Anarchism, Feminism and the Individual

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> A serious anarchism must also be feminist, otherwise it is a question of patriarchal half-anarchism, and not real anarchism.
> **Anarchist Federation of Norway**

As social anarchists we inherit a body of theory (based on experience) that appears to grow more powerful as time passes. For us an analysis of power relations that locates oppression in hierarchy and domination gives us insights into many contemporary social movements — insights that many in these movements may miss themselves. However, while we have the bare bones of an overarching social theory, we are obliged to learn from the new social movements in order to flesh out that theory. Thus we actively listen and learn from people of color about Eurocentrism and other forms of racism, from gay and lesbian activists about heterosexism and homophobia, from animal advocates about speciesism, etc.

In this article we will look specifically at the feminist movement, both to see what an explicitly anarchist analysis can contribute to it, and also to see what we can learn about our own movement from feminism. Since male participation in feminism is somewhat controversial, I begin with a section addressing my own involvement with this issue. And I conclude with some speculations concerning ecology as a future grounding for both anarchism and feminism.

It would be an understatement to say that the anarchist movement — both historical and contemporary — is androcentric or male centered. A theoretical commitment to an abstract and generalized "equality" leaves much unsaid — specially when this "equality" does not extend into the domestic realm. Many anarchist analyses continue to ignore the reality of male domination, directing their critiques to commodity relations, capital and the state, or civilization. Whatever merits these critiques have, gender equality is either given a lower priority or supposedly follows naturally once we have developed the "right" way to think. The fact that unlearning sexism may require some effort is rarely addressed.

Men in Feminism

> Men must struggle to create for themselves a kind of experience of their own gender location which male supremacy has forbidden.
> **Sandra Harding (p.286)**

As a male, I had postponed my interest in feminism until after I had absorbed the politics of the ecological left. I had believed that the struggle for human freedom could be achieved almost entirely within male-derived arenas of thought (albeit with a sensitivity toward women's issues). Until then I had only passively supported the goals of women's autonomy. It wasn't until after I had absorbed the point (from my reading) that all men benefited from sexism — not just the ones who abuse, rape, harass or discriminate — that I was able to look deeper into my own (white) male

privilege. In family life, in schooling, in the job market, I almost always had the advantage over my female (and non-white) peers. My interest in feminism grew, and by reading feminist literature and novels I began to realize that my own future utopian visions were becoming increasingly women-affirmative and women-centered. While my anti-capitalist and antistatist orientations remained as strong as ever, I noticed a shift in my values toward a higher regard for caring, nurturing and intimacy. I had started to develop a feminist sensibility and found it easier to recognize in men patriarchal behavior that before had been invisible to me. I was finally understanding how the struggles of feminist women were benefiting me. While Emma Goldman pointed out that only women can free themselves from their "internal" oppression, men can play important roles by helping dismantle the "externalities" of patriarchy. By unlearning one's own sexism and then challenging the sexism of other men, we can help create a climate that fosters the full participation of everyone in all areas of life. While a spectrum of opinion exists in the feminist community regarding the participation of men, most women welcome support. Sandra Harding in her recent book insists that men can be feminists to allow for the possibility that white women can be antiracist . For her, men should adopt "traitorous identities" and develop a "feminist standpoint" (Harding, p.288). Nevertheless, men's involvement in feminism (my own included) demands caution. "Men love appropriating, directing, judging and managing everything they can get their hands on," writes Harding (p.280). Thus, only if we are aware of the dangers of coopting feminism into our own male agendas, only if we are willing to listen to women's voices, can we contribute to the feminist movement. After all, the point is to empower women. However, with all this said, many of the obstacles that keep men sexist are complex, ingrained, and relatively unexplored. We can make a commitment to feminist logic, gender equality, etc., but still not see how our behavior may be intimidating and arrogant. Even when we address the institutional factors (family, school, media, etc.), the subtle (and not so subtle) effects of gender socialization remain. We still know comparatively little about childhood development and the construction of masculinities and femininities. But, while totally eliminating patriarchal behavior will take time, in the final analysis feminism is about human liberation. We will all benefit by a society that places a strong premium on caring and cooperation without resorting to threats of aggression or intimidation.

Feminism and the Liberal/Radical Split

> ..the achievement of full freedom for women (all women, not a privileged few) presupposes such profound economic, social and political changes that, were such a historical development to take place, the present status quo could not and would not survive.
> **Hester Eisenstein (p. xvii)**

Minimally, feminism is a commitment to gender equality, a recognition that male domination exists and is wrong. It has its roots in the liberal tradition of the autonomous and freely choosing self. This tradition remains strong today and is well represented by liberal feminists. These feminists believe equality can be achieved by modifying the present system through promoting greater equality of opportunity (increased educational and workplace access, etc.). Nevertheless, the sixties and seventies saw the emergence of new feminist radicalism of many varieties — radical, socialist, lesbian, black, anarchist, etc. Feminist radicals, in contrast to feminist liberals, believe that the entire system — patriarchal liberalism — is a flawed construct, designed by and for men in their own interest. Thus, for these feminists, feminism is nothing less than revolutionary. Unfortunately, since the media has only given access to mainstream or liberal feminism, the revolutionary potential of feminism has been obscured and degraded. Meanwhile, the significance of liberal feminism has been debated, with no consensus in the feminist community as to its meaning. Socialist feminist Zillah Eisenstein believes that the contradictions in liberal feminism — can women really be equals in the patriarchal liberal state? — will eventually work themselves out and point the way to a radically new society. In her words, "the contradiction between liberalism (as patriarchal and individualist in structure and ideology) and feminism (as sexual egalitarian and collectivist) lays the basis for feminism's movement beyond liberalism" (Zillah Eisenstein, p.3). Others are less certain. bell hooks writes that the "process by which this radicalism will surface is unclear. ...The positive impact of liberal reforms on women's lives should not lead to the assumption that they eradicate systems of domination" (hooks, p.l9). To hooks, "revolutionary impulses must freely inform our theory and practice if feminist movement to end existing oppression is to progress, if we are to transform our present reality" (hooks, p.l63). In fact the roots of feminist radicalism extend back to (at least) the nineteenth century, when an earlier version of the liberal/radical split took place. Margaret Marsh in a recent study chronicles a previous anarchist feminist movement (Marsh). Foreshadowing the second wave radical feminists, with their conviction that "the personal is political", these early anarchist feminists insisted that:

> female subordination was rooted in an obsolete system of sexual and familial relationships. Attacking marriage often urging sexual varietism insisting on both economical and psychological independence and sometimes denying maternal responsibility, they argued that personal autonomy was an essential component of sexual equality and that political and legal rights would not of themselves engender such equality.
> (Marsh, p.5)

Meanwhile, liberal feminists (typified by Elizabeth Cady Stanton) sought equality with men by pushing for ballot access. Only with the emergence of the anarchist feminists and early radical feminists did women come to challenge the public/domestic

dichotomy. In the end, the suffragists won the day (and the vote), and the private sphere as a feminist issue was forgotten. And while Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger would continue to fight for birth control, sexuality became the realm of Freud and Reich. As a political issue, sexuality had to await the likes of Kate Millett or Shulamith Firestone in our own era. Anarchist feminist theory has been neglected into our own time (and not least by male anarchists). Consequently, both anarchism and feminism have suffered. For example, few of the emerging socialist or radical feminists developed critiques of the nation-state itself. Predictably, before long, arguments in favor of the "feminist State" began to surface (MacKinnon). And while anarchist direct action tactics have long been an important part of the feminist movement, the number of explicitly anarchist feminist women remains small in comparison to the number of socialist, radical and liberal feminist women. A slightly different perspective on the contemporary liberal/radical split is offered by Angela Miles. Recognizing that traditional divisions and frameworks — liberal, socialist, anarchist, black, etc. — mirror a man-made, polarizing politics, she instead favors a women centered approach she terms "integrative feminism." This would seek to unite "revolutionary/evolutionary" feminists to challenge "worldwide systems of domination" (Miles, p.l4). "There are," she insists, "large numbers of ...feminists who, despite the wide diversity of their concerns and analyses, share a feminism that goes beyond pressure to represent an embryonic new politics of general relevance and universal significance" (Miles, p.20). Often, Miles asserts, these feminists share more in common with each other than with others who share their specific label. However, as useful as integrative feminism is in uniting feminists, I think inevitably its own contradictions will arise. For instance, while opposing "all" forms of domination, it fails to clarify its relation with the state. My point here is not to dogmatically reject the state (or divide feminists), but rather to seek out the implications for practice. Would all integrative feminists build community from the grassroots up or would some petition for statist institutions, not recognizing the inherently domineering nature of the state?

Anarchism and the Public/Private Split

> All right, dear comrade, when I have reached your age, the sex question may no longer be of importance to me. But it is now, and it is a tremendous factor for thousands, millions even, of young people.
> **Emma Goldman, arguing with Peter Kropotkin (Goldman, p.253)**

While women in the nineteenth century grappled with the liberal/radical split, libertarians were debating "the woman question." In England, early anarchist theorist William Godwin formed an alliance with pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Meanwhile in France, utopian Charles Fourier would write "social progress and changes

of historical period take place in proportion to the advance of women towards liberty, and social decline occurs as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women" (Beecher, p.1). Similarly, early socialist Robert Owen, in detailing his utopian communities, could write "Both sexes shall have equal education, rights, privileges, and personal liberty" (Harsin, p.75). Unfortunately, practice indicated that good intentions were not enough, given the often hostile environment the Utopians worked in. In her study of the Owenite communities, Jill Harsin would conclude that: "the carryover of traditional domesticity into communal society served to incorporate the inequalities of the old world into the new" (Harsin, p.82). This division continues to plague contemporary social movements. While many men acknowledge that women ought to be full partners in public life, they may not acknowledge that this requires an equal involvement of men in domestic life. Meanwhile, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (first to adopt the "anarchist" label) would retreat further from the positions of the Utopians by considering the patriarchal family as the fundamental social unit (Marsh). And while Bakunin sought full participation of women in public life, he did not differ from Marx or Engels in this respect. Both the state socialist and anarcho-syndicalist societies that were to materialize in the 20th century, failed to challenge the public/private dichotomy that often ended up doubling women's workload. As Martha Ackelsberg would write in a study of the Spanish Revolution: "the mainstream of the Spanish anarchist movement refused to acknowledge either the specificity of women's oppression or the legitimacy of separate struggle to overcome it" (Ackelsberg, p.118). As an outgrowth of classical liberal politics — with its emphasis on individual liberty — anarchism inherited from liberalism a consistent male bias. Not only were women minimally involved in the creation of both liberalism and anarchism, but also anarchism carried over from liberalism a series of hierarchical dualisms, sometimes muted, sometimes not. Thus, for instance, the public/private and the reason/emotion oppositions became part of both individualist anarchism, with its capitalist orientation, and of community-based social anarchism. Nevertheless, the concept of the individual that was emerging in social anarchism remained markedly different from the liberal one. While social anarchism sought to retain and strengthen community bonds, liberalism dovetailed nicely with the emerging capitalism. The social anarchist focus on community was one that sought to promote mutual aid, a focus which overlapped with the emerging socialist concepts of class consciousness, solidarity and internationalism. The liberal picture of competing, individual atoms working in their own self interest was the very antithesis of left-wing anarchism. But while social anarchists and socialists recognized that the working class would never gain substantive equality in a liberal political system, feminists came to realize that women would never gain gender equality in a patriarchal system that shut women out of public life. Describing the seeming contradiction between "free and equal individuals" and women enslaved to domestic life, Anne Phillips writes: "Denied entry by the front door, patriarchy crept in at the back. Instead of rejecting all forms of natural authority early liberals restricted themselves to saying that government and the family were separate realms (Phillips, p.14). Thus the public/domestic dichotomy, which institutionalized

male control over community decision-making, made its way first into liberal and then into anarchist politics.

Anarchism, Feminism and Ecology: Beyond Dualisms

> [In such a future society] natural friendships will soon produce what a thousand years of artificial attempt could not create, an organization, spontaneous, free, solid with the solidity of personal affection.
> **Voltairine de Cleyre**

We have seen that anarchism deepened the liberal critique of authority; while feminism broadened the definition of the individual. However, the relation between anarchism and feminism remains unresolved, sometimes paradoxical. Thus for L. Susan Brown, "anarchism transcends and contains feminism in its critique of power" (Brown, p.209). Meanwhile, for the English Zero Collective, "feminism transcends anarchism because feminism shows authority, hierarchy and leadership for what they really are, structures of male power" (Zero Collective, p.7). Anarchism and feminism both speak to the whole of society, but neither can fully claim hegemonic dominance over the other. Anarchist feminist theory itself remains relatively undeveloped, despite a renewed interest during the seventies, and the eloquent writings of Carol Ehrlich, Peggy Kornegger and others. Still, a synthesis of these two very different political philosophies, if even possible or desirable, remains to be completed. For the present, each offers a useful framework to view the other, while adding substance and insights. However, rather than try to unite anarchism and feminism, an alternative approach suggests itself. Social anarchism and feminist radicalism both represent attempts to move beyond their individualist roots in classical liberalism, where the individual is pitted against the community. We can overcome this dualistic thinking by looking to the emerging field of ecology, where the differentiated individual becomes part of community in a unity-in-diversity (Bookchin). In a recent essay, Thomas S. Martin proposes that a "weaving" together of feminism, anarchism and ecology is beginning to take place (Martin). Feminism is the warp, anarchism is the weft, and ecology is the fiber. What unites these movements into a convergence, he proposes, is an analysis of domination. While a critique of domination is certainly a crucial point of contact between anarchism, feminism and ecology, domination itself remains only one aspect of human behavior. It is to the credit of feminism that it has revealed the extent to which patriarchal thought has devalued women's lives. Thus not only have thought and feeling, public and private, been divorced, but the behaviors crucial to the maintenance of the species have been undervalued. The task of nurturing not only the young, but the infirm, the elderly and often men themselves has fallen on women. The values of caring and empathy that make mutual aid possible have been carefully tended by our extended stay as

children in women's culture. Anarchism is really a theory about power and authority, and power and authority tend to act in their own self-interest. As a theory, anarchism falls short in explaining human behaviors that foster interdependence or self sacrifice. On the other hand, the women's movement, which has brought into sharper focus the relation betwen autonomy and interdependence, has not spoken uniformly in its analysis of power. Ecology may be able to offer us a broader conceptual framework that can encompass the insights of each. In an ecological model (and here I really mean a *social* ecological one), neither anarchism nor feminism would be forced to fit into the framework of the other. Instead, each could develop independently, or rather, interdependently. Ecological thinking underlies the recent work of feminist philosopher Lorraine Code. While critical of ecofeminism with its problematic woman/nature identification and its lurking "essential" eternal femaleness, Code recognizes the value of an ecological model as a vehicle for feminism:

> A community-oriented, ecologically responsible society would make participation and mutual concern central values and would restructure debates among community members as conversations, not confrontation. Its aim would be to promote mutual support and a nonoppressive ambiance.
> (Code, p.278)

Further, ecology may provide a means for feminism to "create spaces for developing responsible perspectives that make explicit the interconnections among forms and systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression, across their different manifestations" (Code, p.271). Ecological thinking itself owes much to the libertarian tradition. From 19th century geographer Peter Kropotkin to modern-day social ecologist Murray Bookchin, anarchist visions of face-to-face democratic communities that do not seek to dominate nature offer alternatives to the industrial capitalist threat to the integrity of the biosphere. What may have been missed is that these ecological visions can incorporate a mediated, feminist public/private negotiation. Thus they may open the way for a productive dialogue between women and men, between feminism and anarchism. A new political form may yet emerge: one that moves beyond liberal patriarchalism with its emphasis on isolated individualism to one where the egalitarian individual, the community and the Earth flourish together in relative harmony.

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