, unpossessable, but also turns out to trap the For-itself who/which attempts to possess it: its sticky sliminess adheres to the For-itself and threatens to drag it down and swallow it up. It is soft and yielding, 'but its softness is leech-like' (p.608): 'I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me' (p.609).

Sartre continues:

It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking, it lives obscurely under my fingers, and I sense it like a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me. There is something like a tactile fascination in the slimy. I am no longer the master in *arresting* the process of appropriation. It continues. In one sense it is like the supreme docility of the possessed, the fidelity of a dog who *gives himself* even when one does not want him any longer, and in another sense there is underneath this docility a surreptitious appropriation of the possessor by the possessed.

(p.609)

And a little further on:

The slime is like a liquid seen in a nightmare, where all its properties are animated by a sort of life and turn back against me. Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet feminine [*féminin*] revenge which will be symbolized on another level by the quality 'sugary' ... A sugary sliminess is the ideal of the slimy, it symbolizes the sugary death of the For-itself (like that of the wasp which sinks into the jam and drowns in it).

(p.609)

Later on, in the same (section of the same) chapter, Sartre considers another quality of the In-itself, its being 'holed' ('*trouée*'), in relation to what he takes to be a fundamental human fascination with the *filling* of holes - a fascination which is not to be regarded as *consequent upon* a certain stage in sexual development, but rather as prior to, and enabling one to understand, such sexuality. More or less from birth, says Sartre, the baby or infant (as For-itself) engages with all kinds of holes (aspects of the In-

itself) as things to be filled or plugged, and thereby be made complete. Thus:

... the hole is originally presented as a nothingness 'to be filled' with my own flesh; the child cannot restrain himself from putting his finger or his whole arm into the hole. It presents itself to me as the empty image of myself. I have only to crawl into it in order to make myself exist in the world that awaits me.... Thus to plug up a hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plenitude of being may exist; that is, to subject the passion of the For-itself so as to shape, to perfect, and to preserve the totality of the In-itself.
(p.613)

Sartre continues:

It is only from this standpoint that we can pass on to sexuality. The obscenity of the feminine sex [*sexe féminin*] is that of everything which 'gapes open'. It is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange [*étrangère* - perhaps 'alien' would be better here] flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution. Conversely woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is 'in the form of a hole' [*'trouée'*]. This is the true origin of Adler's complex [i.e. the inferiority complex]. Beyond any doubt her sex [*le sexe*] is a mouth and a voracious mouth which devours the penis - a fact which can easily lead to the idea of castration. The amorous act is the castration of the man; but this is above all [*avant tout* - the more literal 'before' brings out Sartre's 'priority of holes to sex' better, perhaps] because sex is a hole.

(pp.613-614 - square brackets mine -RNK)

A detailed exegesis of these comments cannot be provided here, but I think it can be argued that there are, in effect, at least two (in my terms) distinct claims being made. First, that these characteristics of the In-itself - being slimy, and being holed - are to be seen as *feminine*; and second, that (at least in the case of the latter), these characteristics belong to *women* by virtue of their very physiology, their sexual anatomy. Further, since in Sartre's ontology the In-itself is clearly in some sense an 'inferior' category by comparison with the For-itself, what is implied by these claims is that, at least in these respects, women as a sex are inferior since they possess by nature characteristics that are themselves 'inferior'.

What this (latter) supposed inferiority consists in, exactly, I shall say more about shortly. But enough has now been said to enable one to see the difference between criticizing Sartre's *sexism*, here, and (possibly) criticizing his *genderism*. In the former case, one would need amongst other things to challenge Sartre's apparent view that female sexual anatomy has some intrinsic human 'meaning', such that women necessarily differ from men in this respect; whilst in the latter case, one would have to engage with the question of what possible justification Sartre might have for de-valuing (and indeed being 'terrified' of) these *feminine* characteristics. This, indeed, is a difference which Collins and Pierce clearly recognize, in a lengthy footnote commenting on the difficulties of translating Sartre's *féminin* as 'female' or 'feminine', where they conclude:

Thus, females may or may not possess feminine characteristics, and insofar as one discourages 'feminine' behaviour in females (or males), one may be anti-feminine without being anti-female

or sexist. To escape a charge of sexism, one needs to make such a differentiation, and Sartre does not do so.

(note 15, p.126)

That is: had Sartre not talked of the feminine as something that women naturally were by virtue of their sex (and men were not), then he would not have been open to the charge of sexism. But that, of course, would leave open the further possibility of challenging the genderism involved in his marked antipathy towards (at least certain features of) the feminine, and showing the wider significance of this for his philosophy.

How might one go about doing this? I shall make only a few, very sketchy remarks here, since the issues are highly complex. Sartre's analyses of 'slime' and 'holes' seem to be closely related to two quite basic features of his overall ontology, namely his refusal to accept or recognize the *organic* features of human existence, and his emphasis upon the *instrumental* character of the For-itself's relations with the world, the In-itself. That is, there is a strong connection between his fear-ful antipathy towards the viscous, as a cloying, organic, seductive receptivity that cannot be successfully appropriated, and his attempt to define the 'nature' of humans, as free For-itselfs, in a way that altogether excludes their character as a biological species; and likewise a strong connection between his account of 'the attitude of the For-itself towards holes' and his more general view of the For-itself as always engaged in active, manipulative, instrumental relations with 'objects'. Furthermore, as Sartre himself indicates explicitly in the passages quoted earlier, both the viscous and the holed are associated for him with the feminine; and it is fairly plausible to assume that, in the specific socio-historical context in which he was writing, the 'active-instrumental' was taken to be masculine, and the 'passive-organic' as feminine. Hence there are some initial grounds for regarding Sartre's conception of the privileged ontological category of the For-itself as expressing an assumed superiority of the masculine, and as operating in a relationship of projected control over the In-itself as (at least partially) feminine. And, to the extent that this is so, we would have here an example of philosophical genderism, which is quite distinct from the sexism criticized by Collins and Pierce (namely Sartre's tendency to exclude women from the favoured ontological category) [5].

6. Criticizing genderism

My discussion of Sartre has been intended both to illustrate the differences between sexism and genderism in philosophy, and to indicate how genderism may be involved not just in the more obvious areas of moral and political philosophy, but also in the less obvious ones of metaphysics, epistemology, and so on. As noted earlier, one major reason for this latter possibility is that these kinds of theories frequently make claims or assumptions about the nature of the human 'subject', the differences between such subjects and 'objects', and the character of the relations between them. And given that such theories have typically been articulated by men, in patriarchal societies, there is good reason to suspect that, for example, their conceptions of these subjects will express a distinctively masculine, gendered standpoint, whilst masquerading as a purely human, gender-neutral, one [6] (a form of misrepresentation which has certain parallels with the way in which, in class-ideologies, historically specific forms of human activity are falsely eternalized/universalized).

However, it is not enough merely to *suspect* this: one must show conclusively, in particular cases, that it is so; and to do this, one must first identify the specific features of the system of gender-differentiation that is operative in the relevant socio-historical context.

But it might be objected at this point that, given my definition of genderism as the unjustified assumption of the superiority of gender-specific characteristics, any adequate criticism of the genderism of a philosophical theory must require not just showing that it *is* gender-specific, but also that it is actually wrong or mistaken to accord such privilege to those characteristics; and no indication has yet been provided of how this latter task is to be performed.

As an initial response to this objection, I would say this: to the extent that any philosophical theory *presents* itself as gender-neutral, but can be shown not to be, it can legitimately be criticized as genderist precisely because it *has* assumed a privileged status for those gender-specific characteristics without providing any justification for doing so; and hence the 'onus of proof' is upon its proponents, namely to justify explicitly what has been tacitly assumed. Nonetheless, this initial response does not take one very far; and whilst I have no very positive suggestions to make as to how in general the desirability or otherwise of various gender-characteristics can be evaluated, I will conclude by noting a number of more 'negative' considerations that seem important to bear in mind here.

To start with, it may be plausible to assume that in any particular system of gender-differentiation, neither masculine nor feminine characteristics are likely to be acceptable in their existing form. This is for at least two reasons. First, the processes through which men and women come to acquire their respective genders will probably have involved considerable degrees of coercion, disapproval, fear, repression, and suchlike; and characteristics that are generated in these ways are inevitably distorted and 'pathologised' by the very process of their formation. Second, systems of gender-differentiation are typically constructed in such a way as to support and reinforce an overall pattern of domination-subordination between men and women; and it is therefore very unlikely that the characteristics of either gender will be appropriate to the social relationships and activities of a non-patriarchal society. For example, if one examines the masculine and

feminine characteristics mentioned by Hite's male respondents (see section 2 above) and asks the question 'what would be the relations of power between men and women who respectively displayed these?', the rough answer would surely be that they would involve the domination by the former of the latter [7]. (Thus, although my account of genderism in philosophy has focused upon the assumed superiority of masculine characteristics, it is important to recognize that the way in which systems of gender-differentiation sustain patriarchal societies is not exclusively through the devaluation of feminine characteristics, but also through the structuring of relations between men and women precisely *as* relations of domination.)

So whilst on the one hand an assumed superiority of masculine characteristics is likely to be unjustifiable, it is on the other hand unlikely that any straightforward *reversal* of this assumption, 'replacing' it by the privileging of feminine characteristics, will be acceptable either [8]. Nor, it would seem, should one opt instead for some ideal of androgyny which is specified simply as the *combination*, in both men and women, of what exist at present as gender-specific characteristics - as if, somehow, all that was wrong with the masculine and feminine was that each was only 'partial' and needed to be 'completed' by the other [9]. For not only are existing gender-characteristics 'suspect' for the reasons just mentioned, but also the kinds of opposition and contrast that frequently exist between various masculine and feminine characteristics make it unlikely that their simple combination would constitute a coherent or viable way of living.

Finally, it may in any case be a mistake to think that there could as yet exist an adequate conceptualization of what should be ideally counterposed to gender-specific characteristics about which there is good reason to be suspicious and critical. For this would apparently require one to assume that, by some feat of theoretical analysis, one could achieve a gender-neutral standpoint from which some positive alternative could be clearly and persuasively articulated. But a theoretical standpoint of this kind cannot altogether precede the practice it would supposedly be designed to guide; and it is perhaps only, instead, through the inevitably confused and confusing attempts to discover in practice some alternative to existing gender-systems that the basis for an adequate conceptualization of this will be created.

Footnotes

- 1 This article is based on papers given at Philosophy Department meetings in Lancaster, Bristol, and Bangor - thanks to the participants there, and also to Alison Assiter, Jenny Lloyd, and Aurora Turner for their comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 For full references, see Bibliography.
- 3 This assumption is clearly over-simplified as it stands - in practice there is a good deal of prejudicial stereotyping, ideological imagery, self-deception, etc., in the specification of gender-characteristics.
- 4 See, e.g., Hutt, *Males and Females*, Chapters 1-3, and Reynolds, *The Biology of Human Action*, Part III.
- 5 This genderism may also be involved in Sartre's conception of the For-itself as 'transcendent'; and this may generate certain problems in the say de Beauvoir makes use of the latter concept in *The Second Sex*. On this, see Lloyd's 'Masters, Slaves and Others' elsewhere in this issue, and Easlea's discussion of de Beauvoir in Chapter 1 of *Science and Sexual Oppression*.
- 6 Important examples of this kind of genderism might be found in those forms of Cartesian dualism involving, amongst other things, a (masculine) devaluation of the *body* as the locus of emotional experience.
- 7 For an interesting discussion of some aspects of this issue, see Blum et al, 'Altruism and Women's Oppression'.
- 8 But cf. Miller's *Towards a New Psychology of Women*.
- 9 I'm not implying, here, that this is the *only* way in which an ideal androgyny can be, or has been, specified.

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