

II THEORIES OF RADICAL FEMINISM:

Radical Feminism by TI-GRACE ATKINSON

Ti-Grace Atkinson, a past president of the New York chapter of National Organization of Women (NOW), left to form *October 17*, which later became *The Feminists*. She was one of the first to clearly articulate a radical feminist position. These are the first two parts of a seven-part essay. In the remaining parts, the political notions of class, class system, function, and institution are analyzed as revealed through the analysis of the class of women.

Almanina Barbour, a black militant woman in Philadelphia, once pointed out to me: "The women's movement is the first in history with a war on and no enemy." I winced. It was an obvious criticism. I fumbled about in my mind for an answer: surely the enemy must have been defined at some time. Otherwise, what had we been shooting at for the last couple of years? Into the air? Only two responses came to me, although in looking for those two I realized that it was a question carefully avoided. The first and by far the most frequent answer was "society." The second, infrequently and always furtively, was "men." If "society" is the enemy, what could that mean? If women are being oppressed, there's only one group left over to be doing the oppressing: men. Then why call them "society"? Could "society" mean the "institutions" that oppress women? But institutions must be maintained, and the same question arises: by whom? The answer to "who is the enemy?" is so obvious that the interesting issue quickly becomes "why has it been avoided?" The master might tolerate many reforms in slavery but none that would threaten his essential role as master. Women have known this, and since "men" and "society" are in effect synonymous, they have feared confronting him. Without this confrontation and a detailed understanding of what *his* battle strategy has been that has kept us so successfully pinned down, the "women's movement" is worse than useless: It invites backlash from men, and no progress for women.

There has never been a feminist analysis. While discontent among women and the attempt to re-

solve this discontent have often implied that women form a class, no political or *causal* class analysis has followed. To rephrase my last point, the persecution of women has never been taken as the starting point for a political analysis of society.

Considering that the last massing of discontent among women continued some 70 years (1850-1920) and spread throughout the world and that the recent accumulation of grievances began some three years ago here in America, the lack of a structural understanding of the problem is at first sight incomprehensible. It is the understanding of the *reasons* for this devastating omission and of the *implications* of the problem that forces one to "radical feminism."

Women who have tried to solve their problems as a class have proposed not solutions but dilemmas. The traditional feminists want equal rights for women with men. But on what grounds? If women serve a different *function* from men in society, wouldn't this necessarily affect women's "rights"? For example, do *all* women have the "right" not to bear children? Traditional feminism is caught in the dilemma of demanding equal treatment for unequal functions, because it is unwilling to challenge political (functional) classification by sex. Radical women, on the other hand, grasp that women as a group somehow fit into a political analysis of society, but err in refusing to explore the significance of the fact that women form a class, the uniqueness of this class, and the implications of this description to the system of political classes. Both traditional feminists and radical women have evaded questioning any

part of their *raison d'être*: Women are a class, and the terms that make up that initial assumption must be examined.

The feminist dilemma is that it is as women—or “females”—that women are persecuted, just as it was as slaves—or “blacks”—that slaves were persecuted in America: in order to improve their condition, those individuals who are today defined as women must eradicate their own definition. Women must, in a sense, commit suicide, and the journey from womanhood to a society of individuals is hazardous. The feminist dilemma is that we have the most to do, and the least to do it with; we must create, as no other group in history has been forced to do, from the very beginning.

The “battle of the sexes” is a commonplace, both over time and distance. But it is an inaccurate description of what has been happening. A “battle” implies some balance of powers, whereas when one side suffers all the losses, such as in raids (often referred to as the “rape” of an area), that is called a *massacre*. Women have been massacred as human beings over history, and this destiny is entailed by their definition. As women begin massing together, they take the first step from *being* massacred to *engaging in* battle (resistance) and, hopefully, eventually to negotiations—in the *very* far future—and peace.

When any person or group of persons is being mistreated or, to continue our metaphor, is being attacked, there is a succession of responses or investigations:

1. depending on the severity of the attack (short of an attack on life), the victim determines how much damage was done and what it was done with;
2. where is the attack coming from? —from whom? —located where?
3. how can you win the immediate battle? —defensive measures? —holding actions?
4. why did he attack you?
5. how can you win (end) the war? —offensive measures —moving within his boundaries.

These first five questions are necessary but should be considered diplomatic maneuvers. They have never been answered by the so-called “women’s movement,” and for this reason I think one cannot properly call that movement “political”: it could not have had any direction relevant to women as a class.

If diplomacy fails, that is, if your enemy refuses to stop attacking you, you must force him to

stop. This requires a strategy, and this strategy requires a map of the relevant landscape, including such basic information as:

1. who is the enemy?
2. where is he located?
3. is he getting outside support? —material? —manpower? —from whom?
4. where are his forces massed?
5. what’s the best ammunition to knock them out?
6. what weapons is he using?
7. how can you counteract them?
8. what is your plan of attack on him to force diplomatic negotiations? —program of action (including priorities) —techniques.

I am using some military terminology, and this may seem incongruous. But why should it? We accept the phrase “battle of the sexes.” It is the proposal that *women* fight *back* that seems incongruous; it was necessary to program women’s psychic structure to non-resistance on their own behalf—for obvious reasons: they make up over half the population of the world.

Without a programmatic analysis, the “women’s movement” has been as if running blindly in the general direction of where they *guess* the last missile that just hit them was based. For the first two years of the last organizing, I was very active in this running-blind approach. It’s true that we were attacking evils, but why *those* particular evils? Were they the central issues in the persecution of women? There was no map so I couldn’t be sure, but I could see no reason to believe that we knew what the key issues were, much less that we were hitting them. It became increasingly clear to me that we were incorporating many of our external problems (e.g., power hierarchies) into our own movement, and in understanding this and beginning to ask myself some of the obvious questions I’ve listed above, I came to the conclusion that at this time the most radical *action* that any woman or group of women could take was a feminist analysis. The implications of such an analysis is a greater threat to the opposition to human rights for women than all the actions and threatened actions put together up until this time by women.

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With this introduction to the significance of a feminist analysis, I will outline what we have so far.

As I mentioned before, the *raison d'être* of all groups formed around the problem of women is that women are a class. What is meant by that?

What is meant by "women" and what is meant by "class"? Does "women" include all women? Some groups have been driven back from the position of *all* women to some proposed "special" class such as "poor" women and eventually concentrated more on economic class than sexual class. But if we're interested in women and how women *qua* women are oppressed, this class must include *all* women. What separates out a particular individual from other individuals as a "woman"? We recognize it's a sexual separation and that this separation has two aspects, "sociological" and "biological." The term for the sociological function is "woman" (wif-man); the term for the biological function is "female" (to suckle); both terms are descriptive of functions in the interests of someone other than the possessor.

And what is meant by "class"? We've already covered the meaning as the characteristic by which certain individuals are grouped together. In the women's movement" or "feminism," individuals group together to *act* on behalf of women as a class in opposition to the *class* enemies of women. It is the interaction between classes that defines political action. For this reason I call the feminist analysis a *causal class analysis*.

We have established that women are a political class characterized by a sexual function. It is clear that women, at the present time at any rate, have the *capacity* to bear children. But the question arises: "How did this biological classification become a political classification? How or why did this elaborate superstructure of coercion develop on top of a capacity (which normally implies choice)?"

It is generally agreed that women were the first political class. (Children do not properly constitute a political class since the relevant characteristic of its members is unstable for any given member by definition.) "Political" classes are usually defined as classes treated by other classes in some special manner distinct from the way other classes are treated. What is frequently omitted is that "political" classes are *artificial*; they define persons *with* certain capacities *by* that capacity, changing the contingent to the necessary, thereby appropriating the *capacity* of an individual as a *function* of society. Definition of "political class": individuals grouped together by other individuals as a function of the grouping individuals, depriving the grouped individuals of their human status. A "function" of society cannot be a free individual—exercising the minimum human rights of physical integrity and freedom of movement.

If women were the first political class and political classes must be defined by individuals outside that class, who defined them, and why, and how? It is reasonable to assume that at some period in history the population was politically undifferentiated; let's call that mass "Mankind" (generic). The first dichotomous division of this mass is said to have been on the grounds of sex: male and female. But the genitals *per se* would be no more grounds for the human race to be divided in two than skin color or height or hair color. The genitals, in connection with a particular activity, have the *capacity* for the initiation of the reproductive process. But, I submit, it was because one half the human race bears the *burden* of the reproductive *process* and because man, the "rational" animal, had the wit to take advantage of that, that the childbearers, or the "beasts of burden," were corralled into a political class: equivocating the biologically contingent burden into a political (or necessary) penalty, thereby modifying those individuals' definition from the human to the functional, or animal.

There is no justification for using any individual as a function of others. Didn't *all* members of society have the right to decide if they even *wanted* to reproduce? Because one half of humanity was and still is forced to bear the burden of reproduction at the will of the other half, the first political class is defined not by its sex—sexuality was only relevant originally as a means to reproduction—but by the function of being the *container* of the reproductive process.

Because women have been taught to believe that men have protective feelings towards women (men have protective feelings towards their functions (property), *not* other human beings!), we women are shocked by these discoveries and ask ourselves *why* men took and continue to take advantage of us. Some people say that men are naturally, or biologically, aggressive. But this leaves us at an impasse. If the values of society are power oriented, there is no chance that men would agree to be medicated into an humane state. The other alternative that has been suggested is to eliminate men as biologically incapable of humane relationships and therefore a menace to society. I can sympathize with the frustration and rage that leads to this suggestion, but the proposal as I understand it is that men constitute a social disease, and that by "men" is meant those individuals with certain typical genital characteristics. These genital characteristics are held to determine the organism in every

biochemical respect, thus determining the psychic structure as well. It may be that as in other mental derangements, and I do believe that men behave in a mentally deranged manner towards women, there is a biochemical correspondence, but this would be ultimately behaviorally determined, not genetically.

I believe that the sex *roles* both male and female, must be destroyed, not the individuals who happen to possess either a penis or a vagina, or both, or neither. But many men I have spoken with see little to choose between the two positions and feel that without the role they'd just as soon die. Certainly it is the master who resists the abolition of slavery, especially when he is offered no recompense in power. I think that the *need* men have for the role of oppressor is the source and foundation of all human oppression: they suffer from a disease peculiar to Mankind which I call "metaphysical cannibalism," and men must at the very least cooperate in curing themselves.

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Perhaps the pathology of oppression begins with just that characteristic which distinguishes Mankind from the other species: rationality. It has been proposed before that the basic condition of Man is *Angst*—the knowledge and constant awareness that He will die and is thus trapped by existence in an inescapable dilemma. My proposal is more fundamental.

Man is not aware of the possibility of death until He is able to put together certain abstractions, e.g., descriptions of events, with the relevant descriptive connectives. It requires a fairly sophisticated intellect to be able to extrapolate from the description of an event to one's own condition, that is, from another person's *experience* to one's own essential definition. If instead of asking ourselves what particular conclusion rationality might arrive at, we ask what the nature of this distinguishing human characteristic is, we come to a more fundamental question.

The distinction between the nature of the animal and human brain seems to be that while an animal can imagine, that is, can mentally image some object before its eyes in a different position or some object not presently before its eyes in some familiar situation, an animal cannot *construct* with its imagination. An animal cannot imagine a new situation made up of ingredients combined together for the first time with each ingredient initiating consequences for the other ingredients to produce the new situation.

Man's rationality is distinguished by its "constructive imagination," and this constructive imagination has been a mixed blessing. The first experience of Man in His existence is usually called "awareness" or "consciousness"; we are *sensible*; our senses are operating unrestricted by external coercions (so far our description is also true of animals). What probably is first *known* to us as a distinct thing is our own body, since it is the object most consistently within our perception. As we see other objects with parts similar to our first object of perception, I think we can observe our first operation of rationality: We "imagine" that the second observation has *consequences* for the first observation. We see another human being as physically complete and autonomous (powerful) and ourselves as abbreviated, thus incomplete (powerless). We can never see ourselves as fleshly integral units; we feel and sense and analogize that we are each independent units, but we can never completely perceive *ourselves* as such. Each of us begins with this initial insecurity.

Rational action (intention) requires some sense of individual autonomy. We have choice only to the degree that we are physically free, and every Man by His nature feels ambiguity on this point. In addition, Man realizes early in His maturity that there is an enormous gap between what He can do and what He can *imagine* done. The powers of His body and the powers of His mind are in conflict within one organism; they are mockeries of each other. This second factor adds frustration to the first factor of insecurity.

We now posit Man as insecure and frustrated. He has two needs: (1) substance, as autonomous body—necessarily outside Himself—and (2) the alleviation of His frustration (the suppression of feeling) through anger—*oppression*. When we understand these two consequences peculiar to Man's nature, we can begin to understand the nature of "politics"*

*While I cannot go into it here in detail, I want to make clear that we must use our constructive imagination to devise a moral alternative. Such an alternative must provide an internal solution to the feelings of inadequacy. The solution would probably depend upon just that faculty that initiated the original dilemma, the human imagination. Rationality will have to construct the substance sufficient for individual autonomy from the inside. This would resolve both the problem of substantive incompleteness and the reconciliation of mind and body.

Man feels the need of something like Himself, an "extension." This presents a problem since *all* Men suffer this same need: all Men are looking for potency—the substantive power to close the gap between their bodily and mental powers. It seems clear that, once the resolution takes this external direction, some Men—ideally half (thus, one for each)—would have to catch *other* Men in some temporary depression of consciousness (when matured, rationality or constructive imagination) and at some physical disadvantage. This temporary depletion of Self provides the opportunity to simultaneously devour the mind of a member of the selected class and to appropriate their substance to oneself. It is this process that I call "metaphysical cannibalism." It is to eat one's own kind, especially that aspect considered most potent to the victim while alive, and to destroy the evidence that the aggressor and the victim are the Same. The principle of metaphysical cannibalism seemed to meet both needs of Man: to gain potency (power) and to vent frustration (hostility).

Some psychic relief was achieved by one half the human race at the expense of the other half. Men neatly decimated Mankind by one half when they took advantage of the *social* disability of those Men who bore the burden of the reproductive process; men invaded the being of those individuals now defined as functions, or "females," appropriated their human characteristic and occupied their bodies. The original "rape" was political, the robbing of one half of Mankind of its humanity; the sexual connotations to the term no doubt grew out of the characterizations made later of the Men in the original action. This rape in its essential features has been reenacted and rationalized and justified ever since. Firstly, those Men called women have been anchored to their position as victim by men devising numerous direct variations on women's capture, consolidating women's imprisonment. Secondly, men have devised indirect variations on the original crime via the principle of oppression against other Men. But all of these variations—what we call class systems and their supportive institutions—are motivated by Man's nature, and all political change will result in nothing but other variations on metaphysical cannibalism—rape—until we find a human and equitable alternative to Man's dilemma.

The male-female distinction was the beginning of the role system, wherein some persons function for others. This primary distinction should properly be referred to as the Oppressor (male) - Oppressed

(female) distinction, the first political distinction. Women were the first political class and the beginning of the class system.

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Certainly in the pathology of oppression, it is the agent of oppression who must be analyzed and dealt with: he is responsible for the cultivation and spread of the disease. Still a question arises: How is it that, once the temporary susceptibility to disease (aggression) has passed, the patient does not spontaneously recover? It must be that the external attack aggravates in the victim a latent disorganization which grows and flourishes in response to and finally in tandem with the pathology imposed from outside. The disease drawn out and cultivated from within can finally maintain the original victim in a pathological state with fewer external pressures. I propose that the latent disorganization in "females" is the same disorganization—dilemma—from which "males" opted for metaphysical cannibalism. The role of the Oppressor (the male role) is to attempt to resolve his dilemma at the expense of others by destroying their humanity (appropriating the rationality of the Oppressed). The role of the Oppressed (the female-woman role) is to resolve her dilemma by self-destruction (bodily destruction or insanity). Given an Oppressor—the will for power—the natural response for its counterpart, the Oppressed (given any shade of remaining Self-consciousness), is Self-annihilation. Since the purpose and nature of metaphysical cannibalism is the appropriation *of* and extension *to* substance, bodily self-destruction is uncommon in comparison with mental escapes. While men can "cannibalize" the consciousness of women as far as human Self-construction for the woman is concerned, men get no direct use from this except in so far as they *believe* it gives them magic powers. But rationality imprisoned must destroy itself.

Metaphysical cannibalism does not solve the dilemma posed by human rationality for either the Oppressor or the Oppressed. The Oppressor can only whet his appetite for power by external measures (like drugs to dull the symptom of pain) and thus increases his disease and symptoms; the Oppressed floats in a limbo of un-Consciousness, driven there by the immobilization of her vital organ—rejecting life but not quite dead—sensible enough to still feel the pain.

The most common female escape is the psycho-pathological condition of love. It is a euphoric state of fantasy in which the victim transforms her oppressor into her redeemer: she turns her natural

hostility towards the aggressor against the remnants of herself—her Consciousness—and sees her counterpart in contrast to herself as all powerful (as he is by now at her expense). The combination of his power, her self-hatred, and the hope for a life that is self-justifying—the goal of all living creatures—results in a yearning for her stolen life—her Self—that is the delusion and poignancy of love. “Love” is the natural response of the victim to the rapist. What is extremely difficult and “unnatural,” but necessary, is for the Oppressed to cure themselves (destroy the female role), to throw off the Oppres-

sor, and to help the Oppressor to cure himself (to destroy the male role). It is superhuman, but the only alternative—the elimination of males as a biological group—is subhuman.

Politics and political theory revolve around this paradigm case of the Oppressor and the Oppressed. The theory and the practices can be divided into two parts: those institutions which directly reinforce the paradigm case of oppression, and those systems and institutions which reinforce the principle later extrapolated from this model.

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The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm

by ANNE KOEDT

Anne Koedt, a founder of the radical feminist movement in New York (New York Radical Women, The Feminists, and currently New York Radical Feminists), is an editor of *Notes* and is now at work on a book about female sexuality, to be published by Random House in 1971.

Whenever female orgasm and frigidity is discussed, a false distinction is made between the vaginal and the clitoral orgasm. Frigidity has generally been defined by men as the failure of women to have vaginal orgasms. Actually the vagina is not a highly sensitive area and is not constructed to achieve orgasm. It is the clitoris which is the center of sexual sensitivity and which is the female equivalent of the penis.

I think this explains a great many things: First of all, the fact that the so-called frigidity rate among women is phenomenally high. Rather than tracing female frigidity to the false assumptions about female anatomy, our “experts” have declared frigidity a psychological problem of women. Those women who complained about it were recommended psychiatrists, so that they might discover their “problem”—diagnosed generally as a failure to adjust to their role as women.

The facts of female anatomy and sexual response tell a different story. There is only one area for sexual climax, although there are many areas for

sexual arousal; that area is the clitoris. All orgasms are extensions of sensation from this area. Since the clitoris is not necessarily stimulated sufficiently in the conventional sexual positions, we are left “frigid.”

Aside from physical stimulation, which is the common cause of orgasm for most people, there is also stimulation through primarily mental processes. Some women, for example, may achieve orgasm through sexual fantasies, or through fetishes. However, while the stimulation may be psychological, the orgasm manifests itself physically. Thus, while the cause is psychological, the *effect* is still physical, and the orgasm necessarily takes place in the sexual organ equipped for sexual climax—the clitoris. The orgasm experience may also differ in degree of intensity—some more localized, and some more diffuse and sensitive. But they are all clitoral orgasms.

All this leads to some interesting questions about conventional sex and our role in it. Men have orgasms essentially by friction with the vagina, not the clitoral area, which is external and not able to