The Politics of Reproduction. Mary O'Brien. *London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. Pp. 240.*

The central themes of this exciting, erudite, and brilliantly-written book are well captured in the following quotation:

> Feminism insists that 'value' is not an exclusively economic category, but an ethical, affective, and genetic one. It...presents and represents a fundamentally different experience of the relation of people and nature than that posed by male dualism. It insists, further, that the principle of integration can form the basis for a political praxis which is rational, humane and far more progressive than any genderically one-sided praxis...can ever be. (p. 166)

The book stands in its own right as one cogent and impressive answer to the frequently (and often antagonistically) posed question: "But what would it be like to do female philosophy?" It might well be like this: bringing philosophical thought into close contact with the actuality of human experience; showing that questions about the principles of knowing, doing, and participating in human institutions are questions that engage whole persons in all aspects of their lives (i.e. not just the intellectual aspect) —and that the answers to these questions matter profoundly; pointing up the limitations of pure intellect separated from the world of action and affectivity. Yet in so doing, as O'Brien amply demonstrates, it need sacrifice none of the standards of rigorous argument and intellectual integrity in which the best of philosophers in general, and political philosophers in particular, have long taken pride. Such standards are preserved and importantly enriched in O'Brien's work: they are neither diluted nor compromised.

In O'Brien's view, it is the recognition of its close connection with the reproductive process which requires us to see value as "ethical, affective and genetic," rather than purely economic. Indeed, reproductive labour stands as the *a priori* condition for the existence of value *per se*. Without it — i.e. without the human beings who are its products — there could be no value, economic, social, aesthetic, or other, O'Brien argues. Nonetheless, in the history of political thought (a domain in which she moves with the ease of an expert), she points out that biological reproduction is usually taken for granted, and so passed over in silence. This is the case, for example, in Marxist thought, where "the labour of reproduction is excluded from analysis, and children seem to appear spontaneously or perhaps magically" (p. 175).

On the rare occasions when reproduction is considered worthy of philosophical attention, on the other hand, the purpose of such consideration may be simply to display the philosopher's contempt for the process in the name of 'higher' value (as when Diotima instructs Socrates on the nature of Eros — p. 130-1); or to assert, as Hannah Arendt does, that the grounds of worthwhile, human public activity "are ontological rather than biological" (p. 100). The *vita activa*, as Arendt sees it, is only genuinely possible for man (in the non-generic sense) when he succeeds in performing his political activities "in a public realm uncontaminated by life process" (p. 101). And de Beauvoir's analysis of reproduction appears to yield the conclusion that "parturition is non-creative labour, [and] that the product, the human child, *has no value*" (p. 75, emphasis in original). This is a curious way indeed, O'Brien maintains, to view the process which has as its product a child who "has a human value simply by virtue of being human, of growing and maturing in all the wonder of nature's most stunning performance" (p. 59).

In fact, she holds that it is not just a curious way: it is deeply pernicious both in itself and in its implications. For in this devaluation of reproduction, O'Brien sees the source of a fundamental human alienation. Hence, the *politics* of reproduction has as its primary aim the overcoming of this alienation, the integration of the alienated.

But in order properly to found a political programme, it is first necessary to understand the origins of the alienation. O'Brien sees these to be in the dualisms which permeate "male-stream thought": dualisms of mind and body, object and subject, theory and practice, reason and emotion, spirit and matter, public and private, universal and particular. These dualisms are not merely descriptive of the structures of human existence. They carry with them normative implications such that the second of each pair stands for a characteristic of lesser value, for the dark and dangerous elements which one must strive to overcome if one would be a good member of society. And, throughout the history of Western thought, the female is, in each case, associated with the lesser of the two characteristics: with the bodily, the subjective, the emotional, the material, the particular, the (unthinkingly) practical, and the private. The productive/reproductive dichotomy reflects this evaluative pattern in such a way that only productive (male) labour is considered to be of worth.

Viewed still more fundamentally, these dualisms have their source in a deep masculine unease about historical continuity, O'Brien maintains. The process of reproduction, by its very nature, imposes a temporal gap between sexuality and parturition, for men. They are separated from all stages of the process except copulation: hence the whole of human history is shot through with masculine efforts to establish continuity, to forge this broken link, to resolve male alienation and feelings of separation from natural process. This manifests itself in the elaboration of complex institutions which provide public structures for the appropriation of children— and hence of the labour (woman's) that goes into their creation. Central among these are marriage and family structures, structures of inheritance, and of patriarchal domination. With these goes the creation of the private realm to which woman is relegated: in part to ensure her isolation from other men. For if she has no association with other men, 'her' man need not fear that his children may not be his own. Continuity will be easier to maintain.

Consigned to the private realm, woman is rendered invisible not only to other men, but also to other women, from whom she might (and now, in the upsurge of feminist thinking, *does*) gather sustenance, both moral and spiritual. Thus removed from the public realm, she is almost invisible to herself; for the value of her labour, both productive and reproductive, is so low as to be virtually imperceptible. And through this deeply divisive public/private dualism, the other above-mentioned dualisms are perpetuated. Man is universal, spiritual, theoretical, public, and moral; woman is, in each case, opposite — and Other. Her very integration with continuity and history is a dark and mysterious threat which must be suppressed, and ultimately denied. "For men, sexuality is the basis of a free appropriation right, a power over women and children. ...The social relations of reproduction are relations of dominance precisely because at the heart of the doctrine of potency lies the intransigent impotency of uncertainty, an impotency which colours and continuously brutalizes the social and political relations in which it is expressed" (p. 191).

O'Brien contends that we are not yet ready to spell out in full what kind of social theory must be developed to set these wrongs to right. But she sees in the feminist perspective a clearer vision, governed by the ideal of a *praxis* wherein there is a unity between knowing and doing, thinking and acting. Such a praxis bears the potential to mediate dialectically between these long-standing dualistic modes of thinking and being, and thus to move toward a progressive integration of human beings both within themselves, and with one another. "Female reproductive consciousness...transcends the isolation of women in their domestic prisons; women grasp the reality of a universal consciousness, the sisterhood of which we already have primitive but profound adumbrations" (p. 208).

The analysis of the problems is a compelling one, and the indications of where we might look for solutions are, on the whole, both persuasive and appealing. I remain troubled by only one problem; but it is, I think, a significant one. I am not persuaded that reproductive labour can bear the full weight of female self-realization. Too much seems to be excluded from its scope. The genuine and valuable creativity, and the need for self-esteem, of the women who do not, whether by choice or by chance, ever produce children, is difficult to place within this domain where reproductive labour is the primary creator of value. So, too, is the life and work of women both before and after (and often also during, but apart from) their child-nurturing activities. In order to have a full integration of persons into a world of cooperative human interaction, we must avoid thinking in terms which make the childless perceive themselves as 'other.' It would be an unhappy solution which would replace old dualisms with new ones: dualisms whose evaluative implications would lead to the devaluation of lives in which reproductive labour has no place.

O'Brien might well respond that we should not strive to universalize; that we are only too familiar with the results of a prolonged struggle to do just that. Piecemeal solutions may be the best we can offer: optimally, they will ultimately converge to form a whole. But if we are not to universalize, we must still make space for those who stand outside the central focus of our new evaluative structures. Their numbers are increasing as effective contraception makes reproductive labour into a matter of genuine, rational choice. We must allow that it can be a good choice, either way.

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A Working Majority. Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong. *Ottawa: The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1983.*

Reproductive Hazards at Work. Nancy Miller Chenier. *Ottawa: The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1982.*

In *A Working Majority*, Pat and Hugh Armstrong's goal is to let women speak for themselves about their working lives. The result is a useful, occasionally depressing, but consistently interesting antidote to the statistical analyses which have so frequently represented women's labour force participation. The authors, working with five researchers, interviewed 65 women who held a wide variety of jobs in five provinces. The jobs these women work are 'women's jobs'—the 'bad' jobs such as waitressing, bank clerking, factory work and so forth and not the prestigious, professional careers that a much publicized minority of women have managed to attain. Although the authors briefly review the general features of women's labour force participation in Canada, it is these interviews (which are extensively excerpted throughout the book) which are used to examine and illustrate the structure of women's work and the nature of the work process.

The resulting book is an extremely comprehensive discussion of a wide variety of work-related issues: hours, unions, job tenure, unemployment, relations with fellow workers, the impact of technology, health hazards, sexual harassment, etc. In each instance, women workers relate their personal experiences. Not only are the issues brought into the realm of 'real life', but also important details are highlighted. For example, in the section, "Unemployment Insurance: 'You have to fight for every cent you get'", women discuss the frustration and humiliation of struggling to maintain their benefits qualification. Under "Health Hazards: 'The whole place is dangerous'", women talk about psychological as well as physical hazards; for example, the single