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# DEFINING FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL APPROACH

KAREN OFFEN

What is feminism? Who is a feminist? How do we understand feminism across national boundaries? Across cultures? Across centuries? These questions and their corollaries are raised every day, both here and abroad, by activists in the contemporary women's movement, by scholars, in the press, and in informal conversation. Everyone seems to have different answers, and every answer is infused with a political and emotional charge. To many people, inside and outside of the academy, the word "feminism" continues to inspire controversy and to arouse a visceral response—indeed, even to evoke fear among a sizable portion of the general public. If words and the concepts they convey can be said to be dangerous, then "feminism" and "feminist" must be dangerous words, representing dangerous concepts. Despite Virginia Woolf's attempt some

This essay was conceived amid a contestation over the historical content of feminism at the 1976 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, held at Bryn Mawr College. An earlier version circulated as Working Paper no. 22, Center for Research on Women (now the Institute for Research on Women and Gender), Stanford University (1985), under the title, "Toward a Historical Definition of Feminism: The Case of France." I wish to thank many historian colleagues and the reviewers of *Signs* for their challenging comments, tips, and suggestions on previous drafts. I am also indebted to the Harvard University Center for European Studies; the Women's Studies Seminar of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and San Diego State University, for inviting me to present these findings; and to Clemson University, for asking me to deliver the first Dorothy Lambert Whisnant Lecture on Women's History. The article is dedicated to my colleagues in the Affiliated and Visiting Scholars' group at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

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fifty years ago to kill the word “feminism” by symbolically incinerating its written representation, the word continues to be used, and the concepts it stands for clearly retain “a force of tremendous power.”<sup>1</sup>

As scholars in women’s studies who do claim the label of feminism, we owe it to the public and to one another to respond to these questions and to address the fear that induces would-be supporters to disclaim the label of feminism even when they support what we would consider feminist goals. To allow so many to get away with saying, “I’m not a feminist, but . . .” seems highly problematic in the light of current political necessities. To speak effectively, we must arrive at some understanding of the term “feminism” that we ourselves can agree on. However, to be truly useful such an understanding cannot be derived exclusively from our own culture; it should reflect the cumulative knowledge we have acquired about the historical development of the critique of and program for sociopolitical change in the status of women in a variety of cultures. In other words, it must be not only historically sound but comparatively grounded in order to be conceptually illuminating.

### Rationale for the project of defining feminism

What I am proposing here is a reexamination and reconceptualization of the public understanding of this word “feminism,” based on the history of the word and its cognates and on evidence of its use from comparative history. As the distinguished historian Lucien Febvre once argued, “It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word.”<sup>2</sup> My aspiration is to arrive at a new definition, that is, a conceptualization of feminism that is more dynamic, more supple, and more comprehensive than those formerly inscribed in dictionaries.<sup>3</sup> Let me state at the outset that as a historian I view definition neither as an exercise in dogmatism nor as “a labelling activity . . .

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth, 1938), 184, 250.

<sup>2</sup> Lucien Febvre, “Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas” (1930), in *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 219. The impetus for much of the subsequent interest in the history of words and concepts can be traced to Febvre’s classic work, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982; originally published in French, 1942). Febvre’s enormously important insights have been built on and extended through the “archeology of knowledge” proposed by the late Michel Foucault and by historians of the *Annales* school in France.

<sup>3</sup> Many historians since Febvre have investigated the history of words, but only a few have argued for historical redefinition of terms. For a recent American example, see Mary Gluck, “Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and

betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organize, and rationalize our conceptual universe” but, rather, as a powerful working tool for enhancing understanding of a concept that remains undisputedly significant to both women and men today.<sup>4</sup> The definition I will propose later in this article is intended to accommodate the extant historical evidence specific to time and place, which suggests that feminism is represented by two historically distinct and seemingly conflicting modes of argument. Yet this definition is also intended to encourage readers, once informed, to transcend these historical specifics by raising our thinking about feminism and its meaning to a higher level of generalization. This exercise may admittedly be seen by some as stretching too far the general mission of the historian, which is to locate the patterns of change and continuity in the chaos of past human activity and to interpret their meaning for the present. I hope, however, that the exercise will stimulate deeper and more informed reflection on the conceptual and political problems we face today.

No doubt a fuller explanation should be offered as to why I think such an endeavor necessary. The first, most immediate reason is that historians, both those who work on the history of American feminism and those who, like myself, are exploring the history of feminism in other Western cultures, require a more sophisticated conceptual framework than we have possessed to date in order to

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the Avant-Garde,” *Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 4 (December 1986): 845–82. In the twentieth century, historians have been particularly interested in the development and deployment of “ism” words and concepts such as individualism, nationalism, feudalism, fascism, communism, romanticism, classicism, etc., which are often utilized (especially in textbook histories) to characterize whole historical epochs. See, e.g., E. O. Golob, *The “Isms”: A History and Evaluation* (New York: Harper, 1954), which discusses capitalism, mercantilism, socialism, and corporatism; and Richard Koebner and H. D. Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). There is such a huge scholarly literature surrounding the terms “socialism,” “nationalism,” and “fascism” that study of these concepts has spawned whole historical subfields. Thus it seems all the more amazing that the concept of feminism has only begun to receive close scrutiny.

<sup>4</sup> The quote is from Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 159. Moi herself is not opposed to the act of definition. As a practical matter, I find it difficult to accept the renunciation of definition that has recently become stylish in the wake of French feminist literary criticism (see, e.g., Alice Jardine, *Gynesis* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986], 20). Knowledge is not well served by asserting that “definition is a male prejudice” and that “the day we start defining feminism it’s lost its vitality” (Melanie Randall, “Defining Feminism—an Interview by Melanie Randall,” *Resources for Feminist Research* 14, no. 3 [November 1985]: 2). The utility of definition depends on how it is done.

better analyze and interpret thought and action concerning women's status across cultures and across time. Second, such conceptual clarification could be useful to scholars in other academic disciplines represented in women's studies and, particularly, to contemporary feminist theorists, a group whose work is sometimes ahistorical and sometimes altogether antihistorical in character.<sup>5</sup> Finally, it could be valuable to contemporary activists who, awash in a sea of competing tendencies and issues that demand solutions, sorely need a broad-based, dynamic working definition in order to confront and combat the present confusion about and fear of feminism in the public mind. Thereby, activists may reclaim the initiative from our adversaries in explaining what feminism is and is not. Thus, a historical understanding and definition of the term "feminism" seem to me to be essential conditions for becoming more politically effective today and in the future.

### European history and the history of feminism

The study of European women's history can contribute important insights to the exercise of understanding and, therefore, defining feminism for contemporary readers in other settings. As Americans, a comparative historical approach forces us to broaden our perspective by examining carefully from a different, although not wholly unfamiliar, angle much that we take for granted—namely, the political, social, and economic context in which so many of our own ideas originated. Thus, it allows us not only to recover and dissect the prevailing and dissenting views on the organization of societies, which are embedded historically in the Western debate on "the woman question" (as this controversy came to be known in the nineteenth century), but also to explore the political dynamics of the interaction between these views.

In the early 1970s, when my generation of American historians began to investigate the history of European women and their women's movement, we understood feminism in a rather simplistic and straightforward way, according to a composite English-language definition then found in most American dictionaries. A feminist was, of course, defined as a person who espoused feminism. But what

<sup>5</sup> For example, sheer lack of historical information beyond the recent Anglo-American context weakens most essays in Julie Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *What Is Feminism?* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), which nevertheless attempts to grapple with historical questions. See, in particular, the thoughtful essay by Rosalind Delmar (8–33), which poses many of the questions this article set out, quite independently, to answer.

was feminism? The dictionary definition (in composite) read approximately as follows: a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of *political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men* (my emphasis). This was also the perspective conveyed by the best-known histories of the American women's movement published prior to 1970, in which feminism effectively began in 1848 at Seneca Falls and the focus was on votes for women. The key notion here is the means to the end of "advancement": "rights equal to those granted men."<sup>6</sup> Notice the extent to which this legalistic definition of "equal rights" proposes the standard of male adulthood as the norm. It is a definition that is expressed in a vocabulary of "rights" common to the Western tradition but developed most explicitly in the political theory and practice of Great Britain and the United States, which has so long focused on elaborating the rights and privileges of male individuals on grounds of principle.<sup>7</sup> For women, the vote, the attainment of legal control over property and person, and entry into male-dominated professions and institutional hierarchies became the representative issues.

Those of us in European history soon discovered that this English-language dictionary definition of feminism did not serve us well; we found its explanatory power inadequate for the accumulating evidence about the goals and activities of women's advocates and women's movements on the European continent during the nineteenth century and before. Even though issues of access to male privilege and power were undeniably important for women and men in the European past, they sought other goals as well. Moreover, the ways in which Europeans expressed their claims seemed

<sup>6</sup> American dictionaries consulted include: *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2d ed., 1939 and 1954; *Funk & Wagnall's New Standard Dictionary of the English Language*, 1955; *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 1966; and *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1966. The definitions in these works all refer primarily to the theory and action of the movement for equal rights. For examples of this usage by historians, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (1959; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1971); Andrew Sinclair, *The Better Half: The Emancipation of the American Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> On Anglo-American political theory, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981). For the British tradition, see, in particular, Carole Pateman, *Women and Democratic Citizenship: The Jefferson Memorial Lectures Delivered at the University of California, Berkeley* (February 1985), photocopy in my possession; for the French, Christine Fauré, *La démocratie sans les femmes: Essai sur le libéralisme en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985).

to differ considerably from the Anglo-Americans: Europeans focused as much or more on elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than similarity within a framework of male/female complementarity; and, instead of seeking unqualified admission to male-dominated society, they mounted a wide-ranging critique of the society and its institutions. Amy Hackett, an American historian of German feminism, spelled out the problem in 1975, when she wrote, "The American bias [in scholarship on feminism] is particularly evident in the frequent assumption that equality of rights is the essence of feminism."<sup>8</sup> Hackett proposed excluding the concepts of equality and rights from any broad definition of feminism because claims for individual "equality" and "rights" were not categories germane to the discourse of leaders of the early twentieth-century German women's movement. Yet, some of these women clearly considered themselves to be feminists and were so considered by their contemporaries.<sup>9</sup>

In a subsequent case, Cheryl Register puzzled over the definition of feminism as she attempted to evaluate the contribution of the Swedish writer Ellen Key, for whom motherhood was the central analytical point. If feminism is identified, as has been the case in Swedish historical writing, with women's activity in the public sphere and with parliamentary agitation for legal rights, Register queried, how should one evaluate "a woman who stays independent of organizations and doctrines, extols private virtues, and sees love, an unlegislable emotion, as the crux of liberation"? Such a woman, she added,

<sup>8</sup> Amy Hackett, "The Politics of Feminism in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890–1918," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976), v. For a similar criticism of the ethnocentrism of the American individualist perspective on feminism by another German scholar, see Peter H. Merkl, "The Study of Women in Comparative Politics: Reflections on a Conference," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 3, pt. 1 (Spring 1976): 749–56.

<sup>9</sup> This is contrary to the claims of historian Richard J. Evans, who has argued that leaders of the German women's movement never used the terms "feminism" or "feminist" ("The Concept of Feminism: Notes for Practicing Historians," in *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social and Literary History*, ed. Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986], 247–58, esp. 248). For proof of the contrary, see the commentaries published in France and elsewhere by German women, notably Käthe Schirmacher, who used the term frequently in her articles, "El feminisme en la universidad de Zurich," *España moderna* 9, no. 100 (April 1897): 136–46, "Le féminisme en Allemagne," *Revue de Paris* (July 1, 1898), 151–76, "Le mouvement féministe à travers le monde," *Revue mondiale* (December 1, 1901), 555–63, and in her short book, *Le féminisme aux Etats-Unis, en France, dans la Grande-Bretagne, en Suède et en Russie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1898). See also Lily Braun Gizycki, "Le mouvement féministe en Allemagne," *Revue politique et parlementaire* 20 (April 1899): 21–65; Siebald Rudolf Steinmetz, "Feminismus und Rasse," *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 7 (1904): 751–68; and Helene Lange, "Feministische Gedankenarchie," in G. Bäumer et al., *Frauenbewegung und Sexualethik* (Heilbronn: Selzer, 1909).



“looks suspiciously anti-feminist, unless we broaden our view of what feminism encompasses.”<sup>10</sup> Yet Ellen Key, who also demanded state subsidies for all mothers, including the unmarried, had a profound impact on the theory and practice of the European women’s movement.<sup>11</sup> Similar interpretative problems have appeared more recently as scholars reexamine the historical evidence for France, Italy, Great Britain, and even the United States prior to the First World War.<sup>12</sup> Such evidence suggests that our understanding of feminism cannot be restricted, as some have claimed, purely and simply to an expression of “bourgeois” or “possessive” individualism. Nor can feminism be considered, as Richard Stites has suggested for Russia, merely as one component of “women’s liberation.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cheryl Register, “Motherhood at Center: Ellen Key’s Social Vision,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 602.

<sup>11</sup> See Ronald de Angelis, “Ellen Key: A Biography of the Swedish Social Reformer” (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1979); Torborg Lundell, “Ellen Key and Swedish Feminist Views on Motherhood,” *Scandinavian Studies* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 1984): 351–69; and Kay Goodman, “Motherhood and Work: The Concept of the Misuse of Women’s Energy, 1895–1905,” in Joeres and Maynes, eds.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of European developments and further bibliographical references, see Karen Offen, “Liberty, Equality, and Justice for Women: The Theory and Practice of Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Mosher Stuard, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), 335–73. To be fair, it should be pointed out that historians of American women have developed a comparable critique since the mid-seventies. The revisionist approach to the history of feminism in the United States is too well known to require documentation here; its initial thrust, however, was to locate the origins of feminist activism in early nineteenth-century female reform societies and educational activities that fostered the development of female consciousness, rather than exclusively in the movement for women’s rights that grew out of the political movement to abolish slavery. More recent work has emphasized the community consciousness of the women in female reform societies, but with what seems to me (in comparison to Europe) to be a far more local rather than emphatically national or state-associated perspective. Influential contributors to this revisionist account of American feminist history include Barbara J. Berg, Nancy F. Cott, Estelle B. Freedman, Linda Gordon, Nancy Hewitt, William Leach, Mary P. Ryan, Anne Firor Scott, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (see, in particular, Estelle B. Freedman, “What Women Wanted: Varieties of Feminism in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Stanford Observer* [January 1978], 3, 7; and Nancy Cott’s review essay, “The House of Feminism,” *New York Review of Books* [March 17, 1983], 36–40). It remains the case, however, that this newer historiography has yet to offset the impact of older rights-based notions in the historical perception of feminism held by the American general public.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Ideological Bases of Domestic Economy: The Representation of Women and the Family in the Age of Expansion,” in her and Eugene Genovese’s *Fruits of Merchant Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), and her introduction to *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); and Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Nihilism, Feminism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).



To complicate matters, historians of Europe discovered that the term “feminism” itself barely existed before the twentieth century and that, from the time of its introduction, it was controversial. As my own research on France developed, I became interested in the early history of the word *féminisme*. My inquiry revealed definitively that this word and its derivatives originated quite recently in France.<sup>14</sup> Although invention of the word “*féminisme*” has often erroneously been attributed to Charles Fourier in the 1830s, in fact its origins are still uncertain. It only began to be used widely in France in the early 1890s and then principally as a synonym for women’s emancipation.<sup>15</sup> The first self-proclaimed “feminist” in France was the women’s suffrage advocate Hubertine Auclert, who from at least 1882 on used the term in her periodical, *La Citoyenne*, to describe herself and her associates.<sup>16</sup> The words gained currency following discussion in the French press of the first self-proclaimed “feminist” congress in Paris, which was sponsored in May 1892 by Eugénie Potonie-Pierre and her colleagues in the women’s group *Solidarité*, who shortly thereafter juxtaposed *féminisme* with *masculinisme*.<sup>17</sup> By 1894–95 the terms had crossed the Channel to Great

<sup>14</sup> See Karen Offen, “Sur les origines des mots ‘féminisme’ et féministe,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* (Paris) 34, no. 3 (July–September 1987): 492–96. An English version is forthcoming in *Feminist Issues*, vol. 8 (Fall 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Marya Chéliga-Loevy stated in 1896 that Charles Fourier had coined the expression in his *Théorie des Quatre Mouvements et des destinées générales* (1808) (“Les hommes féministes,” *Revue Encyclopédique Larousse*, no. 169 [November 28, 1896]: 826). This claim has been uncritically echoed by many persons since, based on secondary sources that repeated the claim without authenticating it. My consultation of both the 1808 and 1841 editions of the *Théorie* revealed no trace of the actual words, though Fourier’s concepts of what would be required to emancipate women clearly qualify as “feminist” concepts even by today’s standards. Nor is there any entry under either word in Edouard Silberling, *Dictionnaire de sociologie phalanstérienne. Guide des oeuvres complètes de Charles Fourier* (1911; reprint Burt Franklin, New York, in their Bibliography and Reference Series, no. 63, 1964). See Offen, “Sur les origines des mots ‘féminisme’ et féministe,” for further discussion of the Fourier conundrum and the circuitous odyssey through cross-references whereby this erroneous claim became entrenched in French dictionaries.

<sup>16</sup> See *La citoyenne*, no. 64 (September 4–October 1, 1882), 1. Auclert’s usage was picked up by L. Cosson, *Essai sur la condition des femmes* (Paris: Dupont, 1883), who speaks both of *féministes* (59, 121) and *chauvinisme masculin* (125). American readers will be interested to learn that Hubertine Auclert used the word “feminist” repeatedly in an open letter to Susan B. Anthony (dated February 27, 1888), responding to an invitation to attend the 1888 congress of women in Washington, D.C. (“Un mot de marche,” *La citoyenne* [March 1888], reprinted in *Hubertine Auclert: La Citoyenne, 1848–1914*, ed. Edith Taieb [Paris: Editions Syros, 1982], 128–31). See also, Steven C. Hause, *Hubertine Auclert: The French Suffragette* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> The Congrès Général des Institutions Féministes convened at the sixth district municipal building in Paris on May 14, 1892. See Maria Deraismes, “A Propos du

Britain, and before the turn of the century, they were appearing in Belgian French, Spanish, Italian, German, Greek, and Russian published sources.<sup>18</sup> At the September 1896 women's congress in Berlin, Potonie-Pierre (in a report on the position of women in France) applauded the press for launching the word "feminism" after she and her friends had invented it and sent it into circulation.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1890s the words had jumped the Atlantic to Argentina and the United States, though it seems they were not commonly used in the United States much before 1910.<sup>20</sup> Then, as now, these words

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Congrès de la Fédération des sociétés féministes," *Revue des revues* (August 1892): 1–3. The article discussing this congress in the *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions (EWR)* [(July 15, 1892): 210], referred to the "General Congress of Women's Societies"; only in 1896 (64, 121) did the *EWR* pick up the terminology of feminism, complete with the French accent marks. The juxtaposition of *féminisme* and *masculinisme* is made in the pamphlet *Socialisme et sexualisme: Programme du Parti socialiste féminin* (Paris, 1893).

<sup>18</sup> Early usages that have come to my attention during an admittedly random inquiry are the following. In Belgium, an Office Féministe Universel was established in 1896 and sponsored publication of *Cahiers féministes* (March 1896–1905). During August 1897, an international feminist congress convened in Brussels (see the proceedings: *Actes du Congrès féministe international de Bruxelles, tenu du 4 au 7 août 1897: Publiés par les soins de Mme Marie Popelin, secrétaire-générale du Congrès* [Bruxelles: Eulens, 1898]). In Spain, Adolfo Posada wrote and published several articles with feminism in the title in *España moderna* in 1896–97 (see "Los problemas del feminismo," *España moderna*, no. 95 [November 1896], 118–45, and "Progresos del feminismo," *España moderna*, no. 99 [March 1897], 91–137, and his book *Feminismo* [Madrid: Librería de Fernando, 1899]). Significantly, most of the sources Posada cited in his articles were either French or British. In Italy, see Anna Kulisciöff, "Il femminismo," *Critica sociale* 7, no. 12 (June 16, 1897); Emilia Mariani, "Il femminismo: Lettera aperta alla Dottoressa Kulisciöff," *Per l'idea; supplemento mensile letterario al Guido del popolo* 2, no. 8 (August 1, 1897); and Maria Venco, "Tra femminismo e socialismo," *Vita femminile* 3, no. 8–9 (1897). See also Rina Faccio Pierangeli, "Il femminismo in Italia," *Vita internazionale* 2, no. 1 (January 5, 1899): 22–24. In Russian, see Zinaida Vengerova, "Feminizm i zhenskaia svoboda," *Obrazovanie*, no. 5–6 (1898), 73–90; and V. G. Kamrash, *Feminizm, ob emansipatsii zhenschiny* (Moscow, 1902), both cited by Linda Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984). In Dutch, see Siebald Rudolf Steinmetz, *Het feminisme* (Leyden, 1899). In German, see the articles by Schirmacher, Braun Gizycki, Steinmetz, and Lange, all cited in n. 9 above. According to Eleni Varikas, the word first appears in Greek in an editorial on Greek women of letters in the women's publication ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΚΥΡΠΙΩΝ (Ladies' Journal) (December 5, 1896), 2.

<sup>19</sup> In Rosalie Schoenflies et al., eds., *Der Internationale Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen: Berlin, 19–26 September 1896* (Berlin: Walther, 1897), 40.

<sup>20</sup> On Argentine usage, see Asunción Lavrin, "The Ideology of Feminism in the Southern Cone, 1900–1940," Working Paper no. 169 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, Latin American Program, 1986). I have since consulted Elvira V.

(like other nineteenth-century “ism” words—conservatism, liberalism, socialism) were employed not only by proponents and adversaries of women’s emancipation but also by observers of their struggles. Then, as now, many parties used the terms polemically, as epithets, rather than analytically; then, as now, the words were not used by everyone to mean the same thing. And, as the study of their history reveals, they referred far more often to the “rights of women” than to “rights equal to those of men.” This is a subtle but profound distinction. Even then the vocabulary of feminism connoted a far broader sociopolitical critique, a critique that was woman-centered and woman-celebratory in its onslaught on male privilege.

In fin-de-siècle France, problems of defining and claiming *fém-inisme* and *féministe* arose immediately. As was true of French politics generally, factions quickly emerged. Groups and individuals espousing divergent theories of feminism and agendas for change began to categorize themselves and their rivals through the practice of exclusionary classification, by adding qualifying modifiers as well as by forming separate organizations and publications. By 1900 a veritable taxonomy of self-described or imputed feminisms had sprung into being: “familial feminists,” “integral feminists,” “Christian feminists,” “socialist feminists,” “radical feminists,” and “male feminists,” among others.<sup>21</sup> Already at that time, “socialist

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Lopez’s 1901 doctoral thesis, “El movimiento feminista” (University of Buenos Aires), which drew largely on European sources. For deployment of the term in an Argentine anarchist women’s paper, *La voz de la mujer* (1896–97), see Maxine Molyneux, “No God, No Boss, No Husband: Anarchist Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 119–45. I am also indebted to Asunción Lavrin for sending me an early Cuban text, “Algo sobre Feminismo,” by the prominent Cuban intellectual Manuel Marquez Sterling, in *La escuela moderna* (Havana) (August 30, 1901), 163–64. In her unpublished autobiography, Inez Haynes Irwin reports that she first heard the word *féministe* from a Radcliffe classmate who had just returned from France. Irwin was a Radcliffe student in 1896–97 (see her “Adventures of Yesterday,” 209, 450, deposited at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe, and available on microfilm in the RPI microfilm collection, “History of Women”). I am grateful to Kathy Peiss for this reference. Peiss has found that the American *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* did not employ the subject category prior to its 1910–14 volume (see “A Great Personal, Joyous Adventure: Feminist Ideology of the 1910’s and Its Social Context,” in *Feminist Research in the Eighties, Conference Proceedings*, ed. Patricia Lattin, Judith Bischoff, and Linda Tafel [De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983]). Note, however, that in 1905 the psychologist G. Stanley Hall referred to “feminists” in his two-volume treatise, *Adolescence* (New York: Appleton, 1905), 2:614.

<sup>21</sup> For the various subforms of late nineteenth-century French feminism, see Karen Offen, “The Woman Question as a Social Issue in Republican France before 1914” (mimeographed and privately circulated, Woodside, Calif., 1972), and “De-

feminists” had begun to cast aspersions on “bourgeois feminists.”<sup>22</sup> Not only adversaries but also partisans of various factions persistently posed the question of who could properly be called a feminist and who could not; their efforts quickly raised several related questions, questions that have since become all too familiar, including the questions that to the historian appear the most perplexing of all: Which advocates of which resolution to the woman question held women’s best interests at heart? **When is a feminist really an antifeminist?** What must the fundamental criteria be? And, most important politically, *who* will decide?

These definitional problems were quickly compounded by another problematic discovery, stemming from the fact that French scholars were pioneers in what we now call women’s studies.<sup>23</sup> In the course of exploring the early **French historiography in women’s history, it became apparent that, since 1900,** historians and scholars of literary history, as well as contemporary commentators, have taken up the **words “feminism” and “feminist,” using them anachronist-**

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population, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 654. Marilyn J. Boxer develops a similar point in “‘First Wave’ Feminism in Nineteenth-Century France: Class, Family and Religion,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 551–59. For striking examples of how contemporary opponents sorted out early twentieth-century feminists, see Theodore Joran’s comments on the *Almanach féministe* in his *Au coeur du féminisme* (Paris: Savaète, 1908), and his *Le mensonge du féminisme* (Paris: Jouve, 1905), 290–94; and Charles Turgeon, *Le féminisme français* (Paris: Larose, 1902).

<sup>22</sup> The polemical distinction between “bourgeois” and “socialist” feminists harks back to the founding in 1894 of the Bund Deutscher Frauenverein, at which time the women associated with the German Social Democratic Party were excluded (see Richard J. Evans, “Bourgeois Feminists and Women Socialists in Germany, 1894–1914: Lost Opportunity or Inevitable Conflict?” *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* 3, no. 4 [1980]: 355–76). These dichotomous categories spread throughout the network of socialist parties affiliated with the Second International and continue to color recent historical scholarship on feminism. Charles Sowerwine has examined the history of the Groupe Féministe Socialiste (1899–1905) in *Sisters or Citizens? Women and Socialism in France, 1876–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chap. 4. For a recent critique of that bourgeois/socialist feminist polemic, see Françoise Picq, “‘Bourgeois Feminism’ in France: A Theory Developed by Socialist Women before World War I,” in *Women in Culture and Politics*, ed. Judith Friedlander, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 330–43.

<sup>23</sup> See Marilyn J. Boxer, “Women’s Studies in France circa 1902: A Course on Feminology,” *International Supplement to the Women’s Studies Quarterly*, no. 1 (January 1982), 26–27, on the course taught by Marguerite Souley-Darqué in Paris at the Collège Libre des Sciences Sociales. Another woman, Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix, taught a course entitled “*Féminisme*” at this same institution in 1906. Both courses resulted in book-length publications.

ically and with great abandon, only rarely defining their terms or scrutinizing the full content of the ideas they so labeled. In the first decade of the twentieth century, learned books and articles appeared on feminism in antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and especially in the period beginning in the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

English-language scholars quickly demonstrated that such careless habits could be contagious; thus, we find scholarly treatises that address *Feminism in Greek Literature: From Homer to Aristotle*; *Women Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610–1652*; *Feminist Writers of the Seventeenth Century*; *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*, and “Feminism in the French Revolution,” the latter an otherwise valuable article that uses the terms “feminist,” “anti-feminist,” and “feminism” some sixty-five times in the space of twenty pages.<sup>25</sup> Even the late Joan Kelly, who openly

<sup>24</sup> Several French scholars writing during the first decade of the twentieth century did not hesitate to use the term in describing Erasmus, Thomas More, and Poulain de la Barre. In 1906 Georges Ascoli published a bibliography on the “history of feminist ideas” from the mid-sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries (see the *Revue de synthèse historique* 13 [1906]: 25–57, 99–106, 161–84). In March 1908, Jules Tixerant defended his doctoral thesis, “Le féminisme à l’époque de 1848 dans l’ordre politique et dans l’ordre économique,” in the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris. See also, Rose Rigaud, *Les idées féministes de Christine de Pisan* (1911; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973). Léon Abensour likewise used the term freely (see *La femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution française* [1923; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1977], and *Le féminisme sous le règne de Louis-Philippe et en 1848* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1913]; see also his earlier version, “Le féminisme pendant le règne de Louis-Philippe,” *La Révolution française* 55 [1908]: 331–65). Abensour also wrote about “Un mouvement féministe au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *La nouvelle revue* (March 1, 1911). Note also French applications of the term to studies of classical antiquity, as in Cleyre Yvelin, *Etude sur le féminisme dans l’antiquité* (Paris: Giard & Brière, 1908); and J.-M.-F. Bascoul, *La chaste Sappho de Lesbos et le mouvement féministe à Athènes au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.* (Paris: Welter, 1911). French writers continue to use the term no less broadly (see, most recently, Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours*, 2 vols. [Paris: des femmes, 1977]; and Jean Rabaut, *Histoire des féminismes français* [Paris: Stock, 1978], which opens with a discussion of the women of ancient Gaul).

<sup>25</sup> George Ely translated *Les femmes de la Renaissance* by René-Marie-Alphonse Maulde de Clavière (Paris: Perrin, 1898) as *The Women of the Renaissance: A Study of Feminism* (1900; rev. ed., London: Sonnenschein, 1905). See also S. A. Richards, *Feminist Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Nutt, 1914); F. A. Wright, *Feminism in Greek Literature from Homer to Aristotle* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1923); Joyce Mary Horner, *The English Women Novelists and Their Connection with the Feminist Movement (1698–1797)* (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Studies, 1930); Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Hilda Smith, *Reason’s Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Katharine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); and Jane Abray, “Feminism in the French Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (February 1975): 43–62.

acknowledged that the term “feminism” was not in use before the nineteenth century, proceeded to deploy it to encompass a broad range of pro-woman advocacy by European women between 1400 and 1800.<sup>26</sup> This practice seems highly problematic; not only is it anachronistic, but it is conceptually anarchic as well. A close reading of some of these studies reveals that few authors use the terms to mean the same thing. Moreover, many are internally inconsistent. Only an unusually attentive and well-informed reader can discover the myriad ways in which such a practice effectively deflects analysis from what are, in fact, important historical issues. In the meantime, scholars continue to speak loosely of “precursors” and “forerunners” of feminism or of “proto-feminists” and, nowadays, of “feminist antifeminism,” “antifeminist feminism,” and “post-feminists.”<sup>27</sup> How can one decide what is pre- and what is proto-, let alone anti- or post-, without first setting forth what is “feminist”?

As things now stand, scholars have to invent their own definitions of feminism. The extent to which this practice can lead to contradictory results is exemplified by editorial remarks in two recent collections of British women’s texts from the period 1500–1800. Moira Ferguson speaks of “first feminists” from 1500 on, while her British colleague Simon Shepherd, discussing several of the same writers examined by Ferguson, insists that readers will find no feminism in these texts.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, Ferguson’s notion of feminism differs from Shepherd’s. It is, of course, doubtful whether the most basic assumptions of sixteenth-century women writers about women’s nature, their relationship to men, to the family, to the structure and purpose of social order would be even slightly acceptable to critics of women’s status in England today. The “feminism” of the six-

<sup>26</sup> Joan Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*,” *Signs* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 4–28; reprinted in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> For example, Lula McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance from Christine of Pisa to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929). The term “pre-feminist” is employed by Edna L. Steeves, “Pre-Feminism in Some Eighteenth-Century Novels,” *Texas Quarterly* 16 (Autumn 1973): 48–57; and Sara Slavin Schramm, *Plow Women Rather than Reapers: An Intellectual History of Feminism in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979). For the oxymorons “antifeminist feminism” and “feminist antifeminism,” respectively, see Judith Stacey, “Are Feminists Afraid to Leave Home? The Challenge of Conservative Pro-family Feminism,” in Mitchell and Oakley, eds. (n. 5 above), 243–44, n. 4; and Donald Meyer, *Sex and Power: The Rise of Women in America, Russia, Sweden, and Italy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 176, 183.

<sup>28</sup> Moira Ferguson, ed., *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578–1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Simon Shephard, ed., *The Women’s Sharp Revenge: Five Women’s Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1985).



teenth century would be even more different from our own, and the demands by women or men for change in women's status in that century would require interpretation within the context of the cultures in which they wrote. Nevertheless, there is one common thread running through their arguments: what they share with their successors is the impetus to critique and improve the disadvantaged status of women relative to men within a particular cultural situation. Even this rudimentary definition of feminism, however, is not sufficient for analytical purposes.

Nor do the rough-hewn historical categories of feminism in circulation today in the United States and Great Britain offer much real insight into the possible historical dimensions of feminism. We find contemporary scholars employing both dualistic and tripartite distinctions. Among the dualistic distinctions proposed by scholars and activists in recent years are "old" and "new" feminisms, "social" and "hard-core" feminisms, "first-wave" and "second-wave" feminisms, "classical" and "modern" feminisms, "maximalist" and "minimalist" feminisms, and "humanistic" and "gynocentric" feminisms.<sup>29</sup> Tripartite distinctions include the "egalitarian," "evangelical," and "socialist" feminisms identified in the recent British past (i.e., since 1800) by sociologist Olive Banks, and the "liberal," "Marxist," and "radical" feminisms located by Zillah Eisenstein and others in the contemporary American scene.<sup>30</sup> Not content with

<sup>29</sup> In her collection, *Voices of the New Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1970), Mary Lou Thompson distinguishes between the recent movement for women's liberation and the older suffrage-based feminism. Miriam Schneir employed a similar distinction between "old" and "new" feminisms in the introduction to her anthology, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1972); as did Roberta Salper, ed., *Female Liberation: History and Current Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1972). In England, following the First World War, Eleanor Rathbone also used the "new/old" distinction to separate her "new feminism," of government "endowment" of motherhood, from the "old feminism" of the suffrage movement (*The Disinherited Family: A Plea for the Endowment of the Family* [1924; reprint, London: Arnold, 1927]). Not surprisingly, what was "new" for Rathbone was quite different than what was new to Thompson, Schneir, and Salper. For "social" and "hard-core feminism," see O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave* (n. 6 above). For "first-" and "second-wave" feminisms, see Elizabeth Sarah, ed., "Special Issue: Reassessments of 'First Wave' Feminism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982). For the various other dualisms referred to in the text, see Lynn Levine, "The Limits of Feminism," *Social Analysis*, no. 15 (August 1984), 11; Maggie McFadden, "Anatomy of Difference: Toward a Classification of Feminist Theory," *Women's Studies International Forum* 7, no. 6 (1984): 494–504; and Iris Marion Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 3 (1985): 173–83.

<sup>30</sup> See Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981); and Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981). Eisenstein provides a chart of con-



these, Alison Jagger and others identify a present-day “socialist feminist” category, which is distinct and separate from Marxist feminism.<sup>31</sup>

Admittedly, these latter categories have relevance and meaning within a circumscribed field of contemporary discourse shared by readers of publications devoted to scholarship in women’s studies. It is more doubtful that such distinctions make sense to other members of the general public. However, it is certain that none of them serve the analytical needs of historians who want to understand feminism prior to the twentieth century or in other parts of the world. The history of feminism cannot be rendered intelligible by imposing on the European past oversimplified “now/then” or other, more complex but time-bound, categories devised for analysis of the American or British present, or by subordinating feminism to the clash between liberals and Marxists since the 1890s. The history of European feminism cannot be clarified by resorting to American scholars’ distinctions between “feminism” and “women’s rights” or the “women’s movement.”<sup>32</sup> A more systematic, more comprehensive approach is required.

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temporary feminisms that distinguishes “black feminism,” “socialist feminism,” “lesbian feminism,” “radical feminism,” “anarcha-feminism,” and “radical-liberal,” “progressive liberal,” and “status-quo liberal feminism,” all of which are juxtaposed with a single category of “antifeminist traditionalists” (230).

<sup>31</sup> See Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983). In an earlier text, *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relation between Women and Men* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), Jagger and Paula Struhl offered five categories: conservatism (assumed to be antifeminist); liberalism; traditional Marxist feminism; radical feminism, and socialist feminism.

<sup>32</sup> The American historian Gerda Lerner has continuously insisted on drawing a distinction between “feminism” and “women’s rights” (see “New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History,” *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 1 [Fall 1969]: 53–62, “Women’s Right and American Feminism,” *American Scholar* 40, no. 2 [Spring 1971]: 235–48, and the ensuing essays in *The Majority Finds Its Past* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979]). William L. O’Neill made a similar distinction between the “woman movement” and “feminism” (see “Feminism as a Radical Ideology” [1968] in *Our American Sisters: Women in American Life and Thought*, ed. Jean E. Friedman and William G. Shade [Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1973], 301–25). In American history, Daniel Scott Smith introduced the subcategory “domestic feminism” to describe women’s assertion of control over sexual activity and fertility within marriage (see “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” in *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois W. Banner [New York: Harper & Row, 1974], 119–36). Dolores Hayden added “materialist feminism” in her book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

It took some time to arrive at this conclusion and to begin to struggle with its implications. During the writing of Susan Groag Bell's and my interpretative documentary, *Women, the Family, and Freedom*, there seemed to be no simple answer to this problem. We finally opted for the historicist's escape route; we deliberately renounced use in our essays of the words "feminism" and "feminist" as descriptors of any arguments on women's behalf prior to their actual use in the 1890s. We made this decision in order to focus readers' attention on the issues being discussed in the texts themselves, on the modes of argument used to discuss them, and on the salient points of disagreement, all seen in their immediate historical context.<sup>33</sup>

This strategy works successfully within the limits of a 1200-page book, and for seminars and courses devoted to close study of the texts. But in subsequent efforts to describe and summarize our book for more general audiences, and, ironically, in scholarly reviewers' attempts to analyze its content, the word feminism continues to provide a shorthand too convenient to give up.<sup>34</sup> This shows how stubborn a problem we face. There seems to be no satisfactory substitute. The term "feminism" can be endlessly qualified, but it seems impossible to eliminate it from our vocabulary. In order to use it adeptly, therefore, I see no alternative but to grapple with the complex problem of definition itself. We must have a definition that can bear the weight of the historical evidence and make sense of it.

### "Relational" and "individualist" arguments

Toward that end I will explore two distinct modes of historical argumentation or discourse that have been used by women and their male allies on behalf of women's emancipation from male control in Western societies. Both of these modes, which express

<sup>33</sup> See Susan Groag Bell and Karen Offen, eds., *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents, 1750–1950*, 2 vols. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), 1:2, n. 3, on the decision to avoid anachronistic use of the word "feminism."

<sup>34</sup> In particular, Richard J. Evans, review of *Women, the Family and Freedom*, *English Historical Review* 101 (October 1986): 1020–22, esp. 1020. Evans has since proposed a very general working definition of feminism that emphasizes "systematic social and political injustice" based on sex, though without explicit reference to either the institutions of the family or the state; he views the emergence of feminist doctrines as an eighteenth-century phenomenon (Evans, "The Concept of Feminism" [n. 9 above], 251, 255).

analytically divergent ways of thinking about women and men and their respective places in human social organization, must be encompassed in any historically sensitive definition of feminism. I have characterized these two modes as “relational” and “individualist” (leaving definition of the term “feminism” in abeyance for the moment). At one time, I used the term “familial” to designate the former, but I have abandoned that terminology because it immediately (if wrongly) conjures images of male-dominated families in the minds of readers. The term “relational” seems advantageous because it implies at least the possibility of extension to other classes of people besides husbands, children, and other immediate relatives.<sup>35</sup>

Recent scholarship bearing on the history of feminism in Europe strongly suggests that relational feminism represents the dominant line of argument prior to the twentieth century throughout the Western world. Indeed, relational arguments dominated European continental debate on the woman question until very recently. Individualist feminism also has deep historical roots in European culture, but it has become increasingly characteristic of British and American discourse since the political philosopher John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women* in 1869 and has reached its most expansive development in twentieth-century Anglo-American thought. New historical work on Anglo-American feminism, however, increasingly reveals relational modes of argument in the British tradition existing side-by-side with individualist approaches.<sup>36</sup>

Viewed historically, arguments in the relational feminist tradition proposed a gender-based but egalitarian vision of social organization. They featured the primacy of a companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple as the basic unit of society, whereas

<sup>35</sup> The shift in terminology appears in Karen Offen, “Toward an Historical Definition of Feminism: The Case of France,” Center for Research on Women, Working Paper no. 22 (Stanford, Calif.: Center for Research on Women, 1984), and “Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of ‘Equality in Difference’ for Women: A Case Study of Male Feminism in Nineteenth-Century French Thought,” *Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 2 (June 1986): 452–84. The term “familial feminism” was used in my earlier article, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism” (n. 21 above).

<sup>36</sup> See (among others) Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London: Croom-Helm, 1980); Barbara Caine, “Feminism, Suffrage, and the Nineteenth-Century English Women’s Movement,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 537–50; Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, 1897–1914* (New York: Garland, 1982); Joyce Senders Pedersen, “Education, Gender, and Social Change in Victorian Liberal Feminist Theory,” *History of European Ideas* 8, no. 4–5 (1987): 503–19; and Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women’s Politics, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

individualist arguments posited the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit. Relational feminism emphasized women's rights *as women* (defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities) in relation to men. It insisted on *women's* distinctive contributions in these roles to the broader society and made claims on the commonwealth on the basis of these contributions. By contrast, the individualist feminist tradition of argumentation emphasized more abstract concepts of individual human rights and celebrated the quest for personal independence (or autonomy) in all aspects of life, while downplaying, deprecating, or dismissing as insignificant all socially defined roles and minimizing discussion of sex-linked qualities or contributions, including childbearing and its attendant responsibilities.

Even in Anglo-American thought prior to the twentieth century, these two modes of argument were not always as analytically distinct as I am portraying them here, and we are only beginning to examine their intertwining and interplay. In earlier centuries, evidence of both these modes can often be located in the utterances of a single individual, or among members of a particular group, exemplifying perhaps that not uncommon human desire to have things both ways. Two telling examples within the Anglo-American tradition are provided by the late eighteenth-century British writer on women's rights, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the nineteenth-century American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Wollstonecraft coupled her call in 1792 for the "vindication of the rights of women" with a clear sense of women's role and responsibilities as mothers; Stanton argued in 1869 that "because man and woman are the complement of one another, we need woman's thought in national affairs to make a safe and stable government," and in 1892 insisted, in quite different circumstances, on a woman's right to "her birthright to self-sovereignty."<sup>37</sup> In the thought of these two women, the notion of self-sovereignty was primarily a moral imperative rather than the categorical absolute it has since become. Thus, when the whole of their thought is analyzed, relational arguments dominate. Much more comparative work needs to be done on the thought and writings of such women and men in history before we will have a

<sup>37</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792); excerpts reprinted in Bell and Offen, eds. vol. 1, doc. 12; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, speech before the Woman Suffrage Convention in Washington, D.C., January 18, 1869, reprinted in Bell and Offen, eds., vol. 1, doc. 137, 494–95; "Solitude of Self: An Address Delivered by Elizabeth Cady Stanton before the United States Congressional Committee on the Judiciary, Monday, January 18, 1892," ed. Harriot Stanton Blatch (n.p., 1910), 5.

conclusive picture of the interweaving of these two strands of argumentation in any given setting.

Lest it be thought that the two approaches I am invoking here represent simply another sorry instance of the much-criticized binary logic endemic to Western thought, or a form of reductionism, let me suggest that there are important sociological reasons for positing two and only two categories rather than “varieties” or “relative degrees” of feminism.<sup>38</sup> These two modes of argument certainly reflect the self/other dualism characteristic of Western thought, but they continue to be meaningful because they also reflect profound differences of opinion that have long existed within Western discourse about basic structural questions of social organization and, specifically, about the relationship of individuals and family groups to society and the state. Both modes must be accounted for if one is to understand feminism historically.

The Anglo-American individualistic tradition of feminism is nevertheless the model on which much discussion of feminism by historians has been based. Individualist arguments have served especially the cause of single women to justify an independent, non-family-based existence in a world that remains male defined. The emergence of a large group of emancipated single women during the nineteenth century was tightly intertwined with the unprecedented middle-class prosperity that advanced commercial and industrial capitalism created within Western societies, and nowhere more so than in England and the United States. Yet individualistic arguments inevitably rested on the emulation of a model of the individual that seemed to others functionally male, a sort of *masculinisme féminin*, as one Frenchman referred to it in 1909.<sup>39</sup> As recently as the early 1970s, this notion of feminism seemed to be the only “politically correct” form available to American women. Individualist feminism placed political priority on enactment of the Equal Rights Amendment and on dismantling the gender-stratified educational system and economy that disadvantaged women through occupational segregation. Even as this situation has changed, and competitive individualism itself has come under attack,<sup>40</sup> individ-

<sup>38</sup> For the notion of “relative degrees” of feminism, see Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France: Des origines à 1848* (Paris: Colin, 1966), 164, 189.

<sup>39</sup> Gaston Richard, *La femme dans l'histoire* (Paris: Doin, 1909), 296.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Benjamin R. Barber, “Beyond the Feminist Mystique,” *New Republic* (July 11, 1983), 26–32; Mary Midgley, “Sex and Personal Identity: The Western Individualistic Tradition,” *Encounter* (June 1984), 50–55; and Mary McGrory, “Feminism Tends to Overlook Women’s ‘Special Obligation’ ” (syndicated column), *Peninsula Times-Tribune*, July 25, 1985, A-17. On the “cancer” of American individualism, see Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in*

ualist feminism retains its grip on the mind of the American public. In histories such as Carl N. Degler's *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*, individualist feminism dominates. Given the propensities of contemporary individualists—both male and female—to make claims for uncompromising self-realization, this tendency can probably be held accountable for much of the current resistance to feminism, especially among women who have chosen marriage and motherhood.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the last decade of historical scholarship teaches us that to look only to individualist feminism is to miss the rich historical complexity of protest concerning women's subordination, even in the English-speaking world. It constitutes one important band, one significant possibility, on the broad spectrum of feminist thought. Focusing on it alone blinds us to the range of effective arguments used to combat male privilege in the Western world during the past few centuries, and even to arguments put forth today by women and men in economically less-privileged countries, where women's aspirations to self-sovereignty are often subordinated to pressing short-term political and socioeconomic necessities.

Moreover, the sociological content and logical conclusions of these two modes of argument have been significantly different. Relational feminism, with its couple-centered vision, has led historically to very different interpretations of women's circumstances and needs than has individualist feminism, especially in the arena of state action on behalf of mothers. In the experience of nineteenth-

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*American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), which takes inspiration from Tocqueville. Also, see Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery, eds., *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> For diverse attempts by feminist scholars to counteract this resistance, see Cynthia Nelson and Virginia Oleson, "Veil of Illusion: A Critique of the Concept of Equality in Western Feminist Thought," *Catalyst*, no. 10–11 (Summer 1977), 8–36; Alice Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," *Daedalus* 106, no. 2 (1977): 1–31; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Janet Sayers, *Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1982); Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed., *The Family in Political Thought* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), and her *Public Man/Private Woman* (n. 7 above); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also Elizabeth H. Wolgast, *Equality and the Rights of Women* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980); Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference* (Boston: Hall, 1980); and Nel Noddings, *Caring* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).



century France in particular, the key arguments of relational feminism culminated historically in the seemingly paradoxical doctrine of “equality in difference,” or equity as distinct from equality. The fundamental tenets included the notion that there were *both biological and cultural distinctions between the sexes*, a concept of womanly or manly nature, of a sharply defined sexual division of labor, or roles, in the family and throughout society following from that “difference” and that “nature,” and of the centrality of the complementary couple and/or the mother/child dyad to social analysis.<sup>42</sup> As these ideas were elaborated in conjunction with the discourse surrounding the democratic and industrial revolutions of the last two centuries, “relational feminism” could and did incorporate demands for women’s right to work outside the household, to participate in all professions, and to vote, alongside demands for equality in civil law concerning property and persons. This it did in tandem with older demands for equal access to formal education and for unimpeded moral and ethical development. In other words, relational feminism combined a case for moral equality of women and men with an explicit acknowledgement of differences in women’s and men’s sexual functions in society (or, to use Catharine MacKinnon’s apt phrase, the “difference difference makes”). Increasingly, relational feminists called for governmental programs that would bolster and enhance women’s performance of procreative functions even as they argued that other avenues for life-work must also be available to women.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The sociocultural significance of physiological differences between the sexes was asserted and contested in Europe from the eighteenth century on, particularly as medical men turned to diagnosing social as well as physical ills. In the nineteenth century, few of those who argued for women’s emancipation would have accepted the current notion of focusing exclusively on the cultural construction of gender while setting biological sex differences off limits for discussion. As the historian Carl N. Degler correctly pointed out to a skeptical audience at Stanford, from the time of Darwin forth, “biological arguments were developed both in support of, as well as against, the widening of women’s social horizons” (see “Darwinians Confront Gender, or, There Is More to It than History” [paper delivered at the Conference on Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference, Stanford University, February 19–21, 1987]). See also Nancy F. Cott, “Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past before Us,” in Mitchell and Oakley, eds. (n. 5 above). Here Cott notes, “It should not be assumed that because arguments from ‘difference’ or ‘expedience’ *could* be conservative, they necessarily were. On the contrary, claims for women’s ‘difference’ could be turned to radical social goals” (52).

<sup>43</sup> Among the Americanists, there have been attempts to grapple with the distinctive modes of argument I have been positing here, but their classificatory schemes have focused more on issues or approaches intrinsic to the American tradition than on the sociopolitical issues I am advancing here as fundamental. In *Plow Women Rather than Reapers* (n. 27 above), Schramm posited the distinction of “congruent”



I had first run across such arguments based on difference in mid-nineteenth-century French writing, in the influential program of Ernest Legouvé, a “male-feminist” who spoke out in 1848 for dramatic reforms in women’s legal status in marriage and in their education, while wholeheartedly embracing the notion of “equal but different” spheres for women and men.<sup>44</sup> Like Amy Hackett’s German feminists and like Sweden’s Ellen Key, Legouvé clearly did not fit within the “equal rights” or “autonomy” models then being used to index feminism. Nor, as it turns out, did most nineteenth-century leaders of the French women’s movement, so many of whom placed women’s empowerment in their maternal role at the center of their thinking.<sup>45</sup> Recent scholarship bearing on the history of feminism elsewhere in Europe has convinced me not only that the French were not unique in this respect but also that this mode of “bi-valent” argument (to use Elizabeth Wolgast’s term), often directly traceable to French influence, had a far-reaching impact on developments throughout Europe and the rest of the world.<sup>46</sup> Without acknowledging the historical importance of this tradition and its arguments, our own appreciation of the range and vitality of Western thought concerning the emancipation of women will be impoverished indeed.

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and “complementary” tendencies. See also Estelle Freedman’s juxtaposition of an “equal rights” tradition, oriented toward male culture, with a “female superiority” tradition, focused on female culture (n. 12 above); and Jill K. Conway’s distinction between “equal rights” feminists and “equal authority” feminists in *The Female Experience in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century America: A Guide to the History of American Women* (New York: Garland 1982), 198–202.

<sup>44</sup> See Offen, “Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of ‘Equality in Difference’ for Women” (n. 35 above).

<sup>45</sup> See Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); and Karen Offen, “New Documents for the History of French Feminism during the Early Third Republic,” *History of European Ideas* 8, no. 4–5 (1987): 621–24.

<sup>46</sup> The term appears in Wolgast, 16. See, among other contributions to our knowledge of Germany, Ann Taylor Allen, “Spiritual Motherhood: German Feminists and the Kindergarten Movement, 1848–1911,” *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Fall 1982): 319–39, and “Mothers of the New Generation: Adele Schreiber, Helene Stöcker, and the Evolution of the Idea of Motherhood, 1900–1914,” *Signs* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 418–38. See also James C. Albisetti, “Could Separate Be Equal? Helene Lange and Women’s Education in Imperial Germany,” *History of Education Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 301–17, “The Reform of Female Education in Prussia, 1899–1908,” *German Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (February 1985): 11–41, and “Women and the Professions in Imperial Germany,” in Joeres and Maynes, eds. (n. 9 above), 94–109; and Alfred G. Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Both the relational and the individualist modes of argument have historical roots in what historian Temma Kaplan has called “female consciousness,” or consciousness of the “rights of gender.”<sup>47</sup> The evidence also suggests incontrovertibly that proponents of the relational position possessed a “feminist consciousness”: they viewed women’s collective situation in the culture as unjust, they attributed it to social and political institutions established by men, and they believed that it could be changed by protest and political action.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, they insisted that women had a special role, a role distinct from that of men. Thus, it is clearly erroneous to assert, as Kaplan recently did, that “all feminists attack the division of labor by sex, because roles limit freedom, and to mark distinctions is to imply superiority and inferiority.”<sup>49</sup> This is a radically individualist, very contemporary, and ultimately very exclusionary perspective on the history of feminism. In European history, especially in the nineteenth century, the relational premises of feminism were rooted in sexual dimorphism and based on a vision of specified, complementary responsibilities within an organized society that could even (and often did) override claims for personal liberty that extended beyond moral equivalency; these were not only accepted by pro-

<sup>47</sup> Temma Kaplan, “Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–1918,” *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 545–66. See also the pioneering interpretation of this problem by Natalie Zemon Davis in her book, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975). Other significant discussions of female/feminist consciousness and collective action in a French context include Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, “Women of the Popular Classes in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795,” in *Women, War, and Revolution*, ed. Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 9–35; Louise A. Tilly, “Women’s Collective Action and Feminism in Industrializing France,” in *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Charles Tilly (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1981), 207–31; and Laura L. Frader, “Female Consciousness and Revolutionary Syndicalism in the Aude, 1900–1914” (paper presented at the Conference of Europeanists, Washington, D.C., October 1983).

<sup>48</sup> See, in particular, the recent work by French historian Michèle Riot-Sarcey on the issue of feminist consciousness, “La conscience féministe des femmes de 1848: Jeanne Deroin, Désirée Gay,” in *Un Fabuleux Destin, Flora Tristan: Actes du Premier Colloque International Flora Tristan (Dijon, 3 et 4 mars 1984)* (Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 1985), and, with Eleni Varikas, “Feminist Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century: A Pariah Consciousness?” *Praxis International* 5, no. 4 (January 1986): 443–65. On Germany, see Catherine M. Prelinger, “Prelude to Consciousness: Amalie Sieveking and the Female Association for the Care of the Poor and Sick,” in *German Women in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John C. Fout (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984); 118–32, and *Charity, Challenge, and Change: Religious Dimensions of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Women’s Movement in Germany* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> T. Kaplan (n. 47 above), 547.

gressive women and men in that culture but provided, as well, the foundation for making the broadest of claims for women's empowerment and the most sweeping changes in the sexual balance of power. In the late nineteenth century, for example, relational feminists presented an ever more vocal challenge to the militaristic nation-state by threatening to "regender" it. As Hubertine Auclert put it in 1885, the *état mère de famille* (the motherly state) must replace the *état minotaur* (the minotaur state); Auclert charged that the latter's exclusive interest was the levy of monetary and blood taxes. Bertha von Suttner condemned men's exaltation of battles and death at the expense of both life and life's creation through love.<sup>50</sup>

These are not isolated examples. The history of feminism is inextricable from the time-honored concerns of historiography: politics and power. Hence, the history of feminism poses essential questions for the political and intellectual history of Europe and the modern Western world, just as women's history poses essential questions for its social and economic history. Throughout Europe and the Americas, the history of feminism—both in the growth of theory and in political practice—has become increasingly and inextricably entwined with the controversies surrounding the growth and elaboration of secular nation states, industrial capitalism, and war and peace among nations.

However, at the same time, our understanding of politics and power must be expanded by attention to gender. The new history of politics and power must henceforth comprehend the arguments and efforts of relational feminists to influence government-enacted protective legislation for women workers and state-sponsored maternity benefits; it must include the development of housewives' unions and demands for the compensation of housework as well as unions for employed women and equal pay for equal work; and it must include all political efforts to elaborate the welfare state so as to serve women's needs as wives and mothers (e.g., payment of family allowances to *mothers*, establishment of child-care facilities, movements for improved housing, and the like), as well as efforts to eliminate state control of women's bodies (e.g., contesting anti-abortion laws and regulated prostitution) and to end the so-called white slave trade; and it must include efforts to alter men's more violent habits by attacking alcoholism and wife-beating and by con-

<sup>50</sup> Hubertine Auclert, "Programme électoral des femmes," *La citoyenne*, August 1885, as quoted in Täieb, ed. (n. 16 above), 41; Bertha von Suttner, *Das Maschinenzeitalter* (1889; reprint, 1899), trans. Susan Groag Bell, in Bell and Offen, eds. (n. 33 above), vol. 2, doc. 12.

testing war and promoting peace. Relational feminism informed most activities of the women's movements of France, England, the Scandinavian states, Germany, and other European nations; moreover, it characterized virtually all the reform efforts during the Progressive Era that have heretofore been labeled "social feminism" by historians of the United States.

Between 1890 and 1920, however, the aims and goals of relational and individualist approaches appeared increasingly irreconcilable, as different groups of women began to articulate differing claims. The feminist family tree stands revealed as a two-forked tree, with many smaller branches. Especially in England and the United States, individualist feminism gained momentum as increasing numbers of highly educated, single women intent on achieving personal autonomy became visible for the first time, the participation of married women in the industrial labor force became a political issue, and—most significantly—birthrates began to fall. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the development of a strong anticommunist reaction in the United States during the 1920s, feminist intellectuals veered sharply in the direction of downplaying sex differences.<sup>51</sup>

In European circles—and to some extent, in Anglo-American circles—the quest for "equal rights" sufficient to realize an individual woman's autonomy, a self-reliance asserted rhetorically as a self-contained ideal, seemingly without reference to societal purpose or relationship to others, provoked controversy and dissent.<sup>52</sup> European critics of individualist feminism, echoing Tocqueville's more general concerns about individualism, filed charges of "ego-

<sup>51</sup> For further elaboration and supporting texts, see Bell and Offen, eds., vol. 2. For U.S. developments, where the reaction is manifest in the congressional defeat of the Shepherd-Towner legislation for publicly funded maternal health care, see Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic, 1978), chap. 4. From the perspective of comparative history, it seems extremely significant that the efforts of feminist social scientists in the United States to downplay the degree of gender differences and diminish the notion of separate spheres took hold during this period (see Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982]).

<sup>52</sup> See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870–1936," in her *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985). See also Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). The social construction of the lesbian stereotype in Anglo-American discourse stands starkly revealed in these works. The reasons for such a development in this period fall outside the scope of this article but offer rich subject matter for further comparative historical research.

ism” against women they thought to have adopted a male model as the human norm.

In France this debate became tightly entwined with nationalistic political and cultural visions; critics of individualist feminism branded it as “foreign,” claiming that it epitomized an Anglo-American threat to French visions of womanliness.<sup>53</sup> In the ensuing backlash, the terms “*féministe*” and “*féminine*” were set in opposition as factions found themselves at loggerheads over a variety of issues.<sup>54</sup> The conundrum I posed at the beginning of this essay took shape: Who was a feminist, indeed? Who was the better feminist? Was it Maria Deraismes, who urged repeal of the Napoleonic law that forbade paternity suits by seduced and abandoned women so that they could sue their lovers for child support? Or was it Léonie Rouzade, who argued for state subsidies for mothers? Was it Augusta Moll-Weiss, founder of the *Ecole des mères* (School for Mothers) in Paris, who in 1910 insisted that “being a better housewife [by developing skills and expertise that free up women’s time from the drudgery of household chores] permits one to be a better feminist”? Or was it Madeleine Pelletier, who in 1908 opened her tract, *Woman in Combat for her Rights*, with the line, “The individual is an end in itself, whatever the sex.” She argued compellingly that women must be liberated not only from the legal and economic control of husbands and fathers but also from socially imposed roles and from separate spheres, and that women must be at liberty to realize their potential as individuals, without regard to their sex or their capacity to give birth.<sup>55</sup> Pelletier, a woman doctor who dressed in mannish clothing, cropped her hair, and espoused

<sup>53</sup> Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism” (n. 21 above), and “Feminism, Antifeminism, and National Family Politics in Early Third Republic France,” in *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 177–86.

<sup>54</sup> It would be interesting to follow the development of the alleged contradiction (or false dichotomy) between *féminine* and *féministe* in antifeminist public discourse prior to World War I. For an example, see the article “Feminine versus feminist,” by the author of “An English Woman’s Home,” in *The Living Age*, March 9, 1912 [reprinted from the *National Review*], 587–92. This contradiction has since perplexed many otherwise sympathetic writers on the woman question. The French writer Leontine Zanta poses this dichotomy as a serious one for French women in her *Psychologie du féminisme* (Paris: Plon, 1922). For Anglo-American discussion, see the treatment by Esther Hodge, “A Women’s International Quarterly over Thirty Years: Are the Arguments to be Feminine or Feminist?” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 7, no. 4 (1984): 265–73.

<sup>55</sup> Augusta Moll Weiss, “La menagère et le féminisme,” *Revue internationale de sociologie* 18, no. 7 (July 1910): 499–503; Madeleine Pelletier, *La femme en lutte pour ses droits* (Paris: Giard & Brière, 1908).

women's liberation in advanced socialist and anarchist circles, openly disparaged "femininity" as it was then constructed. From the perspective of the late twentieth century, Pelletier's language and presentation seemed easily recognizable; to some she looked more like a feminist "foremother" than her counterpart, the ultra-feminine Marguerite Durand, a former actress with the Comédie Française who later boasted about the positive effect her charms had had on advancing women's cause. On closer inspection, however, we find that Pelletier constituted a minority of one, an "extraordinary failure by the standards of her own time."<sup>56</sup> The model posited by Pelletier for women's self-realization looked to contemporaries all too much like the male model. In France such an "unfeminine" individualist approach to the emancipation of women would never be well received.

Why not? It remained the case in fin-de-siècle France, and, indeed, well into the twentieth century, that sexual dimorphism was a fundamental ingredient of French social and political thought and that the family—not the individual—continued to compose the core unit in their thinking. As Louise Tilly has insisted, "The continuing centrality of family as an associational reference for the French was not simply a matter of ideology. It was the family's continuing role as an economic productive unit for peasants and craftsmen, and its continuing role as economic resource for propertied and wage earning persons, that makes the family so central in understanding French social relations and French women's collective action."<sup>57</sup>

Early twentieth-century French feminist groups invariably critiqued male/female relationships with reference to the family and explicitly proposed a radically restructured, nonpatriarchal family; they insisted, nevertheless, on the necessary complementarity of, distinction between, and interdependence of the sexes.<sup>58</sup> Social roles, based in "natural" biological differences and the then seemingly inevitable constraints on women of reproduction and parenting, were paramount but were not perceived by most advocates of radical change to conflict directly with a woman's self-realization or self-fulfillment as a *moral and intellectual* being. Sexual dimor-

<sup>56</sup> See Marilyn J. Boxer, "When Radical and Socialist Feminism Were Joined: The Extraordinary Failure of Madeleine Pelletier," in *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981). On the general problem of identifying "foremothers," see Ute Gerhard, "A Hidden and Complex Heritage: Reflections on the History of Germany's Women's Movements," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 566.

<sup>57</sup> Tilly (n. 47 above), 218.

<sup>58</sup> See the texts in Bell and Offen, eds. (n. 33 above), vol. 2, pt. 1.



phism remained central to the French vision of the social order and, indeed, since the Enlightenment motherhood itself had long been invoked by many reformers as a rationale for granting women civil and civic rights and for insisting on women's participation in public affairs. This is not to say that the critique leveled against the prevailing institutional form of marriage, concerning men's legal control over the persons and properties of women, was not a radical critique, or that a few women did not express a desire for total economic emancipation from men and for sexual liberty as well. Like many liberal economic demands of the mid-nineteenth century, however, these latter demands were elaborated alternatively in terms of "freedom *from* externally imposed restrictions" and "freedom *to* become." Freedom from restrictions was the language of classical economic and political liberalism, transposed to serve the emancipation of women in a world of socially constructed restrictions. Freedom to become signified a more philosophical, more transcendental, more internalized project in self-realization; more recently, it has come to connote a project for autonomous behavior that, by ignoring socially constructed norms or goals, refuses to acknowledge limitation by them.

In France, the emergence of individualist feminism forced a paradigm shift in the campaign for women's emancipation. Many French women and men as well as other Europeans who in the 1890s could be considered "relational feminists" objected to such uncompromising individualism, an individualism that seemed to portend bitter competition between the sexes. The French considered it to be a peculiarly Anglo-American (or Anglo-Saxon, as they called it) mutation of feminism. They viewed it as atomistic and, hence, socially destructive. It should be remarked that they were equally opposed to raw economic individualism; late nineteenth-century French sociopolitical discourse was profoundly anticapitalistic. With the emergence of this new model, many nineteenth-century French feminists found themselves relegated to the camp of "antifeminism" by those who preached the doctrine of individualism for women. Some of them fought back. Nor were the French alone in this: women and men throughout the Western world, as diverse in other respects as Clara Zetkin, Ellen Key, Marguerite Durand, Sigmund Freud, Jules Simon, and G. Stanley Hall, derogated this seemingly new individualistic form of feminism as "unwomanly."<sup>59</sup> A grotesque caricature of the "emancipated woman," the *fin-de-siècle* feminist, a functional male who was neither wife nor mother, quickly became a bogey. This caricature of "unsexed

<sup>59</sup> Bell and Offen, eds., vol. 2, pt. 1.



womanhood” contributed, perhaps more than anything else, to the development of an innovative and potentially divisive line of argument for women’s rights based on “womanliness” and motherhood, which exhibited itself in virtually all French agitation for women’s emancipation prior to the Second World War.

By the early twentieth century, therefore, most French feminists had rejected competitive individualism as anti-French, in keeping with their love-hate relationship with the Anglo-American world. From 1900 until the fall of the Third Republic in 1940, French feminism was closely associated with republican nationalism, and its discourse became closely intertwined with the profamily and pronatalist concerns of the regime. As in the nineteenth century, its advocates continued to emphasize sexual difference, a sexual division of labor, motherhood and education for motherhood, and state subsidies for mothers; but they also demanded enhanced legal, educational, and economic rights and the vote for women. French feminists, both secular and Catholic, bourgeois and socialist, advocated putting France’s welfare and a reconstituted family ahead of individual or personal needs, in the name of national solidarity.<sup>60</sup> Was this feminism? The French thought so. At the same time that they argued for compulsory home economics and *puériculture* (scientific infant care), coupled with comprehensive maternity benefits, they scoffed at medals for motherhood and instead demanded state subsidies for all mothers. They also defended women’s right to work and insisted that employed women be granted equal pay for equal work. Within their nationalistic frame of reference this did not constitute a contradictory position, just as Mary Wollstonecraft’s insistence on competent motherhood as woman’s first duty was not contradictory in its context.<sup>61</sup> In the French context, the politics of motherhood in the national interest emerged as a consistent, though complex, feminist politics.

With this historical perspective in mind, it is particularly striking to observe that in France up to the time of publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in 1949, physiological difference and the sexual division of labor predicated on it was rarely identified by self-styled feminists as a primary instrument of women’s oppression. On the contrary, from the early twentieth century on, French feminists have found it both strategically and tactically useful, given France’s seemingly perilous demographic position, to emphasize

<sup>60</sup> See Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism” (n. 21 above), and “Women and the Politics of Motherhood in France, 1920–1940,” Working Paper no. 87/293 (Florence: European University Institute, 1987).

<sup>61</sup> See Wollstonecraft, in Bell and Offen, eds., 1:61.

and celebrate the uniqueness of womanhood, especially women's role and rights as mothers. They demanded radical sociopolitical reforms by the state that would transform the social institutions surrounding motherhood and thereby encourage natality and at the same time improve women's status. The confusion that abounds today in France about what can properly be considered "feminism" is symptomatic of the extent to which today's French women's advocates ignore—for it seems to result more from ignorance and neglect than from overt rejection—the legacy of their own predecessors.<sup>62</sup>

It is remarkable to note, moreover, the ways in which certain deeply ingrained modes of argument reemerge in very different forms within a particular national and sociolinguistic setting. Within the post-1968 French *mouvement pour la libération des femmes*, the group known as Psych et Po (Psychanalyse et Politique) insisted on the centrality of biological differences between the sexes; their enthusiasts, whose thinking draws heavily on Lacanian psychoanalytic postulates, argue that just this women's *différence*, which they insist lies in a sexuality that has been repressed by patriarchal culture, is the source of women's potential liberation.<sup>63</sup> The "feminine," in their view, has been totally repressed, and their objective is to challenge existing language and culture through exploration of "women's language." This group, which treats physiological, sexual difference and its social consequences with deadly seriousness—and fosters a concept of a repressed "woman's nature" as fundamental—is in this essential respect, at least, far closer than its adversaries to the tradition of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French feminism, even though the focus has shifted from procreation and mothering to sexuality and separatism. What Psych et Po seeks to accomplish on the basis of these postulates is no less than the overthrow of Western patriarchal culture

<sup>62</sup> On this confusion, see Dorothy Kaufmann-McCall, "Politics of Difference: The Women's Movement in France from May 1968 to Mitterrand," *Signs* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1983): 282–93. See also Huguette Bouchardeau, *Pas d'histoire les femmes: 50 ans d'histoire des femmes, 1918–1968* (Paris: Syros, 1977); and Claire Duchon, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), both of which inadvertently underscore the 1970s generation of French women's activists' incomprehension of their own past.

<sup>63</sup> Kaufmann-McCall, 285. For other American assessments, see Carolyn Greenstein Burke, "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 843–55; Michèle Blin Sarde, "L'évolution du concept de différence dans le mouvement de libération des femmes en France," 195–202; and Margaret Collins Weitz, "The Status of Women in France Today: A Reassessment," 203–18, both in *Contemporary French Civilization* 6, nos. 1–2 (Fall/Winter 1981–82). See also Moi (n. 4 above).

by the emergence of a specifically female discourse. There is no question that this is a radically innovative program, though its political effect remains to be gauged. Paradoxically, the writings of these theorists, who themselves reject the label of feminism, are presented in this country as the “new French feminism.”<sup>64</sup>

A further paradox is apparent when we consider that the French feminists who rallied round Simone de Beauvoir consider the Psych et Po position “antifeminist.”<sup>65</sup> In the light of what we now know about the overall history of feminism in France, however, it seems ironic that, up to the time of her death, Beauvoir’s arguments were received with greater enthusiasm in English-speaking countries than in her own.<sup>66</sup> Beauvoir’s existentialist, environmentalist position, which rejected “the feminine” as a purely cultural construct and rejected the societal role implications of woman’s physiological difference, even as she endorsed heterosexual existence, seems in retrospect more in harmony with the tradition of individualist feminism, more characteristic of Anglo-American feminism, than with the dominant historic tradition of relational feminism in her own nation. By positing the male model as its ideal type, by posing for women the transcendent act of “becoming” against the imminent stance of “being,” Beauvoir set up a de facto trap whereby, as Helene Eisenberg has pointed out, women are constantly faced with the threat of *démission*, or backsliding into “being,” or female passivity.<sup>67</sup> In turn, the Psych et Po faction considers Beauvoir’s type of feminism as phallogocentric or male identified. If autonomy is seen to be purchased at the price of womanliness, these avant-garde Frenchwomen, like their more conventional sisters, choose to reject the goal. Both the mainstream and avant-garde critics of women’s

<sup>64</sup> Elaine Marks, “Women and Literature in France,” *Signs* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 832–42, esp. n. 4. See also Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken, 1981).

<sup>65</sup> See “Variations sur des thèmes communs,” *Questions féministes*, no. 1 (November 1977), as translated in Marks and de Courtivron, 212–30. See also the lead editorial in *Nouvelles questions féministes*, no. 1 (March 1981), 3–14, following the dissolution of the original collective editorial group over the political issue of lesbian separatism.

<sup>66</sup> See, among the principal French critics of Beauvoir’s position, Ménie Grégoire, *Le métier de femme* (Paris: Plon, 1965); Geneviève Gennari, *Simone de Beauvoir*, rev. ed. (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1967); Susanne Lilar, *Le malentendu du deuxième sexe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969); France Quéré, *La femme avenir* (Paris: Seuil, 1976); and Marielle Reghini, *Ecoute ma différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1978). Indications of American enthusiasm for Beauvoir and *The Second Sex* include the 1979 feminist theory conference held at New York University and the April 1985 colloquium on Beauvoir at Columbia University.

<sup>67</sup> Hélène Lamoure Eisenberg, “The Theme of *Démission* in the Works of Simone de Beauvoir” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

condition in French culture insistently emphasize and prize *la différence*.<sup>68</sup>

### A historically based definition of feminism

The historical evidence presented above sustains two prior propositions on which I base a definition of feminism incorporating both the relational and individualist traditions. First, feminism must henceforth be viewed as a rapidly developing major critical ideology, or system of ideas, in its own right.<sup>69</sup> As an ideology, feminism incorporates a broad spectrum of ideas and possesses an international scope, one whose developmental stages have historically been dependent on and in tension with male-centered political and intellectual discourse but whose more recent manifestations transcend the latter. Thus, feminism must be viewed as not intrinsically a subset of any other Western religious or secular ideology, whether Catholic or protestant Christian, Judaic, liberal, socialist, or Marxist (although historically a feminist critique has emerged within each of these traditions by initially posing the question: "And what about women?").<sup>70</sup> The evidence from comparative history also suggests

<sup>68</sup> Note, e.g., the headline in *Le monde*, May 13, 1983, concerning the proposed "anti-sexist" law: "L'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes doit tenir compte de leurs différences."

<sup>69</sup> Exchanges between American historians in the 1960s provoked subsequent discussion of feminism as ideology. Carl Degler stirred up much debate when he insisted on the nonideological character of American feminism (see "Revolution without Ideology: The Changing Place of Women in America," *Daedalus* [Spring 1964], reprinted in *The Woman in America*, ed. Robert Jay Lifton [Boston: Beacon, 1967], 193–210). Degler has since recanted (see "On Rereading 'The Woman in America,'" *Daedalus* [Fall 1987]: 199–210). In contrast, in the essay, "Feminism as a Radical Ideology" (n. 32 above), O'Neill took feminism seriously as ideology but argued (in what now appears to have been sheer ignorance of the abundant European evidence to the contrary) that the ideology had not yet been properly developed; he insisted that "feminism must have its Marx before it can expect a Lenin" (323). In her book on German Jewish feminism, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904–1938* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), Marion Kaplan argued that "feminism is a process, not an ideology" (7). I would argue, to the contrary, that to see feminism only as process is to take too narrow a view, that it must be viewed as a developing ideology, with the common tenets I have sketched here. From the Quakers to the German Catholics to the Second International, the pattern seems remarkably similar. What needs to be explored in greater depth are the comparative elements of this problem. This is not to say that feminism must necessarily be a conventional sort of ideology, with a canon of authoritative texts; I see it as rather more diffuse and dynamic.

<sup>70</sup> For an introduction to the literature from 1750 on, see the bibliographies in Bell and Offen, eds. (n. 33 above) and, for more recent work, the bibliographical essay appended to Offen, "Liberty, Equality, and Justice for Women" (n. 12 above).

that in order to fully comprehend the historical range and possibilities of feminism, we must locate the origins and growth of these ideas within a variety of cultural traditions, rather than postulating a hegemonic model for their development on the experience of any single national or sociolinguistic tradition—be it Anglo-American, or French, or German, or Italian, or Spanish, or Swedish, or any other. Put differently, feminism must itself be “revised” by expanding our investigative horizons.

Seen in this way, feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society. As the starting point for the elaboration of ideology, of course, feminism posits gender, or the differential social construction of the behavior of the sexes, based on their physiological differences, as the primary category of analysis.<sup>71</sup> In so doing, feminism raises issues that concern personal autonomy or freedom—with constant reference to basic issues of societal organization, which center, in Western societies, on the long-standing debate over the family and its relationship to the state, and on the historically inequitable distribution of political, social, and economic power between the sexes that underlies this debate. Feminism opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society, along with men’s claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; it thereby offers a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization, and control mechanisms. It seeks to destroy masculinist hierarchy but not sexual dualism. Feminism is necessarily pro-woman. However, it does not follow that it must be anti-man; indeed, in time past, some of the most important advocates of women’s cause have been men.<sup>72</sup> Feminism makes claims for a rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic, and political power within a given society, on behalf of both sexes in the name of their common humanity, but with respect

<sup>71</sup> On the possibilities for gender analysis in the practice of history itself, see Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–75.

<sup>72</sup> Among the most significant are François Poulain de la Barre (*On the Equality of the Two Sexes* [France], [1673; reprint, Paris: Fayard, 1984]); the marquis de Condorcet (*Plea for the Citizenship of Women* [France, 1790]); Theodore Gottlieb von Hippel (*On Improving the Status of Women* [Prussia, 1792]); Fourier (n. 15 above); William Thompson (*Appeal of One Half the Human Race against the Pretensions of the Other Half—Men—to Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* [Great Britain], [1825; reprint, London: Virago, 1983]); Ernest Legouvé (*Moral History of Women* [France, 1849]); John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women* [Great Britain, 1869]; and August Bebel (*Women under Socialism* [Germany, 1879–85]).

for their differences. The challenge is fundamentally a humanistic one that raises concerns about individual freedom and responsibility, the collective responsibility of individuals to others in society, and modes of dealing with others. Even so, feminism has been, and remains today, a political challenge to male authority and hierarchy in the most profound sense; “the ultimate vision,” as Claire Moses has argued, “is revolutionary.”<sup>73</sup> I would substitute the word “transformational,” which carries fewer connotations of physical violence. As a historical movement in the Western world, the fortunes of feminism have varied widely from one society to another (from England, France, and the Scandinavian nations, on the one hand, to the Iberian peninsula and the Balkans on the other), depending on the possibilities available within a given society for the expression of dissent through word or deed.

Based on this definition of feminism, I would consider as feminists any persons, female or male, whose ideas and actions (insofar as they can be documented) show them to meet three criteria: (1) they recognize the validity of women’s own interpretations of their lived experience and needs and acknowledge the values women claim publicly as their own (as distinct from an aesthetic ideal of womanhood invented by men) in assessing their status in society relative to men; (2) they exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger over institutionalized injustice (or inequity) toward women as a group by men as a group in a given society; and (3) they advocate the elimination of that injustice by challenging, through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force, or authority that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture. Thus, to be a feminist is necessarily to be at odds with male-dominated culture and society.

The specific claims that have been made by feminists at particular times and in specific places in European history include arguments for ending the maligning of women in print, for educational opportunity, for changes in man-made laws governing marriage, for control of property and one’s own person, and for valuation of women’s unpaid labor along with opportunities for economic self-reliance. They also include demands for admission to the liberal professions, for readjustment of inequitable sexual mores and ending prostitution, for control over women’s health, birthing, and childrearing practices, for state financial aid to mothers, and for representation in political and religious organizations (symbolized in Western societies not only by the vote but also by access to public office). Such claims can all be seen as culturally specific subsets of a broader

<sup>73</sup> Moses (n. 45 above), 7.



challenge to male pretensions to monopolize societal authority, that is, to patriarchy. At the same time, each of these claims addresses a structural issue, a problematic practice with political dimensions, which transcends the boundaries of the Western world and is applicable to the experience of women in other societies.

### **Toward a new feminist politics**

This definition of feminism suggests not only a reconsideration of the relational feminist tradition in history but also a contemporary reappropriation of its most distinctive contribution in the interest of a new feminist politics. The relational mode of approaching women's emancipation, by honoring women's own interpretations of "difference" in its manifold complexity, may hold the key to overcoming contemporary resistance to feminism. It seems to me that most of those women who say today, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." would in fact identify themselves as relational feminists, once made aware of the depth and extent of this tradition. It is to the logical and societal consequences of individualist feminist arguments—the individual as an end in itself—that they object.

Yet within present-day Anglo-American feminist circles, resistance to this type of relational thinking and its implications is not negligible. Arguments based on sexual difference, women's maternal roles, or nurturant thinking, or especially the suggestion that physiological or hormonal differences between the sexes, or female sexuality itself, might have sociopolitical implications, continue to make many current partisans uneasy, as the controversies over the proposals of Alice Rossi, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and, most recently, Sylvia Hewitt have demonstrated.<sup>74</sup> Some opponents would prefer to disassociate themselves from such arguments, even at the expense of obscuring the historical importance of relational feminist arguments in the Western tradition. Some have attested to their discomfort with the role-based arguments of most early French advocates of feminist ideas, arguing, for example, that "it has been shown conclusively that complementary sex roles within an otherwise competitive society mean subordination of women."<sup>75</sup> Others have resisted the arguments for moral and/or spiritual distinctiveness, especially those that historically pointed to a mission of moral

<sup>74</sup> See the proposals by Rossi (n. 41 above); and Elshtain (n. 7 above); and, more recently, Sylvia Hewitt's, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: Morrow, 1986).

<sup>75</sup> Renate Bridenthal (session commentary, Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Bryn Mawr College, June 1976).

reform and unremunerated benevolence for women based on their capacity to nurture (though the content of these missions is now undergoing scholarly reevaluation).<sup>76</sup> For a few Marxist-feminist scholars, arguments for the moral reform of society by women, based on their difference from men, have been interpreted as simply a smokescreen for a bourgeoisie unwilling to confront the necessity of socioeconomic equalization of the capitalist societies.<sup>77</sup>

At bottom, however, the real problem late twentieth-century feminist theorists have had with relational feminist arguments, both historically and today, is that such arguments seem to cut both ways; even as they support a case for women's distinctiveness and complementarity of the sexes, they can be appropriated by political adversaries and twisted once again to endorse male privilege. It is no secret to those who study women's history that certain aspects of arguments grounded in women's special nature, physiological and psychological distinctiveness, the centrality of motherhood, and a sharp sexual division of labor within the family and society have in the past been co-opted by those hostile to women's emancipation to fuel arguments for their continued subordination. The situation that developed in Germany in the 1930s, where a considerable part of the radical feminist program was taken over by the Nazis, offers the most complex and oft-cited case in point, but the situation in today's Soviet Union, in the People's Republic of China, Thatcher's Britain, and 1980s France, or, closer to home, in the camp of the New Right may prove to be no less troublesome.<sup>78</sup>

A closer reading of women's history and the history of the woman question in Western thought shows, however, that throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth arguments for women's emancipation grounded in sexual difference and relational fem-

<sup>76</sup> Nineteenth-century claims for women's "moral superiority" and "maternal instinct" have been heavily attacked. The findings of Gilligan (n. 41 above) have succeeded in shifting the debate to different ground.

<sup>77</sup> See, for an unsurpassed example, Esther Kanipe, "The Family, Private Property and the State in France, 1870–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> On the Nazi period, see Christine Wittrock, "Das Frauenbild in faschistischen Texten und seine Vorläufer in der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung der Zwanzigerjahre" (Inaugural diss., Johann-Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt/Main, 1981); Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); and, esp. Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987). For the contrasting problems caused by "difference" in the developing welfare states of Britain and France from 1945 on, see Jane Jenson, "Both Friend and Foe: Women and State Welfare," in Bridenthal, Koonz, and Stuard, eds. (n. 12 above), 535–56. For the United States, see Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

inist claims could be and were used most effectively by women and men alike to achieve far-reaching rearrangements in the gender-based system, even in the face of heated opposition. One has only to invoke the achievement of Alva Myrdal and her associates in Sweden, who did not abandon the terrain of sexual difference but built upon it during a time of population crisis, to turn objections against women's employment into arguments for women's right to motherhood even as they continued to work.<sup>79</sup> Such a relational approach cannot and must not be dismissed as historically wrong-headed, or too dangerous, or as irrelevant to the needs of women in today's world. Instead, we should be trying harder to reappropriate relational feminism and make it work for us, rather than against us. Surely, the best way to fight appropriation and willful misinterpretation of one's claims is to speak unambiguously and to maintain the initiative in countering opposition. Moreover, if we reject relational feminism because it can be misappropriated, then we must reject individualist feminism on the same grounds.

The individualist approach also has been and is even now being used against us. Most recently, it has been successfully turned against us in achieving defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment at the state level.<sup>80</sup> By attacking gender roles, denying the significance of physiological difference, condemning existing familial institutions as hopelessly patriarchal, and contesting motherhood, individualist feminists of the 1970s formulated claims for personal autonomy, choice, and self-realization for women that simply placed the sociopolitical context, as well as the relational aspects, of most women's lives outside discussion and left this terrain to be effectively claimed by opponents who succeeded in mobilizing public fear.

It has been one of the paradoxes of the contemporary Anglo-American women's movement that women's claims for a radical and thoroughgoing individual equality of rights with men would, if realized, preclude the possibility that there may be value for women in sexual distinctions. After all, solidarity among women is based not solely on recognition of a common oppression but also, histor-

<sup>79</sup> See Alva Myrdal, *Nation and Family* (London, 1945), excerpted in Bell and Offen, eds. (n. 33 above), vol. 2. See also Allan C. Carlson, "The Roles of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in the Development of a Social Democratic Response to Europe's Population Crisis, 1928-1938" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ohio, 1974); and Ann-Sofie Källemark, *More Children of Better Quality? Aspects on Swedish Population Policy in the 1930s* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1980). See also Sondra Herman, "Swedish Feminism" (paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Wellesley College, June 1987).

<sup>80</sup> See, in particular, the analyses in Joan Hoff-Wilson, ed., *Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

ically speaking, on a celebration of shared and differential experience as members of the same sex, the childbearing and nurturing sex. Feminist scholar-activists have discovered, for instance, that women's cultural experience of motherhood as negative and restricting is historically specific and, given a different shape, can potentially offer women much satisfaction.<sup>81</sup> However, we must find the initiative to reshape the world to our own purposes by "rethinking" the male-dominated family and its politics in a manner that incorporates, rather than neglects, the sociopolitical dimensions of women's experience. Reintegrating individualistic claims for women's self-realization and choices, with its emphasis on rights, into the more socially conscious relational framework, with its emphasis on responsibilities to others, may provide a more fruitful model for contemporary feminist politics, one that can accommodate diversity among women better than either of the two historical approaches can on their own.

It is historically significant that today Anglo-American feminist theorists are embarked on a reassessment of and a cautious rehabilitation of relational feminist ideas about "difference," womanliness, sexuality, and motherhood. This reassessment has been inspired to some extent by borrowings from recent continental European feminist theory, though with little knowledge of the historical development of European (especially French) feminism that could so enrich the undertaking. Ten years ago we knew all too little of that complex heritage; today, however, the range and diversity of the history of discourse about women and on women's behalf within Western thought stands revealed.

As we plot a future path, we must draw on the most valuable features of both historical traditions. What feminists today must do—and are now beginning to do—is to reappropriate the relational path of our intellectual heritage, which we now know to be grounded in the very heart of Western thought on "the woman question"; to reclaim the power of difference, of womanliness as women define it; to reclaim its concern for broad social goals; and to reweave it once again with the appeal to the principle of human freedom that underlies the individualist tradition. We must collapse the dichotomy that has placed these two traditions at odds historically and chart a new political course. Armed with a richer history and a more

<sup>81</sup> See, in particular, the diversely revisionist critiques of Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976); and Elizabeth Badinter, *Motherlove: Myth and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1981, originally published in French as *L'Amour en Plus*, 1980). See also Stacey (n. 27 above), 219–48.

comprehensive working definition of feminism, I suggest that, with compromises and concessions on both sides, we can make both modes of feminist discourse work together on behalf of an equitable world, a world in which women and men can be at once equal and different, a world free of male privilege and male hierarchy and authority over women.

To accomplish this, however, we must develop a more historically grounded, more realistic, more encompassing sociopolitical vision, one that goes beyond stark individualism. Such a vision, even as it appeals to solidarity among women to combat their common subordination, must also accommodate their actual range of diversity and differing needs. Such a vision must be capacious enough to include the concerns of women who are married as well as women who are single, women who are mothers as well as women who do not choose motherhood, and women whose most important relationships are with other women. It must speak to poor women as well as wealthy women and to women of various ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions. It must also include men whose self-concept is not rooted in domination over women. Such a vision will encompass the best features of both the past and present relational and individualist frameworks for debating the woman question and open new vistas for the future of feminist politics.

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