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2: The Word Woman

I Definitions and Generalizations

"Woman" means, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "an adult female human being." "Human" means "of, belonging to, or characteristic of man"; "of the nature of man, that is man, consisting of man"; "a human being, a man." It derives from the Latin *humanus*, from *homo*, "man". "Man" means "a human being," "the human race"; with the secondary meaning "an adult male person." "Woman" derives from the Anglo-Saxon *wifmann*—a non-male, female man. "Male" derives from the Latin *mas*, meaning a male of any species—plants, animals, gods, etc. "Female" derives from the French *femelle* (the termination being altered to resemble "male"); which derives from the Latin *femina*, associated with *fecundus*, "fertile." *Mulier*, the loose word in Latin for "woman," tended to be a term of contempt; like the Greek *gunnis* it was frequently used to mean "a weakling" (as *homo* was the loose, somewhat contemptuous word for "man," as to say, "you anyone"). The Greek *gunē* seems to have been a word of the same character as the Anglo-Saxon *wif*—a concrete term arbitrarily identifying, without defining, a thing perceived along with many other things: a convenience-name rather than a definition, as "cat" is a convenience-name rather than a definition. And "wife" has remained such a mere name-word, not pretending to define; to say "my wife" is equivalent to saying "my you-know-what-I-mean thing." The more dignified word in Anglo-Saxon for "wife" was *cwēn*; *cwene* seems to have been merely a more emphatic word for "woman"; we have from these the distinguishing "queen" as well as the disparaging "quean." *Cwēn* and *cwene* are associated with the

Greek *gune*; and these are all, with *wif*, terms of reference rather than definitions. *Wifmann*, which gives "woman," was more of a definition. *Mann* meant "anyone," "everyone," "person"—presumably of either sex: when "woman" was meant personally it was necessary to say *wifmann*. For specific "manly" associations *wer* was used, as *vir* in Latin: as if *mann* and *homo* were made meaningless as defining words by their application to the ambiguous phenomenon which is now suavely assumed to be "an adult female human being."

We see, then, that the words historically used to represent this phenomenon have been of two kinds: terms of pure description and terms of definition. The descriptive terms refer to some obvious functional activity, or, still more casually, state the phenomenon as a mere object of perception. This seems to have been the character of *wif*; it probably meant, originally, something like "thing with a veil." *Gwēn* and *awene*, still older words, also seem to be of this character, as does the Greek *gunē*; and the Sanskrit *yoni*, a holy symbol of the female organ of generation, seems a cognate word, as does the Latin *cunius*, which came to be used for "courtesan," i.e., a woman considered merely as a sexual object.

The second kind of words—the terms of definition—are more elastic, and at the same time more vague. The enlargement of the primitive terms, which had no more than concrete or ritualistic sense, has involved no greater concern with, or study of, the phenomenon "woman." The enlargement is sentimental—a reflection of enlarged, more positive notions of the nature of "man," even as the notion "God" has been sentimentally affected by this enlargement: a god was, first, either a concrete or a ritualistic object of contemplation, but became bigger, mightier, more grandiose, as man's mind and world made itself bigger, mightier, more grandiose. And there has been no more actual study of the nature of "God" than of the nature of "woman": greater concern, in either case, is a by-product of man's increasing concern with, and exploitation of, his own nature.

"Woman" and "God" are the two notions which resist absorp-

tion in the meanings with which man enlarges his nature. Man, in giving the meaning of himself to everything, grows conscious of "something else" to which his meanings do not easily adhere. And the "something else" is divided into two notions—"God," the "other" thing as a passive subject of thought to which he makes his meanings adhere by force of will, and "woman," a closer, more co-operative kind of "otherness," which assists him practically (he does not know or care why) in his attempts to create identity between his own meanings and all the "other" meanings which may be. "Woman," indeed, does not constitute for him another kind of being: her differences from him are so obvious, so observable, as to seem trivial beside the obscure differences which constitute for him the being "God." "God" seems to have difference, "woman" merely differences. So the courtesy of being, roughly speaking, man, is extended to woman: as, when strangers come to some country and settle down in it peaceably and co-operatively, they are in time regarded as fellow-citizens. Yet the country is perpetually preoccupied with its difference from the rest of the world, from which all the strangers come: it is proudly conscious of itself as a particular country, with a particular territory and language of its own, and yet it would like to be able to think of itself as representative of the whole rest of the world, and to regard its language as the universal language. So while at home it insists on naturalizing the strangers who come to it and assiduously cultivates its own peculiarities, confident of their universality, in international intercourse it is extremely diffident of its peculiarities.

Women are strangers in the country of man: they are, that is, immediate manifestations of the existence of something else besides man. But to man they represent merely certain secondary differences; he cannot imagine that with them the whole problem of difference is to be resolved. The strangers are all with him in his place, live with him in his time. Yet he rejects the practical resolution as the final one exactly because it is practical: to work out with woman all the implications of his difference would condemn him to a literal immediate acceptance of his nature against which all his

ambitions for himself would revolt. And so besides women, the strangers, there is a hypothetical elsewhere, and a hypothetical future time, in which difference will disappear: there is "God," the notion of man's ultimate triumph over his peculiarities. As for "woman," she is held to constitute merely certain differences from man which enlarge and assist in the development of his nature, his meanings. And so the word "woman" is included in the word "man," and its meanings do no more than supplement and liberalize the meanings of "man."

Woman has remained, nevertheless, man's most "different" experience: it cannot be said that man has got really used to woman. Experience of "God" is, by definition, a "different" experience, conditioned and futurized by the large demands man makes of it. Experience of woman is an actual experience: it happens. The definition man makes of this experience is an interpretation which succeeds the experience, not conditioning it as his definition of experience of God conditions the experience. And thus the different being "woman," although physically present to man, is more carelessly and ambiguously defined than the different being "God" which is not so present; and although woman remains for man his most persistently "different" experience. But no matter how careless and ambiguous the meanings associated with the word "woman," and how considered the meanings with which the word "God" is endowed, man is forced, nevertheless, to think of *women* in specific terms, since in them the notion "woman" becomes an actual experience; while the notion "God" remains semi-somnolent, never quite breaking through its theological or philosophical status in the consciousness.

Generalizations about women fall into two groups: those in which women are characterized as "woman," as a *problem*, and one not radically distinct from any of the other immediate problems which make up man's general problem "life"; and the more journalistic generalizations, developed irresponsibly from particular observations and having their source in some specific irritation with some specific characteristic of female behaviour. Thus we

have generalizations about the goodness, the loving-kindness, the mercifulness or terribleness, the eternalness, the all-wiseness, the omnipotence, the omnipresence, the incomprehensibility, of God; whereas about women we have neither such major generalizations, nor the kind of sentimental generalization man makes about himself, such as that man is, if worthy of the name, brave and daring, or loyal, or humane, or full of noble thoughts or beautiful imaginings or high hopes or happy humours. A woman may possess any of the traditionally male qualities; but if she does they immediately become minor, whimsical, story-book qualities; although it is expected of her that she be moderately man-like in her social virtues.

The usual generalizations about women, as "woman," have to do with the problem they create by being not merely necessary physical fixtures of man's life, like plants, animals and the material substances of earth, but presences to be reckoned with among male presences: women, that is, are also daughters in the house, persons whose good opinion must be wooed before their bodies are available, wives to be kept in good humour for one's own peace, sisters whose friendship has a practical value, mothers whose powers over one continue mysteriously long after the specific mother-activities have ceased, mothers-in-law whose powers over one are, obscurely, even more absolute. Besides generalizations concerned with the problem, how to handle women, there are the "mere sayings." Neither kind is serious, yet between them they represent man's reaction to the insistent fact "woman." The first kind springs from worry, the second from irritation, and neither worry nor irritation are serious reactions. Man does more than worry about or be irritated with God, if he thinks about God at all, and more than worry about or be irritated with himself; but his reaction, to woman do not pass beyond this elementary stage of notice. It she causes him neither worry nor irritation, this means that he is somehow able, with her assistance, not to notice her—as he is able to dismiss the weather, on a fine day, even in his pleasure that it is a fine day.

And, as with the weather, man resents any pressure which makes

him think about woman; he assumes that she is some mechanical extension of himself, an outer atmosphere as it were breathed by himself which becomes as fantastic as bad weather when it behaves with distinct personality. It is true that modern man prides himself on behaving well to women, on treating them as equals; but modern thinking about woman is confined, by being based on notions of the man-likeness of woman, to such sportsman niceties as those outlined by Havelock Ellis,¹ such as that the decent thing in the game of sex is for man to be as mindful of woman's sporting zest as of his own. Indeed, there is more thought of woman as a distinct personality in old-fashioned courtesy-rites than in modern equality-technique. Though both are equally superficial in their concern with woman, the former has at least the virtue of being more suitable dramatically to the fact that woman is a different kind of being from man.

In the worried generalization about woman, man parodies himself as a strong creature subject to the difficulties which the social presence of women in a male world create. The presence of woman is a difficulty like other difficulties which challenge his strength—economic difficulties, political difficulties, scientific difficulties, disease, crime, etc. But while he is able to deal with other difficulties by his strength, with woman he is like the hero of many battles caught in a storm without his umbrella and soaked to the skin. As a hero of many battles he may gracefully display his ineffectuality against the unaccountable caprices of nature, and his wry worry over his forgotten umbrellas and rubbers and his dislike of wet clothes make a picture at once comic, disarming and dignified: through it all he remains the hero of many battles.

The irritated generalization about woman is witty rather than comic. It is developed from some particular observation—like Dr. Johnson's remark that women were timorous but not cautious. Dr. Johnson, that is, had probably been annoyed by Mrs. Boswell's excessive concern for Boswell's safety on his travels; and by various domestic misadventures at his Bolt Court household in which the women displayed what he considered excessive alarm; and he had

undoubtedly been subject, in his wide experience of coaches, to the extreme nervousness of women about the uncertainty of these vehicles as to horses, wheels and coachmen. And he had also undoubtedly noticed that when a woman had a mind to do or say something no amount of disapproval could stop her; and so he characterized this trait not as a quality in itself but in terms of his disapproval of marked behaviour of any kind in women. The same observation, if applied to equivalent behaviour in men, would automatically become "Men are cautious but brave."

Judgement operates in the generalization about men, but self-interested prejudice in the generalization about women. And there is no common saying about women which has not this pseudo-critical cast. If it is said that women are cruel, the meaning is not that women have the quality of cruelty, but that the effect of women's behaviour, by whatever qualities it may be motivated, is frequently to cause men discomfort. Or, if it is said that women are intuitive but not logical, the meaning is not that women possess a distinct kind of knowledge which men do not, as against men's skill at making deductions which may or may not be true, but that, merely, women are irritably erratic in their thought-processes: they make statements, perhaps true in themselves, but then leave them, annoyingly, to go on to other statements, having little patience with the slow calculations which men weave round a single proposition. It would not occur to men to make the generalization, from the same evidence, that women are dogmatic, men merely argumentative.

Then there are generalizations of this kind: that women are conventional, or fussy, or usually preoccupied with cleanliness and mere physical details. Men, that is, are annoyed by women's insistence on well-defined codes of behaviour and standards of beauty, order and precision. It would not occur to men to make the generalization, from the same evidence, that women have a stronger sense of practical morality, practical beauty, practical order and practical truth than they; that women are continually practising judgement while men are continually experimenting.

with ideas. That women are "so conventional" is indeed a frequent complaint made by women against women. And the woman who makes it borrows the whole male paraphernalia of irritation with women; she makes it not out of any consciousness, as a woman, of the injustice women are doing to their true nature in being so conventional, but from feelings of anger with women for not winning greater approval from men when they have it in their power to do so.

Another generalization made about women is that they are difficult to please. A similar generalization is, indeed, made about men; but this really represents the assumption that women are designed to please men. (And men are, as a matter of fact, easy to please, since they demand of women only to be pleased.) There is no assumption that men are designed to please women behind the generalization that women are difficult to please, merely irritation with the fact that women are difficult to satisfy. It would not occur to men to make the generalization, from the available evidence, that women have high standards of adequacy where men have only prejudices founded in egotism; that the romantic emotion in a woman is always based on some particular excellence of person attributable to the man, apart from mere physical excellence, but that in a man it is identical with sexual feeling; that where she does not esteem, the woman does not, in the romantic sense, love, but that love is indeed stimulated in man by some failing in the woman which reduces the burden of love to mere sexual tenderness.

We frequently hear the generalization that "men are just like children." But we do not hear that women are in earnest—where men merely play earnestly. Men allow themselves to be called children not because they feel themselves to be children and women adults, but because it suits their sexual policy; they are not really interested in determining what man is as against what woman is, only in not being bothered by women. They are irritated by the feeling that women expect them to give coherent accounts of their thoughts and doings, and they like to have their secrets, their private foolishnesses and excitements—to feel important without

having their self-importance critically tested. And therefore they are like children. That is, women treat them like children in letting them, for the most part, keep their play-time secrets to themselves. Men like the freedom which this attitude of women gives them, though they are not sure whether they like being thought of as children. But it is better than going through the humiliation of giving precise accounts of themselves; so they accept the benefits of being children while asserting from time to time their dignity as men when the activity rises out of the playful into the heroic.

Men tolerate certain semi-serious, semi-disrespectful generalizations about themselves of the kind generally made about women, but serious generalizations must confirm them in the major, conventional abilities: whereas there are no serious generalizations about women, only flattering concessions by which women are granted a few minor, unconventional talents. The generalization most dear to men is that which confirms them in superior intelligence and inventiveness. Yet, although they regard it as unchallengeable, it is being constantly and peevishly reasserted. For although it is they who have been, predominantly, the producers of ideas, events, mechanical works, books, pieces of music and objects of art, women somehow maintain a prestige among them altogether disproportionate to their "achievements." Women have seemed to do nothing but be women; yet men have not been able to withhold from them the right of judging of men's activities; the proudest hero has, in his time, secretly trembled before the opinion of some obscure "she." Somehow, without apparent effort, women seem to win—in some altogether unanswerable way, somehow, with weaker physical force than men, and less obvious mental effectiveness, they possess a power which overflows all social restrictions and which is something apart from their strategical power as possessors of the instruments of sexual pleasure and procreation. All of which is naturally very irritating and puzzling; all of which provokes the reassertion of the generalization that men have superior intelligence and inventiveness.

Yet God has produced few books (perhaps none), however

many he may, like women, have inspired, and no works of art in the human sense: the production of Nature, traditionally attributed to him, is of the same automatic character as the production of infants by women. God, too, though (by the same reasoning) of inferior intelligence and inventiveness, has a power. Indeed, though the power of God and the power of woman are equally difficult to define, the evidence of the latter is more tangible and frequent than the evidence of the former. But tangible and frequent evidence of women's power provokes the generalization that women are capricious and unreasonable, while God is left in the crude but majestic stage of absolute intangibility—as in the generalization that the ways of God are inscrutable. It would not occur to men to make, from all the evidence of women's power, the generalization that women have power, men merely strength, rather than the generalization that women are of inferior intelligence and inventiveness.

We find, then, that there exists in man toward woman first of all a simple consciousness—as simple as perception itself—of something “different”; and that in its primitive stages the word “woman” is either a term of objective reference, or, if a meaning, that it has no more than the ritualistic significance which woman herself has in the religious formalities of the society. Only in its civilized stages is the word loaded with active meanings, representing man's subjective reactions to the personal presence of women. Such reactions do not exist in primitive society. Women's presence is accepted as the whole natural world is accepted; efforts to define her are confined to fixing her right place, ritualistically, in the religious scheme which is the society's version of the Unknown. Early man, that is, accepts the existence of an Unknown; and woman, as a different kind of being from man, belongs in some way to the Unknown. Civilized man continues to feel the sense of difference; but he tries, as far as possible, to identify the different with himself. He dislikes difference—which early man accepts without protest; woman is identified with man, and where she seems to resist identification she is disliked. But there remains in

civilized man an involuntary primitive recognition of woman as something different; and, along with it, a persistent consciousness of himself as something different, in spite of his efforts to generalize all difference under the titular identity “man.” There remains an untranslatable residue, which he regards, nevertheless, as ideally translatable into himself; and the conquest of this residue forms the spiritual objective traditionally represented by “God.” And so the more civilized the god, the more decisively male the divine image.

Woman remains an irritatingly different phenomenon. But man heals the daily, immediate shocks she gives to his conviction of being, ultimately, the general standard of meaning, by treating her difference as a local problem, not essentially unlike any of the other technical problems which challenge his strength and ingenuity. Or, with those characteristics of women which seem personal rather than physical, to legislate for which would create a state of war with women, man adopts what he likes to feel is the philosophical attitude and what is, indeed, the philosophical attitude: that women are, fundamentally, incapable of change and must be accepted resignedly as beings who are irrevocably what they are. This acceptance is different from the primitive acceptance of woman; it is an acceptance, merely, of the irritation which women cause. All inquiry into the nature of woman stops with this acceptance; and the inquiry itself is no more than a set of rules about his own behaviour with women which man makes in self-protection. It is not a true inquiry, because it starts out with the proposition that, while women are in many respects different from men, they fall under the general heading “man”; by definition they are men, and so their differences all seem as differences of degree, not of kind. Generalizations about women have the same domestic ring as generalizations about cats or dogs, in their aspect as members of the human household; they are either homely rules of procedure, parallel with such proverbs as “Too much confidence turns an honest dog into a thief,” or homely witticisms like “The patience of a cat is its treachery.”

Yet the characteristics of women which irritate are the same as

those which please. Women, for example, are said to be irrational: it is observed that they proceed from one statement to another. This habit of mind is pleasing to man so long as it does not come into conflict with his own. He regards it as a delightful scatter-brainedness, as delightful as a kitten's caperings with a string—until he is called on to deal with it intellectually: then it becomes "irrationality." He is irritated, that is, at being confronted with a thought-process different from his own; and so he decides that it is not a thought-process but merely an irritating peculiarity of women. To accept as a legitimate personal characteristic one radically different from his own would weaken man's confidence in the universality of maleness; therefore women's personal characteristics, however pleasing, are viewed as erratic departures from the standard of humanity, or maleness. In this respect God has the advantage over women: he scarcely possesses personal characteristics at all, and in so far as he does he is reassuringly male.

II Sexual Differentiation in Symbolic Notions

But although modern God is always a male notion, it must be remembered that male divinity is a comparatively late notion, even a late civilized notion. And even modern man is extremely circumspect in affirming the maleness of God: if pressed, he will say that in putting God in the masculine gender he does not mean that he is male in the human sense. "He," as an upper-case being, is above petty sexual distinctions. "He" is more than man; man is merely a "miniature divine," a "fragment." "God the Father," modern man would explain, is only a poetic way of describing the divine goodness to man; the figure is, of course, inadequate—but where is a better? If you ask, "Why not God the Mother?" he will think you are joking, because he himself does not take his mother as seriously as his father; his mother has undoubtedly cared for him more painstakingly than his father, and his mother, moreover, bore him, but surely everyone thinks of the father as the protective head of the family—and it is the father, after all, who generally makes the money. But, however it may be, he does not mean strictly that God is a man, and of course he means no insult to women in calling God "Him." "Man" is, after all, a very vague term. "Is it not?" he would appeal—including both men and women; and it would be preposterous for women to protest jealously against the maleness of God, since in religion everyone should be above personalities.

But femaleness is associated with divinity even in comparatively late religious thought; and not from courtesy, or notions of sexual equality, or as a result of feminist pressure, but from an instinctive

	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	
	

What is wrong with a current feminist argument as to women's engaging in criminal activity not from a different, a feminine, base of motivation from that from which men engage in it? The argument is that women are in what they do human beings, as men are this in what they do. But this feminist argument forcibly identifies the base of criminal-activity motivation in the criminal activity of men as having a human character, not a masculine character, in the first place. This identification is necessary in order to argue that women are moved to engage in criminal activities as human beings, just as men are: women do, as men do, what they do as human beings, not as, peculiarly, women. If the character of criminal activity itself is examined without respect to the imposed feminist proposition that criminal activity, as exhibited in men's doings, proceeds from traits characteristically human, there will be experienced the simple factual apprehension that the criminal disposition, with the warring disposition, springs from elements of male stress in the nature of men.

Men are also human beings. And elements of male stress, given open lead, take on, as public behavior, the forms of human behavior. The committing of personal outrage upon others or group or mass entering into combat to the death or total subjection falls within the historically accustomed patterns of human experience. Where women are actors within the special bounds of criminal or warring patterns of experience, they are performing in a male mode of humanized form; and no argumentative appeal to the human-being identity of women and men can controvert this

actuality. The animating emotions in criminal and warring activity are distinctively male. When women apply themselves to such activity, the adaptation is mainly mental, not emotional. The self-identification with the criminal or warring rôle is intellectual: the emotions involved will tend to be eccentrically personal, neither of them peculiar to the nature of women nor sympathetically imitative of those peculiar to the nature of men.

This principle I have described as basic to the engagement of women in an activity originating in the emotional proclivities of men, I believe to govern much of the activity and behavior of women in their now extensive participation in a world of human life consisting largely of activities and pursuits that have had their origination in the emotional proclivities of men. They participate in these on the strength of their intellectual ability to do so, and through the capability these have of intellectual adoption by women by their having become increasingly conventionalized into human models of performance behaviors. It is, all, the world of human life, now, a patched-up affair, continually breaking apart in new ways. Its men are only uncertainly risen from the downward pull of the male propensity to attack-making. The level of human comity is a fluctuation; and women, at this poor present mark that trembles between a high low and a low high, are still servants of human life's not yet overcome inferiority to life. They are in attendance: life in them attends upon lagging human life.

Life is a spirit, not the conglomerate world. Or, it is a world of spirit, a whole spirit. In it there is rising insistency, that ever rises, does not fall. One might call it a risen insistency, what is to be reached. That bargaining talk of women's being human beings after the manner of men distracts our spirit from itself.

(date unknown, circa late 1960s)

This piece of writing is to the effect that woman is everywhere in bondage, but that she is in bondage more to her ignorance of the human nature of her woman nature than to any other restrictive force; and that knowledge of this she can come by only when she perceives her ignorance of it, and feels here the most unfree.

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The spreading outbreak among women of protest against various aspects of their official and unofficial status in society, with accompaniment of bristling organization by them for solidarity, protest-power, and the creation of opportunities for sheer energy-release, and all the attendant intellectual, political and commercial climbing on the liberation-of-women band wagon, newly obscures what is wrong with the relations existing between men and women (what has been wrong for as long as there have been men and women), and produces a new degree of confusion in both as to these relations, and of belated sensitivity in both to their internal condition.

The true starting-point for effort directed by women towards the correction of the relations existing between men and women, women and men, is internal; by this I mean, in the area of self-understanding, and self-understanding not in terms of a historical sense of social injustice, wrong imposed from without, but in terms of a universally orientated sense of a lack in what they offer with

their presences. The lack in what women offer with their presences is traceable to a lack in their very conception of themselves. Until this elementary lack is recognized, and a beginning made in effort to fill it, all other corrective effort of women will, in so far as it has socially effective consequences, issue in nothing more than the establishment and enforcement of a principle of social identity of men and women; and the government of relations between them by that principle as a basic triumph in their relations of right over wrong will leave the internal condition of both women and men in total darkness, newly dark darkness. They will exist to themselves and to one another by social definition. They will know themselves as social beings—the human coin's design fixed thus at social identity for the obverse, to the reverse of an animal image. They will be at a stop, a false finality, and think it a moral, even a spiritual, culmination.

In such easy righteousness of revolutionary action as that with which this current liberation-of-women movement is animated, the consciousness of human beings of their nature as universal beings, which they have not been without, at least in the fragmentary form of intuition, suffers injuries massively obfuscating in their effects. Relics of their sense of this nature, now stilled, are carried off for disposal to that fenced-off ground where more and more of what has been somewhat known is discarded, which might be marked "Contemporary Concept Dump." This is the great unsanctified graveyard of knowledge with which human beings have decided to dispense because improving on it is hard work—they think they have found a kind of knowledge that's easier, and better suited to their contemporary needs. Men have been for rather long now stripping their minds of that moral and spiritual fear in which the concepts of philosophy and religion were engendered, as comfort for their conscience: the road to the Concept Dump has become a much-trod one, and women, who have been joining men in their intellectual *table rase* making, know the way well, too well, to this place of hopes rejected as too high. The site is continually expanded; the ground of tended values grows smaller, smaller.

The alluringness to women of the new feminist insistence on having everything that men have by their masculine status within unobstructed social reach, and, further, on recognition of themselves as beings possessed of qualities of ability for the privileges and powers that go with that status equal in general distinction-level to those possessed by men, is in its ready-made revolutionary passion. The older feminism was far less attractive to women because—for one reason—it meant disciplined hardship, going against the social, political, and sentimental grain of civilized custom, for severely limited ends. The later feminism is there to women for the taking, on the platter of contemporary intellectuality. This is an intellectuality of a peculiar sort. It has two opposite characteristics in close combination—in active union, indeed. It is thoroughgoing, embracing everything touchable with thought, leaving no subject, no aspect of human concerns, unexamined, unevaluated, and it is in every part *superficial*. There is no all-underlying depth in which a co-ordinating principle of value could function. Each subject rests on its own shallow bottom, and the whole is a whole only because no judgement is thrown out for its inadequacy to the human need of coherency in values. There are no unifying forces of judgement at work in it; there is no general developmental process of judgement in it, indeed, only this revolutionary intellectual totalitarianism, this arbitrary completeness in which the difficult to judge of is denied recognition, this revolutionary intellectual superficiality. Women, who had hardly begun to do their own thinking about themselves or anything else, have had come before them what seems just the right intellectual opportunity, the right intellectual conditions, the right openings, for their "liberation." They have not had even to formulate a sense of a need of wide-sweeping liberation; the formulation goes with the revolutionary package.

In the contemporary intellectual atmosphere, the force of conviction has been leaking out of the positive notions of value, the core-area of human commitment, and moving into the area of negative notions of value; the preponderance of fervor of argu-

ment—and fervor counts for righteousness on the battlefield of opinion—is on the negative side. None but a few outsiders to the world of contemporary thinking—dwelling in intellectual dullness—would dare to resist the claim made for these negative value-notions to large merit in the face of their revolutionariness. There is no substantial accumulation of counter-fervor to the assaults of protest, dissent, liberation-sentiment, on the weakened intellectual fortifications of the positive value-notions. Where surrender-flags are not hung out, there is at least defensive hanging of heads; and, where heads are not dropped in acknowledgement of superiority in fervor, there is, nevertheless, no intellectually forceful counter-revolutionary action. How to be of counter-revolutionary denomination, in any area of opinion, in these times, with an effect of intellectually respectable reasonableness? How to summon up enough force of conviction (from the ground-bed of human commitment) for intellectual self-confidence in the counter-revolutionary posture? Who, regarding the new liberation-of-women movement as, fundamentally, a movement of folly, in which women pressed for fulfilment of the final features of egalitarian justice with an intensity of dedication and devout enthusiasm proper only to an objective of fulfilment of their unique capabilities of advancing fulfilment of the total human potential, would commit the folly of taking rank as an opponent of women's "liberation"? What sense would the participants in the movement, and their sympathizers, and those who were compliant in their attitude to it as directed towards an inevitability, make of *opposition*? Could these be other than times of change? How could opposition to change justify itself in these times?

Thomas Molnar has written of the helplessness of those in the counter-revolutionary position, where revolutionary forces press themselves into positions of intellectual superiority and by sheer authoritarianism make their preoccupations the *popular* ones. There is a lesson to be deduced from this helplessness—and, curiously, it is the very lesson that women need to learn in their present position as revolutionaries. The counter-revolutionary position is

a helpless one—where it is a critically intelligent one—because it is a critical position towards a position that is largely not a critical one, but a position of *will*, assumed in defiance of (the idea of) reason as a counsellor to position. But the position that has will for a counsellor is a self-confounding one.

To address themselves with adequate scope of intelligent sensitivity to the problems of women and men, men and women, in their relations with one another as women and men, men and women, women would have to locate, first, a position of reason from which to act—in which to *think*. Their "movement" would have to begin in what Spinoza called "adequate ideas." This existing movement is generated, first of all, under the influence of certain emotions, but no "clear and distinct knowledge of their nature" exists by which "the mind may be led to think those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly." The beginning position of the movement is a cluster of emotions having no definition except in terms of what is *wanted*. All the argumentation designed by its members to persuade themselves and others is bold statement of wantings with quick passage from wanting to demanding. The mental machinery of the movement is emotion-ruled. The action is by force of will. It has no dynamics of experience in terms of thought; its energy is limited to the insistence of will, lacks the deep-drawn resolution of intellectual principle. Not only can those who are conscious of the purlindness of new-feministic enthusiasm not oppose the movement except by fighting it (and who would fight *equality*?): the women who constitute the movement are also immobilized, caught in it as in an intellectual treadmill: there is no progress in its thinking, only repetition. The greater the intensity with which women attach themselves to the movement, the more arrested they are in their thought about themselves as women. It prepares no future for them but that of their becoming increasingly creatures of their appetite for equality.

As a woman who has, in the course of a long thinking and writing career, thought hard about, and written now and again, from a serious preoccupiedness with the subject, on the problem

of the "place" of women, not in "society" but in human existence in its entire range of functions, purposes, apprehensions, aspirations, peculiarly characterizable as "human." I have reached a certain stability in my conception of the nature of that place. By my understanding of the realities governing proper linguistic identification, it is not a place, or a position in the social contexts of location ("society" is always, actually, something of localized reference—the human generality in the whole cannot be subsumed in it), but a responsibility of cosmic dimensions. I conceive this responsibility to be one uniquely possessed by women, and to be of a unitarian significance as large as the reaches of the religious imagination; I take women to be endowed with special capabilities of initiating the reunion of the forces of being—of the dispersion of which, within the boundaries of the indestructible, in being, the Universe is, to my sense of the processes of existence, the Exhibit. This reunion I see as implied in human existence, as promised in human beings.

The responsibility of women of which I speak I see as the court of peace not only of the terrestrial sphere but of the whole universe of argument, physical and otherwise. I see woman as having in protective charge the *unfailing* articulation of the unities by which the universal multiplicity of things cohere, and the (unfailing) articulation of the unity of the unities. Woman-nature in human nature, human nature as embodying the general responsibility to speak of all and to speak all, has kept the significance of unity inherent in human nature, by its inherent articulative function, intact against the hazards of contradiction to which man-nature in human nature, peculiar with a prepossession towards the divisive potentialities of existence, exposes human nature: thus I interpret the circumstances in which men and women differ, and the differences. That is, I consider there to be that in the man-nature in human-nature which predisposes it to fear its loss in human nature—to fend off the very unities of being of which human nature gives notice, to want and not want its humanness.

Such is the topography of my conceptions of human nature,

human functioning, and the functioning of men and women in relation to this responsibility that—according to my thinking—they share. For indeed they have the same responsibility, I think, in their identity as human. But men are suspicious of it. In the large realm of human action, the action of beings on whom rests a responsibility of uttering, with themselves, sense of reality as *one* reality, women accept the responsibility so unhesitatingly they hardly know what they accept. Men, of their divisively inclined man-nature, both accept it and turn their backs on it. In accepting it they make an abstraction of the large realm of human action to which the responsibility relates, putting thus an unreality between themselves and the reality that human nature (in men and women) instinctively recognizes.

2

I find, looking at an article entitled "The New Feminism" by Lucy Komisas that was published in the February 21, 1970 issue of *Saturday Review*, the word "treadmill," which I used a while back, here, used in a quoted account by a young woman of her feeling of being arrested, stopped in self-fulfilment in society, by the fact of being a woman. She felt "contradictions in the system" existing in her own individual life. She felt as if she were "on a treadmill, an emotional treadmill." This "treadmill" is far less damaging to the actualizing of a woman's potential as a human being, in which the fact of her womanhood must have functional expression, than the "intellectual treadmill" in which the new feminist traps her—as I have here called the entrapment. In the presumed escape from the restrictive impositions of "the system," the "liberated" woman has patterned her identity to the standardized conceptions of human functionality "the system" itself conforms to the ideals of performance centered upon men's ambition of achieving successes within the social framework that will satisfy also their yearnings for a sense of internal virtue. In making thus a

social rationalization of their own failure to succeed—so far—in the employment of themselves on a large human scale, with a direct impact on human life (not just have success in private, domestic impact, which even in its extensive totality remains of indirect effect), women are submerging their birthright and responsibility, as women, of functional contribution to the success of humanness in the loose morality of compromise of masculine creation. Men have continually sheltered themselves in this compromise plane of existence from the ultimate requirements of their humanness—with women existing in vague identification with them, by men and themselves, alongside. What is called society is this very compromise plane of existence; here men have carried on their bargaining adjustments between the demands of their selfish concerns and those of their human conscience. The problems of women's successful functioning cannot be absorbed by the moral provisions of society, which as an entity has no intrinsic reality, intrinsic spiritual validity, holds no inner content of human meanings. Women's problem is, essentially, that of finding out how best to apply to human life their innate human equipment, as women, of active unselfishness—in which is reflected the unitary nature of being-in-the-large, of "existence," "Being" in the sense of reality whole (reflected without the refraction it undergoes in the medium of man-nature).

In flattering themselves that they are escaping in their new activities of revolt from the emotional treadmill of enclosure within the limits of the domestic locale, women blind themselves to the treadmill character of their new environmentally-conditioned objective. The freedom they are defining as the necessary scope of their activities of self-fulfilment is the right of free-range in a public-life locale that is itself an enclosure in which human beings pay respect to a cosmic factor of their identity which is actually excluded from direct presence in the locale. The benefits of having the full freedom of their society include, for women, the historic self-protective procedure of men of making an abstraction of the principles of being they instinctively comprehend in their

humanness but shrink from serving without reservations, in their self-interested man-ness.

Thus, in fighting for full social liberation as if it held the key for them to fullness of life and performance, women are sealing themselves off from that of which they have, by their woman-nature, pure, sure sensibility—sensibility unobstructed by self-interested appetencies. They add their force, in newly fierce intensity of imitation of masculine exertion towards the creation of social substitutes for spiritual ends, to the removal of the spiritual reality of the human reality to distances of abstraction—morally convenient—seeming distances, by masculine moral optics. They confuse the satisfaction of a male-like vanity in self-emphasizing social performance with the joy of a new sense of social usefulness. Social usefulness is a hugely curtailed, a vastly qualified, version of human usefulness—purely human usefulness. It is in *this* usefulness that women's joy in performance naturally lies. To be useful with a human purity of performance is what comes naturally to women: indeed, they have done much teaching in this, just in being women. Now, instead of rising to perfect their capability of pure usefulness with new careful learning of the extent and urgency of the need of their exercising it, and of the extent and potency to which it is possible for them to exercise it, they descend to the social floor determined to make it their selfish-and-unselfish ground of operations. They have not the innate art that men have of making themselves comfortable in the midst of contradictions; they will—while wounding their woman-nature and by this injuring the general human prospect for who-can-say-how-long, greatly strengthen society in its (false) appearance of constituting the all-inclusive human scene.

3

A question on which I have written, "How Now To Think Of Women?" has a complement that, once posed, precipitates a joining of the two into a question that immediately becomes a question to be immediately answered. For this complement-question is personally directed: "How Now to Be a Woman?" And the question as to thinking about women takes on, beside it, an immediacy of personal direction: "How Now Shall *We* Think of Women?" And the two, joining in this personalness of direction, become, "How Now Do *We*, Men and Women, Think About Those of Us Who Are Women, and How Now Is Each of Those of Us Who Are Women to Be a Woman?" And a further question springs up from this compound, becoming a naturally necessary part (completion, not complement) of it: . . . "And How Now Do *We*, Women and Men, Think About Those of Us Who Are Men, and How Now Is Each of Those of Us Who Are Men to Be a Man?"

The problem "how to think"—think about matters of general human concern—has actively occupied the interest of men, in many categorically different forms of definitional activity. Not only has this activity of thinking, with the object of presenting definitions of what-is-what for general human consumption, been departmentalized according to subjects distinguished as generally important: within the subject-departments there has been a departmentalization into different definitional attitudes and processes, each single "important" subject having competing or conflicting explanations of what-is-what within its particular field of thought-exertion. Women do not naturally think in this way. They have a direct sense of a "whole" of "things," an *obtaining* whole, where men, by a peculiarity of man-nature, are given to experiencing whatever-is, all-that-is, in, as may be possible, familiarizable pieces, collectible into aggregates to which they can attach some general identity having an ideal, or at least comfortable, familiarity, reflecting in some way their own. Only women have spontaneous in

their human nature as women a mind-freedom by which experience is not, in fearfulness for self, divided into the familiar and the unfamiliar, and not treated as material for definition, all, in the terms of established familiarities. The bondage of women's ignorance of their essential nature as human—their entire function as such—tightens the bondage of men within their interlocking circles of familiarities when women's hitherto not intellectually marked horizon of human desire and purpose shrinks to a sharply drawn objective of being masters in the familiarizable—also. Who are there, to think in a way to make the whole experienceable in its intact strangeness—strangeness, as the rule of familiarity of masculine thinking (particularistic and general) goes? Who, to know this strangeness as the true human familiar?—indivisible, uncategorizable, unsynthesizable?

I shall seem to have gone far afield from the subject of women's present strivings for complete social liberation? I have tried to go far enough afield to suggest for the uses of thinking (women's thinking, men's thinking) a different kind of complete liberation.

(1972)