

The Feminist Critique of John Rawls: Carole Pateman, Susan Okin and Martha Nussbaum (First Draft)

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As a reflection of his invaluable contribution to the revival of political philosophy in our time, John Rawls was used for many purposes by many academic political philosophers, receiving both acclamations and criticisms for his life long endeavors, and rightly so.¹ Hardly any political thinker could do his or her work without referring to him. Some incorporates John Rawls's theory as the point of departure in their own theorizing, making efforts to push further. A well-known example is no doubt that of Thomas Pogge in the study of tackling poverty in the world community;² or, for that matter, Amartya Sen in his theorizing of capacity and functions.³ Others, conventionally referred to as communitarian thinkers, rebuke him with very different assumptions of the self. For examples, Michael Sandel's denial of the unencumbered self⁴ and Alasdair MacIntyre's narrative conception of the self, a self constituted by a life story with a purpose, a telos, readily come to mind.⁵

This paper, however, will not deal with Sendal and MacIntyre, nor with the group of inter-generational justice theorists with Peter Laslett at their head⁶, but will concentrate on three feminist scholars: Carole Pateman, Susan Okin and Martha Nussbaum. It will primarily deal with their critique of John Rawls on gender and the family. Moreover, it will make a comparison of their positions using John Rawls as a benchmark and briefly assess their contribution to political theory.

¹ It will take many pages merely to list all the publications by John Rawls. Suffice it to cite a few of his most influential books. *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1971, *Political Liberalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001. Several papers published in the 1980s and 1990s need to be consulted for any in-depth assessment of John Rawls's contribution to political philosophy in our time. They include "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," in *Journal of Philosophy*, September, 1980, "Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, February 1987, and "The Priority of Right and the Idea of the Good," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17, Summer 1988.

² See Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls*, Cornell University Press, 1989.

³ Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁴ Michael Sandel, *The Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

⁶ Peter Laslett and James Fishkin, ed. *Justice between Age Groups and Generations*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

I.

Let us begin with Carole Pateman, for her position on John Rawls is off-handedly dismissive, bordering on contempt, yet in itself highly intriguing. Pateman's *The Sexual Contract*,⁷ no doubt, is an influential work on its own right, pioneering the attack on social contract. She told us that she was moved to write it because "The sexual contract is never mentioned. The sexual contract is a repressed dimension of contract theory, an integral part of the rational choice of the familiar, original agreement. The original contract as typically understood today is only part of the act of political genesis depicted in the pages of the classic contract theorists of the seventeen and eighteen centuries."⁸

Pateman presents the classic contract theory succinctly: "Contract doctrine entails that there is only one, conventional, origin of political right, yet, with the exception in Hobbes' theory where both sexes are pictured as naturally free and equal, the contract theorists also insist that men's right over women has a natural basis. Men alone have the attributes of free and equal 'individuals' Relations of subordination between men must, if they are to be legitimate, originate in contract. Women are born into subjection."⁹

Turing to John Rawls, Pateman points directly at his 'original position': "Rawls's task is to find a picture of an original position that will confirm 'our' intuitions about existing institutions, which include patriarchal relations of subordination."¹⁰ And the solution is fairly neat. The parties in the original position "merely reason and make their choice... The representative is sexless. The disembodied party who makes the choice can not know one vital 'particular fact', namely, its sex."¹¹ However, in doing so, Rawls could only make his original position "a logical abstraction of such rigour that nothing happens there."¹² Pateman speaks here approvingly that the classic contract theorists, beginning with Hobbes, have done better. Their descriptions of the state of nature "are full of life. They portray the state of nature as a condition that extends over more than one generation. Men and women come together, engage in sexual relations and women give birth. The circumstances under which they do so, whether conjugal relations exist and whether families are formed, depend on the extent to which the state of nature is portrayed as a social condition."¹³

Given Pateman's quest, however, the classic contract theorists are just as useless as John Rawls. To reveal the story of the sexual contract, a great deal of reconstruction must be done. Both Sir Robert Filmer and Sigmund Freud are resorted to for their ideas of the beginning of political power and the origins of civilization. But by themselves, they do not suffice. The secret sexual contract still needs be made explicit. To quote:

⁷ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, UK, 1988.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.ix

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.41

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.43

¹² *Ibid.*, p.43

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.43

Freud's stories, like those of Sir Robert Filmer and the contract theorists, begin with a father who is, already, a father. The arguments about 'original' political right all begin after physical genesis, after the birth of the son that makes a man (a husband) a father. But a father cannot become a father unless a woman has become a mother, and she cannot become a mother without an act of coitus. Where is the story of the true origin of political right? In the stories of political origins, sex right is incorporated into father-right, and this nicely obscures the fact that the necessary beginning is missing. All the stories lack a political book of genesis.¹⁴

Through history, Pateman argues, the contract doctrine rules with an iron hand and the subjection of women has never ceased. Wives are not better than slaves, and women in labor market are severely discriminated against and exploited.

II.

Compared with Pateman, Susan Okin is very straightforward in her criticism of John Rawls and more sympathetic towards his theory of justice, especially his idea of the original position. In her *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Okin begins by criticizing political philosophers for their assumption of the hidden gender-structured family and the false gender neutrality in their use of language. The former obviously refers to the well-known distinction in classic political theory between the private domestic life and public life of politics and the marketplace, governed by different principles. As a result, family is not deemed the subject matter of politics, and women are excluded from public and political life. Only men can participate in the public life and women are excluded. And the irony is even more poignant, because men can afford to participate in politics due to the fact that women take care of the functions in the family. If in recent years, it is not so easy to ignore women in the discussion of justice, our contemporary political theorists really have not done better.¹⁵ Moreover, the use of neutral language is irritating, hiding something that should be brought into the open. To quote:

Their merely terminological responses to feminist challenges, in spite of giving a superficial impression of tolerance and inclusiveness, often strain credulity and sometimes result in nonsense...Thus gender-neutral terms frequently obscure the fact that so much of the real experience of 'persons,' so long as they live in gender-structured societies, does in fact depend on what sex they are.¹⁶

As for John Rawls, Okin focuses on the positions he takes and arguments he makes concerning the application of his principles of justice to the family and to women, and

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 104-105.

¹⁵ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, pp. 8-9

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 11.

the family as a school of moral education. In all three, Okin finds Rawls either ambiguous or inadequate.

Citing *A Theory of Justice*, Okin discovers quickly enough that Rawls has hardly realized “that the modern liberal society to which the principles of justice are to be applied is deeply and pervasively gender-structured.”¹⁷ This neglect of gender and the family must be corrected if Rawls were to be faithful to his basic commitment and if the feminist thinkers are going to draw upon Rawls’s ‘original position.’

Praising ‘original position’ as his most important single contribution to moral and political theory, John Rawls is immediately taken to task for his participation in a tradition in which sexism is taken for granted. Does Rawls’s theory of justice apply to women? And what about the family? Is the family a basic social structure as Rawls defines it?

Okin apparently finds it difficult to be certain, and in part it is not her faults but that of Rawls’s. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls has this to say about the family: “For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation... Thus the legal protection of freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family are examples of major social institutions.”¹⁸ But if the family is in, it is “to a large extent ignored, though assumed, in the rest of the theory.”¹⁹ And the family is not even mentioned in an article published in 1977, Okin points out, in which Rawls discusses why the basic structure is the primary subject of justice.²⁰

Further more, Rawls does not pay any attention to the internal justice of the family, and this is inexcusable as far as Okin is concerned. It would seem that as Rawls’s two principles of justice are agreed to by individuals in the original position, and that they are either “heads or representatives of families, they are not in a position to determine questions of justice within families.”²¹ Okin agrees with Jane English that “By making the parties in the original positions heads of families rather than individuals, Rawls makes the family opaque to claims of justice.”²² And what about the children? To Rawls’s “argument from paternalism for their temporary inequality and restricted liberty,” Okin retorts that “This, while it may suffice in basically sound, benevolent families, is of no use or comfort in abusive or neglectful situations, where Rawls’s principles would seem to require that children be protected through the intervention of outside authorities.”²³ As for wives or other adult members of a family who are not its head, they simply are not represented in the original position.²⁴

¹⁷ Ibid. p.89.

¹⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, p. 93.

²⁰ Consult Rawls’s article “The Basic Structure as Subject,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1977): 159.

²¹ Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, p. 94.

²² Jane English’s article, “Justice between Generations,” appears in *Philosophical Studies* 31, no.2 (1977): 95.

²³ Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, p.94.

²⁴ Ibid.

Later in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls assumes that the family is just in his discussion of moral development of the child. “Now I shall assume that the basic structure of a well-ordered society includes the family in some form, and therefore that children are at first subject to the legitimate authority of the parents,” as Rawls put it.²⁵ This assumption, however, cannot be acceptable to Okin. To quote:

The family is not a private association like a church or a university, which vary considerably in the type and degree of commitment each expects from its members, and which one can join and leave voluntarily. For although one has some choice (albeit a highly constrained one) about marrying into a gender-structured family, one has no choice at all about being born into one. Rawls’s failure to subject the structure of the family to his principles of justice is particularly serious in light of his belief that a theory of justice must take account of “how {individuals} get to be what they are” and “cannot take their final aims and interests, their attitudes to themselves and their life, as given.”²⁶

Given Rawls’s assumption that the family is just, Okin accuses him of building his structure of moral education on shaky ground. For as Okin points out repeatedly, and to which almost all feminist thinkers agree, the gendered families cannot be just but are a relic of caste or feudal societies in which Rawls’s principles of justice simply do not apply.²⁷

In his latest book, John Rawls proceeds to clarify his position on gender and the family and reply to the challenges and critique of Susan Okin.²⁸ He first indicates that indeed his principles of justice apply to the family, without saying what these principles require in practice. Nevertheless, Rawls is emphatic in denying that they cannot secure equal justice for women and their children. Citing Okin’s criticism, Rawls says: “This is a misconception. It may arise as follows: the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society understood as the arrangement of society’s main institutions into a unified system of social cooperation over time. The principles of political justice are to apply directly to this structure, but they are not to apply directly to the internal life of the many association within it, the family among them.”²⁹ And why Rawls takes this position? It is because, borrowing the idea from Joshua Cohen, that “we distinguish between the point of view of people as citizens and their point of view as members of families and of other associations. As citizens we have reasons to impose constraints specified by the political principles of justice on associations; while as members of associations we have reasons for limiting those constraints so that they leave room for a free and flourishing internal life appropriate to the association on question.”³⁰ Moreover, these constraints imposed on the family as a basic structure will definitely guarantee to the wife her basic rights and liberties as well as fair opportunities as citizen of the political community. No more is needed.

²⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.p.462-3.

²⁶ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, pp.96-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.99.

²⁸ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 164

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.165.

As for the children, Rawls elaborates his earlier position and argues “It is hardly sensible that as parents we be required to treat our children in accordance with political principles. Here those principles are out of place. Certain parents should follow some conception of justice (or fairness) and due respect in regard to each of their children, but, within certain limits, abuse and neglect of children, and much else, will, as constraints, be a vital part of the family law. But at some point society has to trust to the natural affection and good will of parents.”³¹

Finally, Rawls thinks that Okin is right in her assessment that his ‘original position’ can be used to critique the gender-structured society. But Rawls poses the question that we need to clarify “what precisely is covered by gender-structured institutions? How are their lines drawn?”³² He ends up by saying “if we say the gender system includes whatever social arrangements adversely affect the equal basic liberties and opportunities of women, as well as of those of their children as future citizens, then surely that system is subject to critique by the principles of justice. The question then becomes whether the fulfillment of these principles suffices to remedy the system’s faults. This depends in part on social theory and human psychology, and much else.”³³

Indeed would Rawls’s principles of justice be sufficient to remedy the faults of the gender-structured system, which Okin and almost all the feminist theorists have so vividly described and analyzed? Does the distinction between the point of view of people as citizens and their point of view as members of family and of other associations really help? And is the family really just like any other association such as a church or a university? Okin clearly does not think so.

III.

Martha Nussbaum is equally concerned with Rawls’s position on the family and rights of women and children. But she is a champion of the capabilities approach,³⁴ which makes her agree with Rawls on many points yet from a different perspective, while challenging Rawls to go further in support of state intervention in promoting capabilities. She proposes in *Women and Human Development* that “the idea of central human capabilities be used as the analogue of Rawlsian primary goods, and that the guiding political conception of the person should be an Aristotelian/Marxian conception of the human being as in need of a rich plurality of life-activities, to be shaped by both practical reason and affiliation.”³⁵ These interlocking conceptions can form a political conception, she says, that is close to Rawls’s in many ways. Yet it will more easily provide the requisite affirmative support for capabilities, including the care of physical as well as mental dependency needs.

³¹ Ibid. p.165.

³² Ibid. p.167.

³³ Ibid. pp. 167-8

³⁴ Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

³⁵ Martha Nussbaum, “The Future of Liberalism,” in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 74,2: 56.

More concretely, Nussbaum challenges Rawls in his assertion that while the family is part of the basic structure of the society, yet his principles of justice do not apply directly to the inner workings of the family. Three large questions must be confronted with:

First, if the family is part of the basic structure, how can it also be a voluntary institution, analogue to a church or a university? Plainly, the family is a basic institution, for it exercises such pervasive influence on every one from the start of human life and the church or the university is not. Rawls need to clarify if he indeed thinks that they are not different. Here Nussbaum's position is similar to that of Okin.

Secondly, Rawls fails to acknowledge the parochial character of the Western nuclear family. He still refers to it as something quasi-natural, with "natural affections" between parents and children. Citing village groups, extended families, women's collectives, for example, in India, and kibbutzim as well as other groups, Nussbaum argues forcefully that they all have been involved in rearing children. Why the Western nuclear family when there are many different forms of family to choose from?

Thirdly, Rawls does not recognize the extent to which the "family" in all modern societies is a creation of the state, having a very different status from that of a church or a university. "The state constitutes the family structure through its laws, defining which groups of people can count as families, defining the privileges and rights of family members, defining what marriage and divorce are, what legitimacy and parental responsibility are, and so forth."³⁶

To the extent that Rawls seems to take the family as given, Nussbaum attributes it to his readiness to recognize group rights, the rights of the families, conceived as pre-political, against the state intervention. In contrast, Nussbaum argues that her approach will not recognize any group as existing "by nature." All the groups will be judged as to their usefulness in promoting capabilities. If the women's collectives in India can do better in giving women love and friendship, if they can do better in protecting children from sexual abuse than the nuclear family, they should be supported by the state to do so. Moreover, Rawls's distinctions between internal from external regulations cannot be as meaningful as it appears. Laws governing marriage, divorce and compulsory education, just to cite a few, are clearly internal to a family. Nor should criminal justice system treat offenses differently depending whether they take place in the family. Rape in the family should be treated as rape nonetheless, battery as battery, and coercion as coercion. For the promotion of capabilities which can be translated into rights readily, external constraints from without on the family structure is never enough, state intervention leading to re-structuring of the family institution must be encouraged and insisted upon when there is a need.³⁷

The differences in approach notwithstanding, there are, of course, agreements between Rawls and Nussbaum in many areas. For example, they would likely agree on laws against marital rape, or for that matter, on laws governing compulsory

³⁶ Ibid. pp 60-1.

³⁷ Ibid. pp 62-3

education. As to be expected, Nussbaum also questions if Rawls's theory of justice meet the needs of global justice and argues that global justice is now the central concern for the feminist thinkers because women in the developing world are faced with a desperate situation, denied of the most basic rights and capabilities, including food, education, health, bodily integrity and life.

IV.

In their critique of Rawls, Pateman, Okin and Nussbaum plainly have similar concerns, that is, gender and the family: to what extent that Rawls's principles of justice would help secure basic rights, liberties and fair opportunities for women and children. And how does Rawls confront or not confront the gender-structured society. Yet they all have somewhat different emphases. Pateman dwells on Rawls's original position, and pronounces it quite useless for her purposes. Okin is more sympathetic, thinking that Rawls's "original position" could be useful for a feminist critique, "in particular for our attempts to answer the question, Can justice coexist with gender?"³⁸ Nussbaum focuses on justice in the family, and chides Rawls for failing to acknowledge the parochial character of the Western nuclear family as well as the extent to which the state has always shaped and molded the family. Nevertheless, Nussbaum readily agrees that her approach and Rawls's "are very close. Both of us take our bearings from the idea of the dignity and worth of humanity, and the idea that no human beings shall be used as a mere means for the ends of others...But Rawls, while rejecting the public/private distinction, remains half-hearted in that rejection."³⁹

Behind their criticisms and expositions, the different perspectives of the three feminist theorists can be only briefly indicated. Pateman's, by comparison, is more difficult to be precise. On the first reading, it is easy to classify her as a radical feminist, arguing for the hidden sexual contract and insists that contemporary societies are still ruled by it. Yet when it comes to prostitution, for example, Pateman can be taken as an ally of the most conservative groups in many societies: To quote:

In modern patriarchy a variety of means are available through which men can uphold the terms of the sexual contract. The marriage contract is still fundamental to patriarchal right, but marriage is now only one of the socially acceptable ways for men to have access to women's bodies. Casual sexual liaisons and 'living together' no longer carry the social sanctions of twenty or thirty years ago, and, in addition to private arrangements, there is a huge, multimillion dollars trade in women's bodies. Wives are no longer put up for public auction...but men can buy sexual access to women's bodies in the capitalist market.⁴⁰

Okin is, no doubt, a liberal feminist thinker. She speaks of vulnerability by marriage, referring to women's vulnerability in anticipation of marriage, within

³⁸ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, p.90

³⁹ Martha Nussbaum, "The Future of Feminist Liberalism," p.67.

⁴⁰ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 189.

marriage, in separation or divorce, as well as distribution of power and welfare in the family and wives in wage work. Patently, all these vulnerabilities must be redressed before the family can be remade and become a more just institution.⁴¹

Nussbaum declares her perspective Aristotelian/Marxian, yet argues that it is compatible with Rawls's Kantian constructivism. She is not prepared to concede the theory of the good to the communitarian theorists. Moreover, she made a substantial effort to translate her capabilities theory into concrete rights and liberties. Nussbaum's list of ten central human capabilities (as in *Women and Human Development*, 2000) is a worthy contribution in itself. They are 1. Life. 2. Bodily Health. 3. Bodily Integrity. 4. Senses, Imagination and Thought. 5. Emotions. 6. Practical Reason. 7. Affiliation, further divided into A and B. 8. Other Species. 9. Play and 10. Control over one's Environment. A. Political. B. Material. In doing so, she parts her way with Amartya Sen, with whom she had collaborated for many years.

Three feminist thinkers, three perspectives. Where will they lead?

Pateman leaves no doubt in the mind of her readers that she opts for a free social order. To quote:

A free social order cannot be a contractual order. There are other forms of free agreement through which women and men can constitute political relations... If political relations are to lose all resemblance to slavery, free women and men must willingly agree to uphold the social conditions of their autonomy. That is to say, they must agree to uphold limits. Freedom requires order and order requires limits.⁴²

But what limits? Pateman proceeds to complain, somewhat incongruently, that individual freedom is unconstrained in modern civil society, while order is maintained through mastery and obedience. "If men's mastery is to be replaced by the mutual autonomy of women and men, individual freedom must be limited by the structure of social relations in which freedom inheres."⁴³

Is this an accurate reading of the social relations between women and men in our time? And if we agree with Pateman, that men still absolutely dominate women, how are we going to work for "the social relations in which freedom inheres?" It would seem that Sharon N. Snowiss' review of *The Sexual Contract* is fair. To quote:

The scope and sweep of the work is ambitious. In focusing on the sexual contract as the most basic relationship, underlying all other structure in modern society, she risks using the concept metaphorically and superficially. The value of the simplification is that it starkly points out one critical perspective that needs to be examined in analyzing these relationships. But if used too extensively, it destroys experiential attempts to alter sexual relationships from this category of primal dominance. Can the first contract ever be dissolved?⁴⁴

⁴¹ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, chapter 7.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 232

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 232.

⁴⁴ Sharon N. Snowiss, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 84, No.1 (March, 1990), 272-274.

As for concrete actions, Pateman is cautious. "To retrieve the story of sexual contract does not, in itself, provide a political programme or offer any short cuts in the hard tasks of deciding what, in any given circumstances, are the best courses of action and policies for feminists to follow, or when and how feminists should form alliances with other political movements. Once the story has been told, however, a new perspective is available from which to assess political possibilities and to judge whether this path or that will aid or hinder (or both) the creation of a free society and the creation of sexual differences as diverse expressions of freedom."⁴⁵

Okin is much more concrete in her proposal. The end of the road is humanist justice and it entails dramatic changes in the lives of men and women and the society as well. To quote:

I shall argue here that any just and fair solution to the urgent problem of women's and children's vulnerability must encourage and facilitate the equal sharing of men and women of paid and unpaid work, of productive and reproductive labor. We must work toward a future in which all will be likely to choose this mode of life. A just future would be one without gender. In its social structures and practices, one's sex would have no more relevance than one's eye color or the length of one's toes....⁴⁶

Okin's stipulations go on. They need not be things that have not been heard before; yet they will still make for a revolutionary restructuring of our contemporary society.

Nussbaum ends up with plea for new liberal alternative. Referring to the challenges to liberalism, she has this to say: "But the failure to have a fully satisfactory solution to these difficulties is not a failure of liberal justice, because the liberal is right. Self-definition is important, and it is also important to end wrongful tyranny. The tension that results from these twin principles is at heart of liberalism, but it is a valuable and fruitful tension, not one that shows confusion or moral failure... This effort would do well to begin by imagining and studying the many ways in which groups of people of many different types have managed, in different places at different times, to care for one another and to raise children with both love and justice."⁴⁷

V.

To round up this paper, it remains to attempt a preliminary investigation of the relationship between liberalism and feminist theory, or to be more precise, between Rawlsian liberal justice and the three feminist theorist discussed so sketchily above.

It would seem that two things be said, if it is kept in mind that they are nothing more than an indication. First, it would seem that the three feminist theorist and others like them, have a lingering attachment towards the liberal thinkers, an attachment coming close to a symbiosis relationship. They critique one another, and draw upon

⁴⁵ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 233.

⁴⁶ Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, p. 171.

⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum, *Proceedings and addresses*, p. 68.

one another. Could it be that the strength of liberalism precisely lies in its universal appeal in upholding the dignity and worth of human beings and the ease with which it adapts to the needs of changing time. Thus the feminist theorists find it easy to draw upon liberal ideas, while the liberal thinkers appreciate that they have much to learn from the critique of the feminist theorists if they should opt to expand their horizons.

Secondly, expand their horizon the liberal thinkers must if they are to remain influential, and, in particular, to be effective in the third world countries that are struggling for their survival, dignity and rights. Concretely, the liberal theorists must face up to the challenges of caring for the women and children, especially of the poorer classes, and especially in the countries emerging from colonialism and/or traditional authoritarian rule while committed to justice and rights. The time has long gone that a paternal attitude will suffice. Individual rights and dignity must be recognized.

Moreover, the Western, nuclear family system must be scrutinized carefully if it can meet the needs of a pluralist society of many colors and races and ethnic groups, as both Okin and Nussbaum have argued. New ideas should be encouraged and new experiments made, no matter where they are found. Feminist aspiration for equality between men and women, for choosing their way of life and a form of family to their liking must be taken seriously. Village collectives in India, and communal living in Isreal, as Nussbaum makes clear, have much to teach all of us.