

enough about to point to but which I cannot speak from or for. To readers who could never overlook these limitations because of the insult to what you know: I not only invite your criticism but also ask that you use your own creativity and insight to make the best of mine, to carry out the translations and modifications which will make this work as useful to you as it can be.

Some have thought the limits of which I speak here are intrinsic to feminism itself. My life says that is not so. I have moved from an inexcusably innocent apolitical christian-styled liberalism toward the flexible wisdom of some sort of polylingual politics of variety. It is a fact of my biography that that progress began with and almost solely because of my engagement in the women's movement, and when courage or honor would fail, it is the logic of the feminism to which I am committed which compels my continued evolution. This feminism is in conception and intention a global politics; that is one of its greatest attractions and greatest promises. I and many others are growing into that politics, that promise. Growth is growth: sometimes there are things that can be done to hasten it, and sometimes it just has to be left alone. It is not always obvious what is best; one does what one can.

M.F.

# INTRODUCTION

This work is a blend of philosophy and art. It is the partial articulation of a world view, of the shape and structure of the world as this philosopher knows it; it presents images and cameos which by reflections and associations suggest a larger story or picture of "how things are." The point of the undertaking is not to find and present "facts" (new or used), but to generate ways of conceiving and interpreting which illuminate the meanings of things already in some way known and to stimulate the invention of more new ways of thinking.

What I hope to illuminate is certainly not "already known" to everyone. Finally, of course, it is what is within my own ken and what I need and want to make sense of. What I take to be known will be taken for granted far more widely and readily among women than among men. Much of it is the data of women's experience, and much of it I learned from the feminist scholars and scientists who have made it their business to discover, document and present "the facts" about women and the situations in which women live.

One of the great powers of feminism is that it goes so far in making the experiences and lives of women intelligible. Trying to make sense of one's own feelings, motivations, desires, ambitions, actions and reactions without taking into account the forces which maintain the subordination of women to men

is like trying to explain why a marble stops rolling without taking friction into account. What "feminist theory" is about, to a great extent, is just identifying those forces (or some range of them or kinds of them) and displaying the mechanics of their applications to women as a group (or caste) and to individual women. The measure of the success of the theory is just how much sense it makes of what did not make sense before.

Developing theory of this sort is something like reading the varying patterns of the weather off a weathered landscape. The observations one makes on the ground are not used as data, in any strict sense of the word, so much as they give one *clues*. One proceeds more by something like an aesthetic sense of pattern or theme than by classical scientific method. Depending on what one has already figured out, a single detail of an anecdote from one woman's experience may be exactly as fertile a clue as a carefully gotten and fully documented statistical result of a study of a thousand women, and literature or a television sit-com may reflect the shape and velocity of the "prevailing winds" as intelligibly as real life.

The results of this theorizing are also something like charts of currents, trends and cycles of winds and storms, in that there is no implication that every single individual and item in the landscape is affected in just the same way by the same wind. One tree leans more than another: one may be more flexible, one may be more sheltered by other trees, one may be older, one may have been buffeted by both wind and flood. Similarly, the prevailing cultural wind that would cool women's anger to depression or freeze it into self-reproach does not have the same effect on every woman in every circumstance. A "prevailing wind" also is not absolutely constant. The trees by my house lean to the east because the prevailing winds come from the west. But they are not at every moment of every day suffering precisely that force from that direction. Sometimes there is no wind, and sometimes there is wind from the south. If "Women's anger is forbidden" is some sort of cultural truth, that would not imply that the

force of that proscription is always and equally upon every individual in every situation.

None of us, in all our particularities, actually unfolds as a perfect print-out of the stereotypes of women that are promoted by the various segments of the culture. None of us is a perfect reflection even of the cultural forces we welcome or embrace, not to speak of those we deliberately resist. None of us obeys all the rules, even if we want to. But the stereotypes, the rules, the common expectations of us surround us all in a steady barrage of verbal and visual images in popular, elite, religious and underground vehicles of culture. Virtually every individual is immersed most of the time in a cultural medium which provides sexist and misogynist images of what we are and what we think we are doing. Our conceiving cannot be independent of culture, though it can be critical, resistant or rebellious. To the extent that an individual mother, for instance, does not mother in exact accord with advertising images of mothers, comic or religious images of mothers, racist images of mothers of her race, she is not independent of the power of those images but in tension with it. Her practice is affected by that tension.

Any theorist would be a fool to think she could tell another woman exactly how the particularities of that other woman's life reflect, or to what extent they do not reflect, the patterns the theorist has discerned. Even so, if it is true that women constitute something like a caste that cuts across divisions such as race and economic class, then although the forces which subordinate women would be modified, deflected and camouflaged in various ways by the other factors at play in our situations, we still ought to be able to describe those forces in ways which help make sense of the experiences of women who live in all sorts of different situations. I think this is possible, and I have aimed to do it. But finally, such illumination cannot be delivered complete and clear by one individual onto another's history and situation, not even if the two are very similar. If one person's theorizing is sound and correct enough to be useful to another, the other still has

to make use of her own knowledge to transpose and interpret it, to adapt it to the details of her own life and circumstances, to make it her own.

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The conventions for the uses of quotation marks and italics in this text will be familiar enough to professional philosophers, but others who are accustomed to texts prepared according to the *Modern Language Association Style Sheet* or other such standard authorities, and some readers who are unused to reading philosophical texts, may want some explanations.

I use *italics* for the titles of published books and periodicals, and enclose titles of articles, essays and short stories in quotation marks, as is called for in standard style guides. Foreign words appear in italics. Italics are otherwise used solely to indicate *emphasis*; when the essays are read aloud, italicized words and phrases should be stressed.

Quite frequently in these essays I have occasion to be talking about particular words, how they are used and what they mean. To do this, I have to have a device for referring to a word. It would be convenient for me if every word had a proper name, so I could refer to them by name: Tom, Martha, etc. But then I should have to introduce the reader to each word I expected to talk about, so s/he would know which name belonged to which word. That would not be convenient. The device I use is that of forming the name of a word by writing the letters of that word between two apostrophes. Thus:

The word 'spinster' has negative connotations to most speakers of English.

The word 'dyke' does not appear in most standard dictionaries.

The entire string of marks including both apostrophes functions in the sentence like a proper name would. Consequently, if the name of a word occurs at the end of a sentence or phrase, the comma or period goes after the final apostrophe. Thus:

Mary Daly gave new life to the word 'spinster'.

I do not treat these apostrophes like quotation marks, since what is going on when one refers to a word is not a quoting of anyone or of any text. It is simply referring to a particular linguistic entity, and the apostrophes serve just as part of the spelling of the name of that entity. It is more common for preparers of texts to construct names of words by printing the words in italics. I do not do that because I do not want references to words to be confused with emphasis or stress.

Ordinary quotation marks are used here around titles of articles and stories and also around words or phrases whose usage I wish to indicate is questionable, odd or otherwise remarkable:

In "mental health" institutions, an angry woman is likely to be given electroshock "therapy."

Here, the quotation marks indicate that the expressions they enclose are misleading, falsifying, inaccurate terms for the institutions and the processes they denote. I also use quotation marks around terms I am using in a nonstandard way. In general, when a word or phrase appears in quotation marks, but is not actually a direct quotation of some particular speaker or author, the quotation marks are a signal that there is something fishy, phoney, nonstandard, anomalous or eccentric about its usage, and the context will make clear in what way and for what reason it is being set apart from the rest of the text.

Finally, though my use of upper case letters is normal for the most part, I do not dignify names of religions and religious institutions with upper case letters. Hence, the word 'christian', used either as noun or as adjective, is not capitalized, nor is the word 'church' or 'catholic', etc. On the other hand, I do practice, from time to time, the deliberate reversal of standard typographical politics, and capitalize such words as 'Lesbian'. The occasional use of the plural pronouns 'they', 'them' and 'their' as singular pronouns where a singular and gender-neutral pronoun is needed is also deliberate, and should be chalked up to my politics, not to any weakness of my own or the editor's or proofreader's grasp of standard grammar. The usage of 'they', 'them' and 'their' as singular pronouns is very common in spoken English, and I view it as harmless in the written language.

## OPPRESSION

It is a fundamental claim of feminism that women are oppressed. The word 'oppression' is a strong word. It repels and attracts. It is dangerous and dangerously fashionable and endangered. It is much misused, and sometimes not innocently.

The statement that women are oppressed is frequently met with the claim that men are oppressed too. We hear that oppressing is oppressive to those who oppress as well as to those they oppress. Some men cite as evidence of their oppression their much-advertised inability to cry. It is tough, we are told, to be masculine. When the stresses and frustrations of being a man are cited as evidence that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing, the word 'oppression' is being stretched to meaninglessness; it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering, no matter the cause, degree or consequence. Once such usage has been put over on us, then if ever we deny that any person or group is oppressed, we seem to imply that we think they never suffer and have no feelings. We are accused of insensitivity; even of bigotry. For women, such accusation is particularly intimidating, since sensitivity is one of the few virtues that has been assigned to us. If we are found insensitive, we may fear we have no redeeming traits at all and perhaps are not real women. Thus are we silenced before we begin: the name of our situation drained of meaning and our guilt mechanisms tripped.