

have sprung up, some of them openly declaring themselves feminist, a new turn in revolutionary Third World struggles. Perhaps it is from the organizational and theoretical work bound to evolve from these that we can more reasonably expect enlightenment on the woman question. Given the complex dynamics of revolutionary praxis in the Philippines, we are witnessing the emergence of families as 'cultures of resistance' shaped in the ordeals of struggle, not in the wishful thinking of academicians, despite their good liberal intentions.

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**Feminist Politics and Human Nature**, Alison Jagger  
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This book will be useful to feminists in England for two reasons: it contains a summary of existing brands of feminism, and may be used as a textbook for students; and it brings feminist insights to bear on a range of questions that are only just beginning to see the feminist light of day. The bastion she is cracking is political philosophy, and Alison Jagger is an American political philosopher and a socialist feminist. Her summary and potted history of contemporary feminism must be seen in these contexts - she is not describing the British scene, and she is not an historian. Nonetheless, much of what she has to say is applicable to the Women's Movement over here, though the assumptions underlying the beliefs of those who fall into the broad categorizations of feminism she offers may vary from their US counterparts.

Alison Jagger begins her book with a brief history of feminism (by 'feminist' she means anyone who seeks to end women's subordinations), couched, as is the rest of the book, in political philosophical terms. Thus she talks for instance of seventeenth century feminists speaking in the liberal individualist language of 'rights'. She then begins her evaluation of the four different sections that she considers make up the contemporary women's movement. These are, respectively, 'liberal feminism', 'traditional Marxist feminism', 'Radical feminism' and 'Socialist feminism'. All of these views, with the possible exception of the first, are present in the UK as well as in the US. (There may be liberal feminist views in this country but they don't have the political voice of their US counterparts.)

Jagger's first concern, and this is an original perspective for feminism, is to outline the various theories of human nature she

believes are presupposed by her brands of feminism. Liberal feminists, for example, see human beings as rational agents; they are 'individualists' and they tend to be 'egoists'. In line with these views, liberal feminists like J S Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft have argued, against the implicit assumptions of many of their contemporaries, that women are capable of reason. But according to Marxist feminists, human nature is constituted by 'human praxis'; 'conscious physical labour directed towards transforming the material world so it will satisfy human needs.' Praxis is social, and human nature, for the Marxist feminist, undergoes change. Traditional Marxists, she says, rely on Engels' analysis of women's oppression, in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

The Radical feminist picture is that men and women have different natures, while, for the Socialist feminist, human nature is created, and alters historically 'through the dialectical interaction between human biology, human society and the physical environment'. Indeed, Jagger's socialist feminist believes that sexual, childrearing and *child-bearing* needs are socially determined.

After offering detailed criticisms of the first three types of feminism, Alison Jagger comes down broadly in favour of the Socialist feminist perspective. She does not think that it is absolutely true because, she argues, all knowledge is socially constructed, but Socialist feminism she believes, is the best of the four.

Socialist feminists will be sympathetic with much of what Jagger has to say, particularly with her criticisms of Radical feminism, where she is very careful to balance critique with a positive assessment of what it has to offer. However, we should be wary of accepting her fundamental assumptions. If all knowledge is, as Jagger believes, socially constructed, then all knowledge is *relative*, and Maggie

Thatcher has as much claim to be right as Arthur Scargill, or anybody else. The Hungarian Marxist, Lukacs, believed that all knowledge is socially constructed, that what counts as knowledge depends upon one's class standpoint. Jagger's position is similar. She thinks that there is a 'women's' experience of the world and a 'women's' knowledge. At least Lukacs had a solution to relativism as far as class society is concerned: the working class, he believed, was the 'universal class', therefore once *its* class interests and knowledge came to the fore, all class perspectives would disappear. The problem with that, however, is that, if we are sympathetic to Marx, then surely we want to know why the working class perspective is the correct one *before* class society is abolished.

Jagger herself doesn't offer any solution to relativism. For her, *any* view *could* be correct; socialist feminism just happens to fit her own view about human nature being historical, and happens to develop a picture of 'women's experience' being important. But she might be wrong about these things. Why is it important to build up an understanding of 'women's experience'? How do we know what counts as genuine, non-alienated, non-ideologically distorted, women's experience?

Though it is vital for us to understand areas of history that have been hidden from us because of patriarchal assumptions and though it is interesting to see how women's psyche, in patriarchal culture, is differently constructed from that of men, I believe it to be crucial that we should *not* describe this as contributing to the development of 'women's' knowledge. We should not do this because, as I have argued elsewhere (*Radical Philosophy* No 34), if we do believe in women's and men's knowledge, then women and men must inhabit different worlds, whose assumptions are incommensurable with one another. Women and men cannot therefore communicate with one another, and women cannot help

change men. In effect, then, despite herself, and she believes she is far from this, Jagger's view leads to this separatist position. She does not escape it by asserting, as she is prone to, that women's and men's experience varies culturally. If this is so, why are the experiences separate? Might they not change so that they merge?

Jagger says that the Radical feminists have no account of the cause of women's subordination, and she is critical of them for this. However, though Radical feminists may not have an analysis of the cause of women's oppression they do give at least one explanation of the agent of its reproduction. It is the one given by Andrea Dworkin, in her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981). Porn, she argues, reproduces women's subordination. It does this because at the core of women's oppression is male *power*, primarily male *sexual* power over women. Porn is the major agent reproducing this sexual power. And men, Dworkin believes, maintain their dominance by violence: heterosexual sex is, by nature, violent. Now,

I believe that this is wrong (a) because the majority of porn that is around, in the US and here in the UK is not violent, (b) because there is not conclusive proof that porn causes violence, and (c) because heterosexual sex is not, *by nature*, violent. I disagree, therefore, with Jagger that the Radical feminists have no account of the reproduction of women's subordination, though I demur with Dworkin on what the agent is.

Socialist feminism, by contrast, offers a combination of class and gender as explanatory of patriarchy. I believe that we can describe a socialist feminist theory that is closer to the truth than Radical feminism.

Overall, then, though there is much that will be very useful in this book for socialist feminists in the UK, it seems to me that it is flawed in its basic assumptions.

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