



# THE LIBERATION RIGHTS DEBATE AT ISSUE

Edited by

**MICHAEL LEAHY AND**

**DAN COHN-SHERBOK**

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

## THE LIBERATION DEBATE

Talking about rights invariably sparks controversy. As soon as the rights of a minority are at the centre of discussion, it becomes very difficult to distinguish polemics from rational argument, and moral from political concerns.

This collection of original commissions challenges the reader to examine and judge the arguments in six areas of contemporary unrest: women's liberation, black liberation, gay liberation, children's liberation, animal liberation and liberation in the Third World.

Designed both for students and a general audience, *The Liberation Debate* encourages readers to become active participants in fraught and topical debates.

**Contributors:** Bernard R.Boxill, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Antony Flew, Jean Hampton, John Harris, Michael Leahy, Michael Levin, Andrew Linzey, Martha Nussbaum, Laura Purdy, Roger Scruton, John Wilson.

# THE LIBERATION DEBATE

Rights at issue

*Edited by*

*Michael Leahy and  
Dan Cohn-Sherbok*



London and New York

First published 1996  
by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an International Thomson Publishing Company

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or  
Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to  
[www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).”

Selection and editorial matter © 1996 Michael Leahy and  
Dan Cohn-Sherbok; individual chapters © 1996 the contributors

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be  
reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any  
electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or  
hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or  
in any information storage or retrieval system, without  
permission  
in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-97669-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-415-11693-7 (Print Edition)  
0-415-11694-5 (pbk)

For Rosey and Lavinia

# CONTENTS

*Notes on contributors* vii

*Preface* xi

## Part I Women's liberation

- |   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| 1 | THE CASE FOR FEMINISM<br><i>Jean Hampton</i>                   | 2        |
| 2 | A RESPONSE TO JEAN HAMPTON'S<br>FEMINISM<br><i>Antony Flew</i> | 25       |
| 3 | HAMPTON'S REPLY<br><i>Bibliography</i>                         | 42<br>45 |

## Part II Black liberation

- |   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| 4 | BLACK LIBERATION—YES!<br><i>Bernard R.Boxill</i>     | 49       |
| 5 | BLACKS DON'T NEED LIBERATING<br><i>Michael Levin</i> | 64       |
| 6 | BOXILL'S REPLY<br><i>Bibliography</i>                | 82<br>84 |

## Part III Gay liberation

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 7 | LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS: PRO<br><i>Martha Nussbaum</i> | 88  |
| 8 | GAY RESERVATIONS<br><i>Roger Scruton</i>              | 108 |

9	NUSSBAUM'S REPLY	125
	<i>Bibliography</i>	129
<b>Part IV Children's liberation</b>		
10	LIBERATING CHILDREN <i>John Harris</i>	133
11	CHILDREN'S LIBERATION: A BLUEPRINT FOR DISASTER <i>Laura Purdy</i>	145
12	HARRIS' REPLY	162
	<i>Bibliography</i>	164
<b>Part V Animal liberation</b>		
13	FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS <i>Andrew Linzey</i>	168
14	BRUTE EQUIVOCATION <i>Michael Leahy</i>	186
15	LINZEY'S REPLY	204
	<i>Bibliography</i>	207
<b>Part VI Liberation theology</b>		
16	A NEW AGENDA FOR SOCIETY <i>Dan Cohn-Sherbok</i>	211
17	SOME PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS <i>John Wilson</i>	226
18	COHN-SHERBOK'S REPLY	241
	<i>Bibliography</i>	243
19	AFTERWORD <i>Michael Leahy</i>	245
	<i>Index</i>	260

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Bernard R.Boxill** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is widely respected in the field of international civil rights. He is the author of *Blacks and Social Justice* (1984). Boxill's articles on issues in moral and political philosophy have appeared in a variety of scholarly journals.

**Dan Cohn-Sherbok** has taught Jewish theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury since 1975. Educated in the USA, he received doctorates from Cambridge University and the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion and has served as a rabbi on four continents. He has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Essex and Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge. He is currently a Visiting Professor at the University of Wales, Lampeter, the University of St Andrews and the University of Middlesex. He is the author and editor of over forty books, including the *Atlas of Jewish History* (1994).

**Antony Flew** is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading (UK). An expert on David Hume, he is a charter member of the Academic Board of the Adam Smith Institute and the Education Group of the Centre for Policy Studies. Notable among his dozen or so books are *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (1961), *An Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ideas and Arguments from Plato to Popper* (1971 and still a bestseller), *Thinking about Social Thinking* (1985), *Equality in Liberty and Justice* (1989) and *Shephard's Warning: Putting Education back on Course* (1994).

**Jean Hampton** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arizona. She has authored *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (1986), *Forgiveness and Mercy* with Jeffrie Murphy

(1988) and the forthcoming *Political Philosophy* (1996). She is presently working on a new book *For the Sake of Reason*, on metaethics and rational choice theory. She has published many articles in moral and political theory, rational choice theory, feminism and the philosophy of law. She has been the recipient of NEH, ACLS and recently, Pew Foundation fellowships.

**John Harris** is Professor of Bioethics and Applied Philosophy, and Research Director of the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy at the University of Manchester (UK). He frequently appears on radio and TV both in the UK and overseas to discuss biomedical ethics and related issues. He has published over sixty papers, is part-editor of three books and author of the following: *Violence and Responsibility* (1980), *The Value of Life* (1990) and *Wonderwoman and Superman: Ethics and Human Biotechnology* (1992). Three more are in preparation; one for Routledge, *Children's Liberation*.

**Michael Leahy** is currently a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent at Canterbury (UK). He has previously taught at Penn State and Cornell, and been a Visiting Professor at Allegheny College and the University of New Hampshire (USA). He is the author of *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (1991, one of the only books to challenge the prevailing animal orthodoxy), and several articles and contributions to books on subjects such as the aesthetics of music, moral practices and the nature of seeing, as well as the psyche of animals.

**Michael Levin** is Professor of Philosophy at City College of the City University of New York. He is author of *Metaphysics and the Mind-Body Problem* (1979) and *Feminism and Freedom* (1987). In addition to issues in social philosophy, Levin's recent writings have dealt with the interpretation of second-order logic and philosophical analysis. His publications have also appeared in more popular periodicals such as *Fortune*, *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*.

**Andrew Linzey** holds the world's first post in theology and animal welfare—the IFAW Senior Research Fellowship at Mansfield College, Oxford. He is also Special Professor of Theology in the University of Nottingham. His first book *Animal Rights* (1976) heralded the modern animal rights movement. Among his books on theology and ethics are other pioneering works on animals:

*Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (1987), *Political Theory and Animal Rights* (1990) and *Animal Theology* (1994). He is co-editor (with Paul Clarke) of the *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* published by Routledge in 1995.

**Martha Nussbaum** is Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, having previously been Professor of Philosophy at Brown University. She is an author of distinction: *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (1978), *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), *Love's Knowledge* (1990), *The Therapy of Desire* (1994) and the forthcoming *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1996). With Amartya Sen, she edited *The Quality of Life* (1993), and with Jonathan Glover, *Women, Culture, and Development* (1995). She was an Advisor for the World Institute for Development Economics Research, Helsinki (1986–93).

**Laura Purdy** is Professor of Philosophy at Wells College, Aurora, in New York State. She received her doctorate from Stanford University; her main research interests are in applied ethics, especially family issues and bioethics. Her book *In Their Best Interest? The Case Against Equal Rights for Children* was a well-received and timely piece of iconoclasm (1992). A co-edited volume, with Helen Holmes, *Feminist Perspectives in Medical Ethics* appeared also in 1992. She is currently preparing a collection of her essays on feminism and bioethics.

**Roger Scruton** is Professor of Philosophy and University Professor at Boston University, where he works for part of the year. He is well-known in Britain as a writer, broadcaster and editor of *The Salisbury Review*. His recent books include *Francesca* (1991), *A Dove Descending and Other Stories* (1991), *Xanthippic Dialogues* (1992) and the magisterial *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (1994). His books and articles have been translated into most European languages. He is currently writing a book on the philosophy of music.

**John Wilson** is currently Senior Research Associate at the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies, and is a Fellow of Mansfield College. Previous posts were Professor of Religion at Trinity College, Toronto, and Lecturer in Philosophy and University Proctor at the University of Sussex (UK). He is a prolific author with more than thirty books, in philosophy,

education and theology, to his credit. They include *Education in Religion and the Emotions* (1972) and *A New Introduction to Moral Education* (1990). His latest work is *Love Between Equals* (1995).

# PREFACE

*Dan Cohn-Sherbok*

Around the world liberation movements of various kinds have exploded onto the contemporary scene. Convinced of the rightness of their cause, liberationists loudly proclaim their messages of freedom and emancipation from oppression. Yet in the face of competing convictions, it is not at all clear who legitimately occupies the moral high ground. The purpose of this volume is thus to untangle some of the key issues surrounding liberation and human rights in a number of central areas of debate.

Throughout this discussion the themes of liberation and rights intertwine—this is so because of their catalytic impact. In the wake of the fragmentation of recent tyrannies, the cry for liberation from poverty, disease and social unrest has fuelled both conflict and violence. More locally—particularly where there is sufficient affluence to allow individuals to dwell on inequalities—these conflicts have evolved into campaigns to ameliorate the financial and social situations of individuals and groups. Liberation has therefore given way to rhetoric about ‘rights’.

Such rights language is invariably deployed by those who seek justice. Some regard these rights campaigns as justified and noble; others view with horror their impact on the major institutions of society: departments of government, the law, schools and universities, employment offices, the prison services, churches and the armed forces. Nothing, it appears, seems to be exempt from the influence of those who seek equality and liberty.

Critics of these rights campaigners are quick to castigate these developments. They argue, for example, that it is in fact the workshy who demand a decent living with holidays in the sun as their right; it is the vicious prison inmates who claim it is their right to rise late and avoid physical exercise and work. Similarly, they argue that teenagers selfishly outrage and devastate their parents

by leaving home to take up alternative lifestyles on the mistaken ground that it is their right to do so. Again, such critics react with hostility to animal rights campaigners who seek to impose their views on society as a whole. On the other side of the coin, defenders of the rights activists insist on the need for the modern world to undergo radical change. Such supporters frequently include social workers, teachers, liberal academics and clergy, poverty action groups and animal protection organizations. All of these bodies are convinced of the need to press their demands on the community.

This symposium, consisting of original contributions especially commissioned for the book, challenges the reader to examine and evaluate the polemics of six central areas of contemporary debate, each with aspects of liberation theory at its heart. All are minefields for the unwary dogmatist with ready conclusions—pro or con—about those who espouse liberation for women, gays, blacks, children, animals and the underprivileged of the First and Third World.

The book itself is divided into six major sections. In each a distinguished academic presents a defence of his or her position; this is followed by a counterargument by an equally experienced expert as well as a brief rejoinder. Attached to each of these sections is a list of further reading for those who wish to investigate the issues raised by this exchange. Finally, a concluding chapter provides an overview of the topics raised as well as a series of personal observations. It is our hope that this volume will give rise to further debate in these areas of liberation as well as in other related spheres. If so, it will have served its purposes, and our modest efforts will be amply rewarded.

## Part I

# WOMEN'S LIBERATION

# 1

## THE CASE FOR FEMINISM

*Jean Hampton*

Emerging as a kind of political movement in the 1960s, modern feminism owes its existence to ideas that were developed much earlier, not only in the suffragette movement but also in the work of writers (both men and women) from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the last thirty years, feminist concerns have spawned not only varieties of political activism but also new ethical and political theories, feminist critiques of science, advances in biological theories, medical research and medical theories, innovative approaches in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, psychology and anthropology, and new ways of doing, and thinking about, literature, drama and art. In this chapter, I hope to show that feminist theorizing has unleashed a host of new and creative ways of thinking about human beings, making it a catalyst for some of the most interesting theorizing in academia today. But more fundamentally, I shall argue that it has encouraged men and women to be committed to ending social systems and modes of thinking that, insofar as they promote oppression and various forms of violence against women, lead to the undermining of moral behaviour and moral regard that is bad for everyone—male and female alike.

### THE REJECTION OF POLITICAL SUBORDINATION

To begin we should define what feminism is, but that is no easy task because there are all sorts of feminists generating (sometimes opposing) theories in all sorts of areas. Before categorizing and evaluating them, it is a good idea to figure out what they all have in common, such that they are forms of *feminism*. I shall argue

that the unifying theme in all forms of feminist theorizing is the rejection of a normative thesis maintaining that women, by virtue of their nature, ought to be subordinated, either politically or socially, to men. In this section I shall concentrate on their rejection of the idea of political subordination; in the next section I shall discuss their rejection of the idea of social subordination.

The thesis of natural political subordination rests on the idea that some human beings' natures are such that they ought to be governed and controlled by other beings whose natures fit them for dominance, rulership and power. To be precise, it is the view that:

A person of type X has authority over a person of type Y if and only if a person of type Y has a nature fitted to take direction from a person of type X, and a person of type X has a nature fitted to give direction to those of type Y, so that we can say Xs are by nature fitted for rulership and dominance over Ys, and Ys are by nature fitted for governance and domination by Xs.

Such a theory has been used to explain and justify the political subordination of women to men, insofar as women have been taken to be 'fitted by nature' to be ruled by men, who are taken to be 'fitted by nature' for such rule.

There are many questions raised by this theory. First, is the biology of the human species as unequal as this theory assumes, such that each of us belongs to either a dominating or dominated type? If this assumption is wrong, the theory collapses. Moreover, what is a 'type' of human being, and why does being male or female make one a member of a type? It has been common throughout history for people to think of males and females as types, and even to believe that to be male or female is to have a certain kind of distinctive 'essence' that pervades behaviour, thought-processes, talents and interests; but such 'essentialism' is inconsistent with the assumptions of contemporary biology, which recognizes only genetically-based traits, and not some kind of spiritual essence pervading or supervening upon human personalities. Hence, this theory must develop an account of human 'types' that is consistent with modern biological theory, and that classifies males and females as two such types. (But are there more types? And if so, what political implications does that

fact have?) Finally, this theory must explain why the male type is the superior or dominating type. For a biologist it is an empirical question whether there are any sex-linked traits that make females or males as groups likely to dominate or be dominated by each other. The advocate of the political subordination thesis must adequately establish that the empirical evidence about sex-linked traits supports his claim.

However, this advocate must also defend the normative claim implicit in his position: i.e. that the superior or dominating type *ought* to rule the inferior type. We must understand the difference between a (mere) *descriptive* account of the origination of power relationships among human beings, which merely tells us what these relations are and where they come from; and a *normative* account of these relationships that establishes their legitimacy and tells us why these relationships 'ought to be'. To be a justification of the rule of some over others, the natural subordination theorist must develop a normative argument to the effect that the subordination of the inferior type by the superior type rule is somehow good or right.

There are two ways of developing such an account. The first way involves arguing that nature itself provides the entitlement. On this view, there is no more reason to object to the dominance of superior human beings over their inferiors than there is to object to the dominance of a queen bee over her worker bees, because there is a 'principle of governance' provided by nature itself. However, stating this principle of governance with respect to human beings is tricky, for it cannot be maintained that inferior humans are *unable* to dominate their betters, insofar as rebellion of people taken to be 'inferiors' against those taken to be their 'betters' happens all the time. Since this view cannot deny the reality of such events, it has to regard them as aberrant or abhorred by nature, given natural features predisposing the inferior group to behave in ways that are ultimately incompatible with dominion. So on this view, just as there are physical laws of nature, there are political laws of nature that invariably determine political hierarchies in human communities.

However, the idea that the world contains normative rules is antithetical to the view of reality taken by modern science. In particular, biologists today do not think that, within any species, nature provides its members with a 'right' way to behave, and if they claim that a particular gender of a species tends to be

dominant, they do not purport to establish that such dominance is morally justifiable by virtue of some fundamental natural order.

Consistent with a more scientific view of nature, the natural subordination theorist can try a second way to justify the subordination of a class of inferiors by claiming that the community of which this person is a part would, on the whole, be *better off* if his or her actions were subject to the control of the superior. This argument derives the justification for the superior type's rule from the good consequences that are taken to follow from such rule; hence I will call it a 'consequentialist' argument for natural political subordination.

Down through the ages, the supposedly bad consequences that would follow from allowing women to rule have often been cited as a reason for their political subordination. For example John Knox, in his (remarkably titled) 'The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women' (1558) argues that 'nature' (as ordained by God) has disabled women from having ruling authority by depriving them of virtues that are essential to good rule: 'Nature, I say, doth paynt them further to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble, and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment' (Knox, 1966, p. 374).

Similar sentiments were expressed in the eighteenth century by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1979, esp. pp. 357–63).

Yet many men suffer from the same sorts of vices that Knox accuses women of having, and we do not take such vices automatically to warrant their political subordination to more virtuous people. A more sophisticated justification of why women require ruling is made by Aristotle in *The Politics* (1981). Aristotle recognizes two forms of natural subordination: that of the (natural) master over the (natural) slave, and that of men over women, and he justifies both forms by claiming that slaves and women are unable to reason well, and so must be subordinated to the control of those (men) who can reason well, both for their own good and the good of the community. Unlike natural slaves, whose reasoning Aristotle says is quite radically deficient, women (who do not already qualify as natural slaves) have just as much rationality as (non-slavish) men. The problem is that their rationality is not 'effective' (1981, 1259a12, p. 95). Aristotle says little about what he means by this word, but scholars have

generally interpreted him to mean that women's reasoning is often 'overruled' by passions or emotions. Assuming that only reason and not passion can direct people toward the good, Aristotle concludes that by virtue of being unable to rely consistently on their reason, women need (and are supposed to welcome) rule by those whose reason continually dominates.

In a sense, Aristotle's argument portrays women as 'permanent children'. It has been relatively uncontroversial in all times and places that parents have authority over children insofar as the latter are deficient in ruling themselves through reason, because they lack the experience necessary to draw rational inferences, or because they lack the intellectual development necessary to perform various sorts of reasoning or because they are easily swayed by emotions or passions. Aristotle is saying that female children never actually rid themselves of these immaturities, necessitating their subordination to free male adults who do achieve rational maturation.

Angry rejection of such ideas is surely one common characteristic of all feminists. To be told that one is a member of a group that is seriously deficient and, in virtue of that deficiency, in need of being governed by a kind of caretaker from a superior group, is deeply insulting, prompting anger against those who have delivered the insult. But aside from the fact that this is a view that feminists today hate, why is it wrong?

Such a theory can only succeed if its thesis of gender-based inequality in the capacity to reason effectively is true; but the claims of natural 'subordination theorists for women's inferiority are generally offered without a shred of empirical support: Aristotle, Knox and Rousseau give none. Moreover, natural subordination theorists frequently undermine their own empirical claims by inadvertently assigning to women tasks that require the capacity that these theorists have already claimed is deficient in them. For example, Aristotle has to rely upon women to rear the free male children in Athens so as to be capable of assuming a leadership role in the city, but this task requires (as any parent knows) enormous reasoning ability, maturity and rational effectiveness to be successfully carried out. This kind of inconsistency is remarkably common in the history of thought, as some feminists have documented. For example, natural subordination theorists (such as Rousseau) have often argued that women's emotionalism makes it virtually impossible to educate them to reason well; and

throughout history women's education has lagged far behind men's. As a justification for keeping women out of secondary schools and colleges, nineteenth-century biologists and physicians claimed that women's ovaries and uteruses required much energy and rest to function properly—so their reproductive tasks precluded them from engaging in any hard intellectual labour. Yet these biologists and physicians failed to 'notice' that there were poor women doing backbreaking work in homes and factories, even while producing many children (see Hubbard, 1989, pp. 123ff.). Theorists who denigrate capacities in (what they call) 'inferiors' in order to justify their subordination to 'superiors' but who end up having to assume that the inferiors have these capacities after all in order for them to be of use to the superiors, are putting forward arguments designed (with, I suspect, a certain amount of bad faith) to keep the ruling group in power.

So what are the *facts* about our relative equality with respect to the one feature that is relevant to political subordination: i.e. the capacity for rational self-direction? Both observation and the experience of modern democracies show that despite all sorts of differences among human beings (of both genders) in physical abilities, mental abilities, temperament and so forth, from skiing to doing mathematics, from musical ability to carpentry, there is no group of human beings, outside of those who are small children, or severely mentally impaired, or seriously mentally ill, who are so deficient in reasoning skills, life experiences or the ability to control passions that they cannot direct their own lives and must be subject to the direction of others. So we find women and men of all races, classes and religions choosing how to lead their own lives and taking responsibility for doing so, voting successfully in democratic elections, raising children, earning money, etc. The failure of some to lead lives that others would regard as 'successful' (e.g. because they break laws, or become impoverished or experience misery) is not a failure distinctive to any particular group of human beings (certainly not a failure distinctive of women), and, if it is not taken to arise from social injustice or bad luck, is usually construed as arising not from inferiority with respect to the *capacity* for rational self-direction, but from the failure of that person to choose to live the right kind of life—a choice for which we hold him or her morally responsible (in a way that we would not, and should not, do of a genuinely mentally incompetent person).

So what unifies all feminists, no matter their differences in theoretical commitments, is the idea that there are no gender-based differences in the capacity for rational self-direction, so that there is no basis for the idea that women should be politically subordinated to men.

### THE REJECTION OF SOCIAL SUBORDINATION

Because of widespread rejection of the political subordination thesis, women enjoy political equality with men in many western and non-western societies: they vote, serve in political offices and administrative positions, serve on court benches, etc. Yet despite that political equality, women are still, in many respects, socially unequal in these societies. Consider, for example, the extent to which women still suffer from violence directed at them both outside and inside the home; indeed, statistics grimly point to the fact that in the United States, violence of men against women, in the form of rape, battery and assault, is actually increasing, not decreasing.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, if one considers the way in which women's wages continue to lag behind those of men, in part because they are underrepresented in jobs that are high-paying and powerful, and combines this with statistics showing that in western societies women rather than men still assume the majority of childcare and housework, are by far the most likely to care for elderly relatives and are far more likely than men to give up full employment (dropping back to part-time work or giving up employment entirely) in order to care for small children,<sup>2</sup> then it becomes clear that even in those western societies strongly influenced by feminist ideals men and women still play roles (and experience problems associated with those roles) within the family and within society that are not as far from traditional gendered roles (and traditional problems with those roles) as some feminists might have hoped.

There are conflicting explanations of why change in these societies has not been more radical. One explanation, which is a kind of successor to Aristotelian-style natural political subordination theory, rejects the inevitability or legitimacy of *political* subordination of women to men, but instead accepts the inevitability or legitimacy of social structures in which men, rather than women, are the leaders or the ones in control. Hence I call this the social subordination thesis. On this view, the nature of

men and women is biologically fixed to a much greater degree than many feminists like to admit. Males, on this view, naturally tend to engage in certain forms of behaviour (sometimes violent) and certain kinds of roles; in particular, leadership roles. Females, on this view, naturally tend to engage in other forms of behaviour (passivity, emotionalism, nurturing attitudes toward children), leading to victimization in certain situations and the inability to combat male violence, and a willingness to take on certain caring roles; e.g. the role of assuming primary care for children within the family. According to those who believe in these natural differences between males and females (e.g., Levin, 1987; Goldberg, 1973) the persistence of gendered social roles and male control in many areas of social life, despite feminist pressure to equalize the legal rights of males and females, reflects our biological nature. This explanation is quite old; but it has taken on new life with the popularity of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, some of whose proponents purport to show, consistent with our best biological theories, the way in which behaviour of men and women expresses structures (e.g., in the brain, endocrine system, etc.) that have been evolutionarily successful, and which result in the social dominance of men over women.

Note, before we proceed, that the fact that anti-feminists now generally endorse the social rather than the political form of the subordination thesis represents a significant achievement of modern feminism: it is no longer plausible to people that women's natures are such that they should be politically dominated by men, and thus no longer plausible that they should be excluded from voting, or holding political office, because they are unable to govern themselves or others.

So the natural subordination theory is dead as a thesis of political subordination in western societies, but it survives as a thesis of social subordination. Is it any more successful in this form?

There are two ways feminists have attacked it. The first way, advocated by radical feminists, involves (perhaps surprisingly) accepting much of the factual basis that the social subordination theorists put forward for their views, but drawing completely different, pro-female normative conclusions on the basis of these purported facts. Recall my discussion above, distinguishing the descriptive and normative components of the political subordination thesis: the same two components exist in the social subordination thesis, and yet its anti-feminist proponents tend to

believe naively that they can ‘read off’ from ‘nature’ the way human beings ‘ought’ to behave. The thesis of radical feminism ought to be a cure for that naivety, because while radical feminists are often happy to accept the idea that there are significant biological differences between men and women, and that men, in particular, are by nature more aggressive or violent or prone to dominate, they give it an anti-male normative spin by arguing that in virtue of their aggressive behaviour men ought to be spurned by women (both socially and sexually) and strictly controlled for the benefit of the community (in the same way that human beings control or isolate violent stallions or aggressive male Rotweilers so that they don’t hurt anybody). If men, on this view, will not submit to being ‘medicated into a humane state’, their maleness, which leads to violence and aggression, will have to be strictly managed or even eliminated, so that it no longer constitutes a menace to the society.<sup>3</sup> This is, in a way, an Aristotelian-style subordination argument for the subordination of men to women!

While I am intrigued by the way radical feminists have turned the normative tables on their anti-feminist opponents (who have yet to reply to these feminists, reflecting, I suspect, the failure of social subordination theorists to recognize or defend the normative claims in their own arguments), I have myself endorsed a second way of attacking social subordination theorists, which I will call social equality feminism. While recognizing the undeniable fact that there *are* differences between males and females (most obviously in their reproductive roles), this view claims that these differences do not inevitably result in women’s social subordination to men, so that the explanation of this subordination, when it exists, must be cultural or political rather than biological. Such theorists therefore advocate reshaping our cultural and political practices and institutions so as to realize not only political but also social equality for women. The influence of this view on western societies cannot be underestimated: it has resulted in changes in the operation of the family, in childcare arrangements and particularly in employment practices. Up until recently, for example, there were almost no women in medicine, law, academia, veterinary science or construction work, because, it was said, being female meant one couldn’t do these things. (Prior to the creation of self-serve gasoline stations, I was told by a man, in complete seriousness, that women could not pump fuel into a car.) The fact that women do all these things now makes such

claims appear, in hindsight, ridiculous (although, as I noted before, ridiculous claims are often made by those who are less interested in the truth than in preserving their power), and supports the social equality feminists' claim that the skills and talents of males and females are relatively equal.

Proponents of social equality feminism also attack the science that undergirds the anti-feminist position. The biologist Ruth Hubbard, for example, ridicules sociobiological studies of non-human species that are often used by those who argue that women are by nature socially subordinate to men. She cites, among other things, a study of algae by Wolfgang Wickler, an ethologist at the University of Munich, who writes:

Even among very simple organisms such as algae, which have threadlike rows of cells one behind the other, one can observe that during copulation the cells of one thread act as males with regard to the cells of the second thread, but as females with regard to the third thread. The mark of male behavior is that the cell actively crawls or swims over to the other; the female cell remains passive.<sup>4</sup>

(Hubbard, 1983, p. 57)

Says Hubbard sarcastically:

The circle is simple to construct: one starts with the Victorian stereotype of the active male and the passive female, then looks at animals, algae, bacteria, people, and calls all passive behavior feminine, active or goal-oriented behavior masculine. And it works! The Victorian stereotype is biologically determined: even algae behave this way.

(Hubbard, 1983, p. 57)

However, the practice of assuming conclusions in order to prove them is not sound science! Hubbard calls on feminists to persist in exposing the mythologies inherent in science. In my view, some of the most interesting work in the sciences today is generated by women attempting to 'see' the world undistorted by the biases and stereotypes that serve the interests of those who are in power (e.g., see Hardy, 1981).

Apart from discrediting the biology of the social subordination theorists, social equality feminists tend to generate theories

explaining the persistence of social roles and practices favouring men and oppressing women by blaming certain cultural and social traditions for creating and perpetuating them. The reasons behind the social construction of these practices cry out for analysis and have been the subject of much feminist debate. There are, for example, psychoanalytic explanations of the development of these practices, developed by Firestone, Chodorow and Dinnerstein (discussed by Tong, 1989, ch. 5). Explanations that explore the influence of both psychoanalytic and philosophical modes of thought have been proposed by post-modernist feminists such as Luce Irigaray (1985), who attempt to 'deconstruct' popular conceptions of the world that they take to animate patriarchal views. And there have even been game-theoretic explanations: for example, the legal theorist Carol Rose (1992) has argued that if many women happen to be, by nature, just slightly more disposed to co-operate with their fellows than men, this seemingly desirable trait can nonetheless put them at a disadvantage in certain kinds of game-theoretic situations, resulting in social practices that institutionalize this disadvantage.

Such theorizing has, in my view, greatly enriched our thinking about human interactions. And yet Ruth Hubbard's caution that it is hard to know 'the facts' makes me question whether such theories are right to assume the database they seek to explain. Are social equality feminists who reject the social subordination theorists' view of female and male biology still influenced by a male-biased perception of the world to the extent that they accept the reality of considerable female powerlessness? Might not the reality of social relations be considerably more complicated and more equal than traditional theories allow, so that explanations of women's subordination are misguided in what they seek to explain? We should, I think, heed Hubbard's worry about the difficulties of 'seeing' the biological and social world as it 'really' is: perhaps the best contribution feminist theory has made to the study of human beings is to point out how little we actually *know* about who we (male and female) human beings are, and how much our scientific theories in human biology, psychology and social relations are still subject to mythologies as profound as those which influenced Aristotle or Knox.

## FEMINIST MORAL THEORY

Moral theory has been particularly influenced by feminist theorizing. One of the most influential books in this area is Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982). On the basis of interviews with people of a variety of ages and backgrounds that address real or hypothetical moral problems, Gilligan argues that in our society there are currently two different 'moral voices', which she calls the 'ethic of justice' and the 'ethic of care', and she finds some evidence, which she takes her subsequent work to have only partially confirmed (see Gilligan, Ward, McLean and Bandige, 1988), associating the first with men and the second with women. Gilligan originally initiated these interviews in order to test Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which Gilligan believed did not adequately describe the moral development of many females. Indeed, Kohlberg's analysis suggested that the 'highest' stage of moral development, involving abstract reasoning and a commitment to abstract principle, was reached more often by men than by women; yet Gilligan argues that this stage is merely one way of morally responding to the world, and that many women have an equally good and equally 'high' perspective, that encourages care, particularized concern and active involvement. Some feminists go even further, and regard the male response as lower, insofar as it represents morality as mere 'traffic rules for self-asserters' (Baier, 1985, p. 62), reflecting the mistaken assumption that each of us is self-sufficient, able and desirous of 'going it alone'. These feminists commend as genuinely mature a perspective on morality that emphasizes care and 'relational' rather than 'atomistic' thinking, more responsive to the value of community than to the value of disconnected autonomy.

Those who are attracted to the idea that women tend to manifest a different moral voice accept the idea that there are differences between males and females (although they tend not to speculate on the source of their differences in moral perspective); yet such feminists vigorously deny that these differences justify (or even explain) the social or political subordination of women. After all, why should justice-thinkers control care-thinkers, especially when the society needs and relies upon the latter in order to function? Why shouldn't the society be prepared to honour and support women's development, welcome its integrity, welcome its entry into fields in which women have traditionally been excluded?

On this view, no lessons of political or social domination follow from any differences in reasoning and development—of either a moral or a non-moral sort—because those differences aren't markers for women's social or political inferiority (any more than differences in how people learn to read, or learn physical skills, are markers for the inferiority of some to others).

Other feminists, myself included, have been suspicious of Gilligan's claims of difference. These critics have challenged Gilligan's evidence for the two moral voices, offering alternative interpretations of her data. For example, I have interpreted many of Gilligan's interviews as uncovering the extent to which men and women, boys and girls, in our society manifest either of two forms of moral immaturity (see Hampton, 1993). One form, commonly but not exclusively experienced by men, involves the failure to appreciate the extent to which we have positive duties to other people; another form, commonly but not exclusively experienced by women, involves the failure to appreciate the extent to which we have positive duties to *ourselves*. Indeed, in a society that encourages males to believe they are dominant and females to believe they are subordinate, wouldn't you expect to see the immaturities of each group take these forms? Under pressure to regard themselves as 'higher', men may have trouble respecting others, where this manifests itself not only in a failure to care, but also in acts of crime, violence, domestic abuse and so forth. Under pressure to regard themselves as 'lower', women may well have trouble respecting themselves, and society's interest in using them may result in their being socialized to care unduly for others. Whatever differences in moral development may exist between men and women may therefore be more a function of the extent to which they have been affected by a sexist social and political system, and not by anything 'natural'.

Whether or not this is true is a subject for psychological research. But if we are to think philosophically rather than psychologically about Gilligan's two voices, we can, I believe, learn that each of Gilligan's voices has something right to say about morality: the voice of justice correctly captures the fact that each of us has needs, aspirations and interests that genuinely matter, and that self-abnegation is both morally wrong and personally destructive. The voice of care correctly captures the fact that each of us exists not as a disconnected soul, but within relationships that are necessary to both our survival and our flourishing. If women's

tendency to give care has been exaggerated and abused by a sexist society, nonetheless it is surely right that caring is fundamental to the moral life.

In this regard, many feminists have become interested in examining mothering, a highly important and complex example of a caring practice. While some feminists (e.g., see Dworkin, 1983) have worried about the extent to which women's role in reproduction and parenting has contributed to their oppression, others have commended it and sought to understand it better. For example, Sara Ruddick has explored the way in which mothering involves both a kind of complicated reasoning and a kind of faith, of the sort exemplified in the story of a mother and her family who waited in a shelter in Texas while a tornado destroyed their home: as they waited, the mother sat and worked on a quilt, recalling later, 'I made my quilt to keep my family warm. I made it beautiful so my heart would not break' (Ruddick, 1986, p. 344). This mother's care for her family that day came from enormous strength and self-confidence, as she looked disaster in the eye, and insisted that her family believe, despite the destruction, that something good would nonetheless prevail. The service of such a mother can be extraordinarily important to those who receive it, and an understanding of the nature of that service is surely relevant to an understanding of what a fully mature moral life involves.

In my view the entry of women into moral philosophy—an entry that is itself the product of both social and political activism on the part of feminists in this century—has broadened and changed the way in which moral theorizing is done, both because of the way women have taken seriously the importance of positive duties to the moral life, and because (perhaps surprisingly) some of us have been highly sensitive to the moral importance of self-regard, in the face of living in a society that has attempted to deny many of us this regard.

## POLITICAL FORMS OF FEMINISM

Feminist political theorizing comes in many forms, depending upon the overarching political theory in which a feminist chooses to embed her feminist ideas. For example, there are liberal feminists of both the left and right, starting as early as the nineteenth century, with J.S. Mill and Harriet Taylor and exemplified in contemporary