
EXPLORATIONS

Antigone's Daughters

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This essay advances a note of caution. It argues that feminists should approach the modern bureaucratic state from a standpoint of skepticism that keeps alive a critical distance between feminism and statism, between female self-identity and a social identity tied to the public-political world revolving around the structures, institutions, values, and ends of the state. The basis for my caution and skepticism is a sober recognition that any political order in our time which culminates in a state is an edifice that monopolizes and centralizes power and eliminates older, less universal forms of authority; that structures its activities and implements its policies through unaccountable hierarchies; that erodes local and particular patterns of ethnic, religious, and regional identities; that standardizes culture, ideas, and ideals; that links portions of the population to it through a variety of dependency relationships; that may find it necessary or convenient to override civil liberties and standards of decency for *raison d'état* or executive privilege; and that, from time to time, commits its people to wars they have had neither the opportunity to debate fully nor the right to challenge openly.

For feminists to discover in the state the new "Mr. Right," and to wed themselves thereby, for better or for worse, to a public identity inseparable from the exigencies of state power and policy would be a mistake. This is a serious charge. I shall defend and develop my argument by considering the ways in which certain important feminist thinkers, at times somewhat casually and carelessly, have presumed the superiority of a particular sort of public identity over a private one. I shall trace out the logic of these arguments, indicating what a fully public identity for women would require, including the final suppression of traditional female social worlds. Finally, I shall reclaim for women a social identity that locates them very much in and of the wider world but positions them against overween-

ing state power and public identity defined in its terms. My aim is to define and to defend a female identity and a feminist perspective that enables contemporary women to see themselves as the daughters of Antigone. To recognize that women as a group experience their social worlds differently from men as a group complicates feminist thinking, deepens female self-awareness, and calls attention to the complexity and richness of our social experiences and relations.

The feminist protest of the past several decades has largely concentrated on the ways—official and unofficial, ideological and practical—in which women have been excluded from equal participation in public life and equal share in official power in government and business. Responding to constraints that curbed their participation as citizens and limited expression of their individual autonomy, the end of feminist protest was conceived as the full incorporation of women into the power, privileges, and responsibilities of the public arena. The stated aim of the largest feminist political organization, the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in October 1966, is to gain “truly equal partnership with men.” To this end, NOW’s Bill of Rights contains a list of proposals and demands required to attain such equal partnership. These demands include the establishment of government sponsored twenty-four-hour child-care centers, abortion on demand, equal pay for equal work, aggressive recruitment of women for top positions in all political and business hierarchies, and so on. Each demand requires action by the federal government to promote women’s interests and to achieve NOW’s version of sex equality. The presumption behind these demands, as stated by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, is that contemporary woman suffers a particular assault against her identity by being housebound; the man, however, with other “able, ambitious” fellows, enters the success-driven ethos of the American public world and keeps “on growing.”¹ Friedan contrasts, and devalues, the activities and identities of women in their “comfortable concentration camps” with the exciting, fulfilling, and presumably worthwhile world of the successful professional male.² In her more recent *The Second Stage*, Friedan remains innocent of any intractable tensions between simultaneous commitments to full intimacy and mobile success on market terms. She evades any serious questioning of her rosy, upbeat feminist project by transcending (her favorite word) every conflict that poses an apparent clash of interests, values, or

¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Books, 1974), p. 201.

² *Ibid.*, p. 325.

purposes, or that seems to present obstacles to her vision of feminism's "second stage."³

Liberal feminists have not been alone in urging that private woman join public man. Susan Brownmiller, a radical feminist, presumes that all the central features of the current male-dominated power structure will remain intact indefinitely; therefore, women must come to control these structures fifty-fifty. Armies, for instance,

must be fully integrated, as well as our national guard, our state troopers, our local sheriffs' offices, our district attorneys' offices, our state prosecuting attorneys' offices—in short the nation's entire lawful power structure (and I mean power in the physical sense) must be stripped of male dominance and control—if women are to cease being a colonized protectorate of men.⁴

Women should prepare themselves for combat and guard duty, for militarized citizenship with a feminist face.

Similarly, one fundamental presumption underlying more deterministic modes of Marxist feminism is the insistence that women will never be "liberated" to join hands with those men whose identities bear the teleologic seed of the future revolutionary order—the proletariat—until they are sprung from the ghetto of the home and wholly absorbed in the labor force, there to acquire an overriding public identity as a member of the class of exploited workers. The realm of intimacy is recast, crudely, as the world of reproduction, an analogue of the productive process.

These moves to transform women into public persons, with a public identity that either primarily or exclusively defines them and takes precedence in cases of conflict with private lives, were embraced or implicitly adopted by the most widely disseminated statements of feminist politics. As a feminist project this ideology required "the absorption of the private as completely as possible into the public."⁵ Women, formerly the private beings, would be "uplifted" to the status of a pre-eminently public identity to be shared equally with men. Though this overstates the case for emphasis, it reflects accurately the main thrust of feminist thought and practice—particularly that of mainstream, liberal feminism—from the late 1960s through the 1970s. What was conspicuously missing from the discussion

3 Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981).

4 Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 388.

5 Robert Paul Wolff, "There's Nobody Here But Us Persons," in Carol Gould and Marx Wartofsky, eds., *Women and Philosophy* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1976), pp. 140-41.

was any recognition of the potential dangers inherent in calling upon the state as an instrument for sexual emancipation. Concentrating only upon the good purposes to be served, feminists did not bring into focus the possibilities for enhanced powers of state surveillance and control of all aspects of intimate social relations.

In practice, the demand for a shift in the social identities of women involves their full assimilation into a combined identification with the state and the terms of competitive civil society, terms which have permeated all aspects of public life due to the close entanglements between government and corporations. The modern state, however, is the locus of structured, "legitimate" public life. It is this state feminists look to to intervene, to legislate, to adjudicate, to police and to punish on their behalf.

This process emerges in stark relief in an *amicus curiae* brief filed by NOW with the Supreme Court that argues that the all-male draft violates the constitutional rights of women. The brief asserts that "compulsory universal military service is central to the concept of citizenship in a democracy" and that women suffer "devastating long term psychological and political repercussions" because of their exclusion from such service.⁶ Eleanor Smeal, president of NOW, insists that barring women from the military and from combat duty is based "solely on archaic notions of women's role in society."⁷ Whatever one's position on women and the draft, NOW's stance and the stated defense for it embodies the conviction that women's traditional identities are so many handicaps to be overcome by women's incorporation into male public roles.

What all feminist protests that inveigh against women's continued identification with the private sphere share is the conviction that women's traditional identities were wholly forced upon them—that all women have been the unwitting victims of deliberate exclusion from public life and forced imprisonment in private life. That is, women were not construed as agents and historic subjects who had, in their private identities as wives, mothers, and grandmothers, played vital and voluntary roles as neighbors, friends, social benefactors, and responsible community members. Though these latter roles are not necessarily gender related, historically they have been associated with women. Holding up the public world as the only sphere within which individuals made real choices, exercised authentic power or had efficacious control, the private world, in turn,

6 Linda Greenhouse, "Women Join Battle on All-Male Draft," *New York Times*, March 22, 1981, p. 19. We do have plenty of evidence on the devastating damage done men and women who served in a variety of capacities in Vietnam.

7 Ibid.

automatically reflected a tradition of powerlessness, necessity, and irrationality. The darker realities of the public world, with the notable exception of its exclusion of women, went unexplored just as the noble and dignified aspects of women's private sphere were ignored.

Feminists who celebrated "going public" could point to the long history of the forced exclusion of women from political life and participation—whether the franchise, public office, or education and employment—as evidence that women's private identities were heavy-handed impositions by those with superior power. They could also recall a tradition of political thought in which great male theorists located women outside of, and frequently at odds with, the values and demands of politics and the sphere of public action. In contrast, another strain of feminist thought, best called "difference feminism," questioned the move towards full assimilation of female identity with public male identity and argued that to see women's traditional roles and activities as *wholly* oppressive was itself oppressive to women, denying them historic subjectivity and moral agency.⁹ They could point to a first-person literature in which women defined and appropriated a particular female identity, rooted in private activities and relations, as a source of individual strength and social authority. They suggested that feminists should challenge rather than accept the present public world. And, rather than chastizing Western political thinkers for their failure to incorporate women into their scheme of things, why not question that very scheme with its devaluation of the traditional world and ways of women?

At this point it is important to take the measure of that public identity into which "liberated" women are to be inducted. Contemporary American public identity is a far cry indeed from Jefferson's noble republican farmer or Lincoln's morally engaged citizen, the "last best hope on earth." Instead we find a public life, political and economic, marked by bureaucratic rationalization and cul-

8 My argument should not be taken as a denial that women, historically, *have* suffered in specific ways. It is, however, a denial that this suffering has been so total that women are reduced to the status of objects—whether in the name of feminism or in the name of defenses of male supremacy.

9 Examples of "difference feminism" include: Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conception of Self and Morality," *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (1977), pp. 481–517; some of the essays in the volumes *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford University Press, 1974); and *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and the Philosophy of Science* (Amsterdam: Dordrecht-Reidel, forthcoming 1982).

minating in the state's monopoly of authority in most vital fields of human activity. This process of rationalization and centralization, in the words of Brian Fay.

refers to the process by which growing areas of social life are subjected to decisions made in accordance with technical rules for the choice between alternative strategies given some set of goals or values. The characteristic features of these sorts of decisions are the quantification of the relevant data, the use of formal decision procedures, and the utilization of empirical laws; all of these are combined to form an attitude of abstraction from the traditional qualitative, and historically unique features of a situation in order to settle the question at hand "objectively." This sort of instrumental rationality is intimately connected with control over the various factors at hand, such that, by the manipulation of certain variables in accordance with some plan, some goal is best achieved.¹⁰

The aims are efficiency and control and powerful bureaucracies have been set up to implement these aims. Bureaucrats operate in conformity to certain impersonal, abstract, and rational standards: this is the price of entry into the predominant public identity available to anyone, male or female. It is the world Hegel called "civil society," in which individuals treat others as means to some end and carry out actions to attain self-interest in public.

For women to identify fully with the present public order is for them to participate (and there is pathos if not tragedy in this) in the suppression of an alternative identity described by Dorothy Smith, a feminist sociologist, as "the concrete, the particular, the bodily," an identity with which women have traditionally been defined and within which, for better *and* worse, they have located themselves as social and historic beings.¹¹ This world, once taken for granted and now problematic, exists in contrast to the abstracted "mode of ruling," the ways of acting of the powerful. Women's historic social identity, at odds with extreme versions of abstract individualism, public-oriented behavior aimed at good for others but not reducible to interest for self. The problem, as Jane Bennett points out in a recent study, is that women, as the "exemplars/defenders of civic virtue," were pressed to sacrifice individual goals altogether in order to preserve "a particular type of public good."¹²

¹⁰ Brian Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), p. 44.

¹¹ Dorothy E. Smith, "A Sociology for Women," in *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Julia A. Sterman and Evelyn Torton Beck (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), pp. 135-188.

¹² Jane Bennett, "Feminism and Civic Virtue," unpublished paper (1981).

Feminist protest that seeks the elimination of this sphere of the concrete, particular, smaller social world—viewing only the sacrifices forced upon women, not the good attained by women—is one response to identities grown problematic under the pressures of social rationalization and modernization. A second response, where growth is a measure of the anger and despair of its adherents, is the militant reaffirmation of a rigid feminine identity, one that aims to leave all the political stuff to men who are better equipped for the task—ironically, of course, such feminine women are actively promoting this passive end. Somewhat lost in the cross-fire between these hostile camps is a third alternative, which I shall call “social feminism,” that opposes the rush toward a technocratic order and an overweening public identity and repudiates, as well, the standpoint of ardent feminine passivity.

The third way, a feminist *via media*, begins with a female subject located within a world that is particular, concrete, and social, and attempts to see it through her eyes. If one begins in this way, one cannot presume, with the feminists I discussed earlier, that this world is automatically one from which all women should seek, or need, to be wholly liberated. The French feminist writer, Julia Kristeva, observed in an interview: “Feminism can be but one of capitalism’s more advanced needs to rationalize.”¹³ Those feminisms that embrace without serious qualification the governing consciousness and norms of social organization of the current public world serve in precisely this way.

To sketch my alternative requires that I begin from the standpoint of women within their everyday reality. Is it possible to embrace ideals and values from the social world of women, severed from male domination and female subordination? I am convinced this is possible only by not viewing women’s traditional identities as devoid of vitality, as being tainted by relations of domination. What follows is my effort to reclaim for women, construed as social actors in the world, an identity that pits them against the imperious demands of public power and contractual relations, one that might serve as a locus for female thinking, acting, and being as transformed by social feminist imperatives. This locus is not some solid rock, not an ontological definition of female “being”; rather, it is a series of overlapping intimations of a subject in the process of defining herself both with and against the available identities, public and private, of her epoch.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, “Women Can Never Be Defined,” in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 141.

The female subject I have in mind is an identity-in-becoming, but she is located historically and grounded in tradition; she belongs to a heritage at least as old as Antigone's conflict with Creon. This powerful myth and human drama pits a woman against the arrogant insistencies of statecraft. Recall the story: the *dramatis personae* that matter for my purposes are Creon, King of Thebes, and his nieces, Antigone and her sister, Ismenê, daughters of the doomed Oedipus. Creon issues an order in the higher interests of state that violates the sacred familial duty to bury and honor the dead. Antigone, outraged, defies Creon. She defines their conflict with clarity and passion.

Listen, Ismenê:
 Creon buried our brother Eteoclês
 With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,
 And it was right that he should; but Polyneicês,
 Who fought as bravely and died as miserably,—
 They say that Creon has sworn
 No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him
 But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure
 For carrion birds to find as they search for food.
 That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here
 To announce it publicly; and the penalty—
 Stoning to death in the public square
 There it is,
 And now you can prove what you are:
 A true sister, or a traitor to your family.¹⁴

Ismenê, uncomprehending, asks Antigone what she is going to do, and Antigone responds: "Ismenê, I am going to bury him. Will you come?" Ismenê cries that the new law forbids it. Women, she cries, cannot fight with men nor against the law and she begs "the Dead/To forgive me." But Antigone, determined, replies: "It is the dead, not the living, who make the longest demands." Harshly, she orders Ismenê off with the words: "I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too," for what is worse than death, or what is the worst of deaths, is "death without honor." Later, Antigone proclaims, "There is no guilt in reverence for the dead" and "there are honors due all the dead." This primordial family morality precedes and overrides the laws of the state. Creon must be defied, for there are matters, Antigone insists, that are so basic they transcend *raison d'état*, one's own self-interest, even one's own life.

¹⁴ Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle*, "Antigone," trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Harvest Books, 1949), p. 186.

Creon's offense is his demand that political necessity justifies trampling upon a basic human duty, an imperative that lies at the heart of any recognizably human social life. In her loyalty to her slain brother and to family honor, Antigone asserts that there are matters of such deep significance that they begin and end where the state's right does not and must not run, where politics cannot presume to dictate to the human soul. In "saving" the state, Creon not only runs roughshod over a centuries-old tradition, he presumes to override the familial order, the domain of women. In refusing to accept *raison d'état* as paramount, Antigone sets the course for her rebellion and pits the values of family and particular loyalties, ties, and traditions against the values of statecraft with its more abstract obligations. In her rebellion, Antigone is as courageous, honorable, and determined as Creon is insistent, demanding, and convinced of the necessity of his public decree.

Sophocles honors Antigone in her rebellion. He sees no need to portray a chastened Antigone, having confronted Creon but having failed to sway him, finally won over to the imperatives of *raison d'état*, yielding at last to Creon's fears of law-breakers and anarchy. Strangely, Antigone has not emerged as a feminist heroine. It is equally strange that a magisterial Greek thinker who would eliminate altogether the standpoint of Antigone is sometimes honored by feminists for his "radical" rearrangements without apparent regard to gender. I refer to Plato of *The Republic*, a Plato dedicated to eradicating and devaluing private homes and particular intimate attachments (principally for his Guardian class). Such private loyalties and passions conflicted with single-minded devotion to the city. Plato cries: "Have we any greater evil for a city than what splits it and makes it many instead of one? Or a greater good than what binds it together and makes it one?"¹⁵

To see in Plato's abstract formulation for rationalized equality (for that minority of men and women who comprise his Guardian class) a move that is both radical and feminist is to accept public life and identity as, by definition, superior to private life and identity. Indeed, it is to concur in the wholesale elimination of the private social world to attain the higher good of a state without the points of potential friction and dissent private loyalties bring in their wake. This view accepts Plato's conviction that "private wives" are a potentially subversive element within the city. Plato cannot allow women their own social location, for that would be at odds with his aim for a unified city. Instead, he provides for women's participation under terms that deprivatize them and strip them of the single greatest source of female psychological and social power in fifth- and

¹⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), Book V/460E-462D, p. 141.

fourth-century Athens—their role in the household; their ties with their children. Effectively, he renders their sexual identities moot. In whose behalf is this dream of unity, and female public action, being dreamed?

The question of female identity and the state looks very different if one picks up the thread of woman's relationship to public power from the standpoint of an Antigone; if one adopts the sanctioned viewpoint of the handful of thinkers whose works comprise the canon of the Western political tradition; or if one tells the tale through the prism of unchecked *realpolitik*, from astride the horse of the warrior, or from the throne of the ruler. The female subject, excluded from legitimate statecraft unless she inherited a throne, is yet an active historic agent, a participant in social life who located the heart of her identity in a world bounded by the demands of necessity, sustaining the values of life-giving and preserving.

This sphere of the historic female subject generated its own imperatives, inspired its own songs, stories, and myths. It was and is, for many if not all, the crucible through which sustaining human relations and meaning are forged and remembered. It is easy to appreciate both the fears of traditionalists and the qualms of radicals at the suppression of this drama of the concrete and the particular in favor of some formal-legalistic, abstract "personhood," or to make way for the further intrusion of an increasingly technocratic public order. To wholly reconstruct female social identity by substituting of those identities available through the public order would be to lose the standpoint of Antigone, the woman who throws sand into the machinery of arrogant public power.

But how does one hold on to a social location for contemporary daughters of Antigone without simultaneously insisting that women accept traditional terms of political quiescence? The question answers itself: the standpoint of Antigone is of a woman who dares to challenge public power by giving voice to familial and social imperatives and duties. Hers is not the world of the *femme couverte*, the delicate lady, or the coy sex-kitten. Hers is a robust voice, a bold voice: woman as guardian of the prerogatives of the *oikos*, preserver of familial duty and honor, protector of children, if need be their fierce avenger. To recapture that voice and to reclaim that standpoint, and not just for women alone, it is necessary to locate the daughters of Antigone where, shakily and problematically, they continue to locate themselves: in the arena of the social world where human life is nurtured and protected from day to day. This is a world women have not altogether abandoned, though it is one both male-dominant society and some feminist protest have devalued as the sphere of "shit-work," "diaper talk," and "terminal social decay." This is a world that women, aware that they have traditions and values, can bring forward to put pressure on contemporary public policies and identities.

Through a social feminist awareness, women can explore, articulate, and reclaim this world. To reaffirm the standpoint of Antigone for our own time is to

portray women as being able to resist the imperious demands and overweening claims of state power when these run roughshod over deeply rooted values. Women must learn to defend without defensiveness and embrace without sentimentality the perspective that flows from their experiences in their everyday material world, "an actual local and particular place in the world."¹⁶ To define this world simply as the "private sphere" in contrast to "the public sphere" is to mislead. For contemporary Americans, "private" conjures up images of narrow exclusivity. The world of Antigone, however, is a *social* location that speaks of, and to, identities that are unique to a particular family, on the one hand; but, on another and perhaps even more basic level, it taps a deeply buried human identity, for we are first and foremost not political or economic man but family men and women. Family imagery goes deep and runs strong, and all of us, for better or worse, sporadically or consistently, have access to that imagery, for we all come from families even if we do not go on to create our own. The family is that arena that first humanizes us or, tragically, damages us. The family is our entry point into the wider social world. It is the basis of a concept of the social for, as Hegel recognized, "the family is a sort of training ground that provides an understanding of another-oriented and public-oriented action."¹⁷

What is striking about political theory in the Western tradition is the very thin notion of the social world so much of that theory describes. All aspects of social reality that go into making a person what he or she is fall outside the frame of formal, abstract analyses. In their rethinking of this tradition, many feminist thinkers, initially at least, locked their own formulations into an overly schematic public-private dichotomy, even if their intention was to challenge or to question it.¹⁸ Those feminists who have moved in the direction of "social feminism" have, in their rethinking of received categories, become both more historical and more interpretive in their approach to social life. One important female thinker whose life and work form a striking contrast to the classical

¹⁶ Smith, "A Sociology for Women," p. 168.

¹⁷ Bennett, "Feminism and Civic Virtue."

¹⁸ I consider myself guilty on this score. See one of my earlier formulations on the public-private dilemma, "Moral Woman/Immoral Man: The Public/Private Distinction and its Political Ramifications," *Politics and Society* 4 (1974), pp. 453-473. I try to restore a richness this initial foray dropped out in *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

vision and to overly rigid feminist renderings of the public and private, particularly those who disdain anything that smacks of the traditionally "feminine," is Jane Addams. Addams embodies the standpoint of Antigone. A woman with a powerful public identity and following, who wielded enormous political power and influence, Addams's life work was neither grandly public nor narrowly private. Instead, she expressed the combined values of centuries of domestic tradition, and the dense and heady concoction of women's needs, and she brought these to bear on a political world that held human life very cheap indeed.

Addams recognized, in uncritical celebrations of heroic male action, a centuries-long trail of tears. What classical political theorists dismissed as ignoble—the sustenance of life itself—Addams claimed as truly heroic. Rather than repudiating human birth and the world surrounding it as a possible source of moral truth and political principle, Addams spoke from the standpoint of the "suffering mothers of the disinherited," of "women's haunting memories," which, she believed, "instinctively challenge war as the implacable enemy of their age-long undertaking."¹⁹ At one point she wrote:

Certainly the women in every country who are under a profound imperative to preserve human life, have a right to regard this maternal impulse as important now as the compelling instinct evinced by primitive woman long ago, when they made the first crude beginnings of society by refusing to share the vagrant life of man because they insisted upon a fixed abode in which they might cherish their children. Undoubtedly women were then told that the interests of the tribe, the diminishing food supply, the honor of the chieftain, demanded that they leave their particular caves and go out in the wind and weather without regard to the survival of their children. But at the present moment the very names of the tribes and of the honors and the glories which they sought are forgotten, while the basic fact that the mothers held the lives of their children above all else, insisted upon staying where the children had a chance to live, and cultivate the earth for their food, laid the foundations of an ordered society.²⁰

A feminist rethinking of Addams's category of the social, resituating it as an alternative to privatization and public self-interestedness, would allow us to break out of the rigidities into which current feminist discourse has fallen. Seeing

19 Jane Addams, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1916), p. 40.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

human beings through the prism of a many-layered, complex social world suffused with diverse goods, meanings, and purposes opens up the possibility for posing a transformed vision of the human community against the arid plain of bureaucratic statism. This communitarian ideal involves a series of interrelated but autonomous social spheres. It incorporates a vision of human solidarity that does not require uniformity and of cooperation that permits dissent. The aim of all social activity would be to provide a frame within which members of a diverse social body could attain both individual and communal ends and purposes, without, however, presuming some final resolution of these ends and purposes; a social world featuring fully public activities at one end of a range of possibilities and intensely private activities at the other.

If this communal ideal is to be claimed as a worthy ideal for our time, a first requirement is a feminist framework that locates itself in the social world in such a way that our current public, political realities can be examined with a critical and reflective eye. One alternative feminist perspective, a variation on both "difference" and "social" feminism that helps us to do this is called "maternal thinking" by its author, Sara Ruddick.²¹ According to Ruddick, mothers have had a particular way of thinking that has largely gone unnoticed—save by mothers themselves. That is, women in mothering capacities have developed intellectual abilities that wouldn't otherwise have been developed; made judgments they wouldn't otherwise have been called upon to make; and affirmed values they might not otherwise have affirmed. In other words, mothers engage in a discipline that has its own characteristic virtues and errors and that involves, like other disciplines, a conception of achievement. Most important for the purposes of feminist theory, these concepts and ends are dramatically at odds with the prevailing norms of our bureaucratic, and increasingly technological, public order.

Ruddick claims that one can describe maternal practices by a mother's interest in the preservation, the growth, and the social acceptability of her child. These values and goods may conflict, for preservation and growth may clash with the requirements for social acceptability. Interestingly, what counts as a failure within the frame of maternal thinking, excessive control that fails to give each unique child room to grow and develop, is the *modus operandi* of both public and private bureaucracies. Were maternal thinking to be taken as the base for feminist consciousness, a wedge for examining an increasingly over-controlled public world would open up immediately. For this notion of maternal thought to have a chance to flourish as it is brought to bear upon the larger world, it must be transformed in and through social feminist awareness.

²¹ Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," typescript. A shortened version has appeared in *Feminist Studies* (Summer 1980), but I draw upon the original full-length draft.

To repeat: the core concepts of maternal achievement put it at odds with bureaucratic manipulation. Maternal achievement requires paying a special sort of attention to the concrete specificity of each child; it turns on a special kind of knowledge of this child, this situation, without the notion of seizure, appropriation, control, or judgment by impersonal standards. What maternal thinking could lead to, though this will always be problematic as long as mothers are socially subordinated, is the wider diffusion of what attentive love to all children is about and how it might become a wider social imperative.

Maternal thinking opens up for reflective criticism the paradoxical juxtapositions of female powerlessness and subordination, in the overall social and political sense, with the extraordinary psycho-social authority of mothers. Maternal thinking refuses to see women principally or simply as victims, for it recognizes that much good has emerged from maternal practices and could not if the world of the mother were totally destructive. Maternal thinking transformed by feminist consciousness, hence aware of the binds and constraints imposed on mothers, including the presumption that women will first nurture their sons and then turn them over for sacrifice should the gods of war demand human blood, offers us a mode of reflection that links women to the past yet offers up hope of a future. It makes contact with the strengths of our mothers and grandmothers; it helps us to see ourselves as Antigone's daughters, determined, should it be necessary, to chasten arrogant public power and resist the claims of political necessity. For such power, and such claims, have, in the past, been weapons used to trample upon the deepest yearnings and most basic hopes of the human spirit.

Maternal thinking reminds us that public policy has an impact on real human beings. As public policy becomes increasingly impersonal, calculating, and technocratic, maternal thinking insists that the reality of a single human child be kept before the mind's eye. Maternal thinking, like Antigone's protest, is a rejection of amoral statecraft and an affirmation of the dignity of the human person.