

Liberal Feminism

Since Alison's Jaggar's influential work in constructing a taxonomy of feminist positions, "liberal feminists" have been taken to support a fundamentally libertarian political agenda based on the assumption that formal equality under the law suffices to eliminate male-female inequality and that additional state-supported programs which serve women's interests, including affirmative action, the provision of child-care, family leave and the like, are unwarranted. In addition, some feminist philosophers suggest that liberal feminists "valorize" masculinity, are indifferent to the devaluation of female-identified work and that one of our fundamental goals is to establish, by a priori methods if necessary, that there are no gender-based psychological differences.

These assumptions are false. In fact, many of us who are liberal feminists to the extent that we believe that women's interests are best served by working toward a state of affairs where the expectations and opportunities for men and women are the same, do not hold these views.

I shall argue that the real fault line between liberal feminists and the majority of feminist philosophers who are unsympathetic to this view marks a divergence in our understanding of the causes of gender inequality and, consequently, disagreement about the priorities of feminist political action.

Male-Female Differences

I recently discovered, to my surprise, that my work was cited as an example of the anti-feminist backlash, in paper by Keith Burgess-Jackson that appeared in

Keith Burgess-Jackson misconstrues my position on two counts. First, he suggests that, ignoring empirical data, I dogmatically assert that there are no innate psychological differences between men and women. Secondly, he assumes that I am a "liberal" who holds that feminist goals should be narrowly focused on "formal equality."

It is crucial to address Burgess-Jackson's concerns because they are symptomatic of an emerging consensus amongst feminist philosophers that those of us who believe that women's interests are best served by working toward a state of affairs where the standards, expectations and opportunities for men and women are the same are committed to a variety of theses and programs that many of us do not in fact support.

In the paper toward which Burgess-Jackson directs his comments, "The Market for Feminist Epistemology," my aim was not to argue that there were no socially or biologically based differences between men and women in the aggregate but rather to address the question of why there was a *market* for the view that there are relatively large, deeply-entrenched, across-the-board psychological differences between men and women rather than the relatively small, statistical differences that empirical evidence suggests. The question is not whether Gilligan and the Mars-Venus literature are correct about male-female differences but why they *sell*.

As a philosopher I am not in the business of collecting or assessing empirical data however I think it is highly likely that there are statistical differences between males and females when it comes to a variety of aptitudes and other psychological characteristics, and that some of these differences are biologically based. However all the literature of which I am aware suggests that these differences are differences in the aggregate rather than individual differences and that they are relatively small. For example, the Association for Women in Mathematics some years ago conducted a massive, global survey of differences in mathematical performance between men and women. Not surprisingly, males do better in the aggregate, but not very much better: the curves overlap substantially. There is much less difference in male-female mathematical performance in the aggregate than there is in, e.g. in height between Japanese and Swedish populations.

This distinction between statistical differences amongst populations and individual differences is one that the general public finds it hard to grasp. One would have thought Burgess-Jackson could have done better but he fudges: while he alludes to empirical evidence supporting claims about male-female differences, he does not distinguish between statistical and individual differences or produce any data about the pervasiveness or magnitude of those that exist. Nevertheless, he feels confident in concluding that, given gender-based psychological differences, holding women to “male” standards would put the overwhelming majority of women at a disadvantage.

What if Baber’s factual premise is false” That is to say, what if evolutionary psychology is correct in its assertion that there are, as well as in its explanation of why there are, sex-based differences? Then applying a single (male) standard to all women works to the disadvantage of most of them! By expecting women to conform to the norms of the male workplace, Baber ensures, perversely, that many or most of them will fail. Those who do not fail may be miserable or frustrated in their success, since they have had to become something, or pretend to be something, that they are not. To be sure some women may succeed in this environment, but these will be the exceptional (male-identified, male-biographed) women.¹

Burgess-Jackson’s argument is reminiscent of J. R. Lucas’ in “Because You Are A Women” which was effectively skewered by Susan Haack 30 years ago:

The would-be female Stakhanovite is penalized by the law forbidding firms to employ female labour for sixty hours a week, just as the youthful entrepreneur is handicapped by his legal incapacity, as a minor, to pledge his credit except for the necessities of life, and the skilled racing motorist by the law forbidding him to drive, however safely, at more than 70 miles per hour. In each case the justification is the same: the restriction imposed on the individual, although real and burdensome, is not so severe as to outweigh the benefits that are likely to accrue in the long run to women in general, or to minors, or to motorists. It is in the nature of

¹ Burgess-Jackson, p. 28

political society that we forgo some freedoms in order that either we ourselves or other people can secure some good. All we can in general demand is that our sacrifices should not be fruitless, and that if we give up some liberty or immunity it is at least arguable that it will be on balance for the best.²

In principle we should indeed be willing to trade off some degree of individual liberty for the greater social good and if it were the case that male-female differences were so significant or pervasive that assessing women according to “male” standards were detrimental to the interests of most women: if this were so, the costs of adopting a single standard to women as a group *might* outweigh the benefits. The benefits to the great number of women who could not cut the mustard according to “male” standards or did not want to might then outweigh the costs to the few exceptional “male-identified” women who found *la difference* as such constraining, insulting and oppressive.

But the mere fact that there are some biologically-based, psychological male-female differences or other in the aggregate does not support this conclusion. If those male-female differences that are either innate or locked in by early development are relatively small differences between men and women in the aggregate then it seems more likely that the costs of promoting doctrines about male-female difference and establishing separate but equal standards and expectations for men and women likely outweigh the benefits.

In any case the interesting question for feminists is not whether or not there are biologically-based psychological sex differences but the extent to which differences in the social, professional and economic status of men and women track these differences and the extent to which they far exceed them.

When I wrote “The Market for Feminist Epistemology,” women represented 44% of the engineering profession in what was then the Soviet Union. In the US, by contrast, only 7% of engineers were female. Looking at this data feminists like myself are not concerned so much about the 7 point difference between the percentage of women in engineering and in the population at large represented by the figures for the former Soviet Union as by the 37 point discrepancy in the percentage of women in engineering between the US and the former Soviet Union. The AWM statistics on mathematical performance predict something closer to the 7 point discrepancy in the former Soviet Union than the 86 point difference in the US.

This should be the talking point for feminists. Assuming that there no gross racial differences between the largely Slavic population of the former Soviet Union and the Anglo-Saxon-Irish-German-Italian-Jewish-African-American-Hispanic-Asian-everything-else population of the United States that would account for the striking difference, this discrepancy suggests that a great many girls in the US who could be engineers and might want to be engineers are being discouraged or side-tracked somewhere in the educational process. And that is not only bad for girls—it is bad for the US, which could use more engineers, and fewer lawyers, generically qualified humanities majors and philosophy professors like myself.

² J. R. Lucas, “Because You Are A Woman”

More generally, economists note that only approximately half of the male-female wage gap is explained by merit factors, training, labor force attachment and the like. It may well be that there are innate biologically based differences in male-female aptitudes, in ambition and in preferences when it comes to allocating time and effort between career and family concerns. But what feminists like me worry about is not primarily the 50% of the wage gap that is explicable in terms of these differences but the 50% that *is not* and which, as far as we can see, is a consequence of discrimination.

My aim, and the aim of other “liberal feminists” like myself, is not to prove in the teeth of all empirical evidence, that there are no biologically-based psychological differences between men and women—that is an empirical question and so not the business of philosophers—but to ask whether such differences as there are account for discrepancies in power, in prestige and in the roles that men and women play. It seems clear that they do not. Cross-cultural differences suggest that a good deal of the difference in male-female roles is not a consequence of either innate differences or universal differences in early development. There are proportionately more women in high political office in most affluent western nations than there are in the US. There is a large discrepancy in male-female literacy rates in developing countries that does not exist in western industrialized countries, including the US. All this suggests that at least some statistical male-female differences are a consequence of discrimination and other factors that put women at an unfair disadvantage—and this is what feminists aim to fix.

In addition, even holding cultural and geographical factors constant, the status of women throughout the world had changed radically during the past 40 years, a very short period in human time. In the US and other affluent western nations women in unanticipated numbers have entered the professions. Throughout the world, the economic emergence of women is a salient economic fact.³ In light of this history, Burgess-Jackson’s suggestion that only a few exceptional “male-identified” women could or would want to succeed in the “male workplace” is seems to be falsified by plain, obvious empirical data.

Finally, quite apart from these empirical issues however there is the theoretical question: suppose it were the case that by “male” standards the majority of women would not measure up. Bien pensants like Burgess-Jackson suggest that if this were the case the feminist response should be to question, or reject, the standards. This suggestion is both naïve and patronizing. It is naïve because it overlooks the extent to which most women and members of disadvantaged minorities as a matter of fact simply want the options that white males have--access to the jobs, professional opportunities, wages, mortgages and car loans that white males get as a matter of course—and the extent to which they are blocked from getting these goods.

³ Moreover, the literature suggests that when women occupy roles comparable to their male counterparts they behave in much the way that their male counterparts do. Tavis, for example, cites empirical evidence suggesting that allegedly feminine “communications styles” are the styles that subordinates adopt in dealing with superiors—when women are in positions of power, which few women manage to get, they communicate in “masculine” ways.

It is patronizing because, if it turns out that fewer women—or members of any other disadvantaged group—are not up to snuff according to accepted standards we do not need to be comforted by being assured that the standards are inherently biased or that everyone is beautiful in their own way. If, statistically, we are defective so be it. There may be legitimate reasons to question these standards but the failure of women or members of other disadvantaged groups to meet them is not one of them. We are not competing in the Special Olympics where everyone gets a hug and a medal and we do not want to work in sheltered workshops where the standards are set to accommodate employees' deficiencies.

In any case, feminist philosophy is philosophy and, as such, has nothing to say about empirical questions concerning the aptitudes, character traits or preferences of men and women. The aim is rather to address normative questions about how men and women ought to behave and be treated.

Liberal Feminism

Since Alison Jaggar set the agenda, feminist philosophers have been taught to classify feminists as “liberal,” “socialist” or “radical” and to construe “liberalism” as what most Americans would call “libertarianism.” Liberal feminists, on this account, regard the goal of feminism as the achievement of “formal equality” under the law. If, given formal equality, women remain disadvantaged, so be it.

This is not the view of feminists and who are liberal in the loose and popular political sense, like myself. Loose, popular liberals like me recognize that formal equality does little to redress the inequities of ingrained habits and unjust institutions. In spite of formal equality women and minorities still face gross discrimination in hiring and promotion, blacks and other members of minority groups still find it difficult to get home mortgages and favorable rates on car loans, and all of us who are not rich, young, white, Anglo-Saxon males are disadvantaged in a variety of ways. We liberals recognize that the market, which is not perfectly efficient will not fix these inequities. Many of us believe that the most effective way to ameliorate the inequitable distribution of options is through massive state intervention—through establishment and enforcement of affirmative action policies, including hard quotas, and through the provision of a variety of benefits, including state-provided childcare, to level the male-female playing field. The benefits of “formal equality,” we believe, are negligible because the paucity of realistic options available to women is not a result of legal restrictions but rather a consequence of traditions and social habits, entrenched assumptions and established institutions that lock in male-female inequality.

Moreover we liberals in the loose and popular sense are not committed to any particular theory of human nature. Those of us who, like myself, are Preference Utilitarians, do not believe that “autonomy” whatever that comes to, is a virtue or that there is any shortlist of character traits or capacities that make one a worthwhile person much less individual who is “fully human.” We are not in the business of assessing the “value” of persons whatever that might come to. We believe that preference-satisfaction, and that alone, is intrinsically good and that, when it comes to social policy, what is important is seeing to

it that people have the greatest possible number of options so that they have the best chance of getting what they want. Insofar as we are interested in fairness we aim to see to it that people are equally good positions to get what they want. We have no views about what people should want, or whether men and women should want the same thing: all that matters about wants is that they be satisfied.

This provides us with what I believe is the most compelling motivation possible for feminism. Pace Freud, there is no deep mystery about what women want: women want a variety of things and different women want different things. The problem is that most women have a worse chance of getting the things they want than their male counterparts do, and that to the extent that they get what they want, often have to pay a higher price. This provides an excellent motive for feminism: sex roles, and conventional expectations about women's behavior, aptitudes and goals, restrict women's options and so undermine preference satisfaction.

Sex roles restrict men's options too insofar as traditional women's roles are unavailable or inordinately costly for men. But they do not restrict men's options to the extent that they restrict women's options: in general, men have more options than women do and the options they have are more desirable. Men, for example, have a greater variety of job options than do women, the majority of whom still occupy a narrow range of female-identified occupations, and "men's jobs" are generally better paid than "women's jobs." That is why those of us who object to the restriction of options on the basis of sex call ourselves "feminists" rather than "humanists": while these restrictions are bad for everyone, they are especially bad for women. The goal of feminists is to fix this.

Why *la difference* sells: the innocuousness of radicalism

During the past 50 years we have discovered that there are psychological differences between men and women that are likely innate. These results were hardly surprising. We have also discovered that men and women are much more similar in most respects than we thought and that, when given the chance, women are willing and able to do jobs that no one imagined women could or would do. To most people that was very surprising.

Nevertheless, it is the small, predictable differences that seem to fascinate most Americans rather than the surprising similarities. Women, as well as men, *like* the idea that men and women "think differently." The original question remains: why do people *like* the idea of that men and women "think differently"? Why is it a story that many women, in particular most who regard themselves as feminists, want to hear again and again?

In my original paper I suggested that it was because the doctrine provided some short-term advantages for women who were able to exploit it. As I noted there, feminists have employed different and competing strategies to achieve their ends. Historically, most have argued that women were more similar to men than was believed, that they were both capable and desirous of occupying the roles traditionally reserved for men, and that social, political and economic bars to their occupying these roles were unfair. Other feminists however sought to improve the status of women by proclaiming the value of

“feminine” virtues and character traits and by constructing a separate but equal sphere for women.

Where sex roles are entrenched, the latter strategy may be politic because it is a fundamentally conservative strategy that can produce minimally decent results without challenging deeply held convictions or undermining established social institutions.

Liberal feminists are socially disruptive: they challenge traditional views about masculinity and femininity, cite the difference in roles that men and women play in the household, the workplace and in public life as evidence of unfair treatment and agitate for remedies that employers and others regard as intrusive and burdensome. Radical feminists are socially innocuous. They do not challenge conventional views about gender or the sexual division of labor. They rehearse the familiar doctrine that men and women are different but equal.

The new presbyter is the old priest writ large: Keith Burgess-Jackson’s worries about the failure of all but a few exceptional women to cope with “male” standards is reminiscent of J. R. Lucas’ concern that apart from “Miss Amazon” most women will be disadvantaged if they are expected to perform as men do. Rhetoric about the value of care, women’s way of knowing and the like sound strangely like those paens to domesticity that were popular during the darkest days of the feminine mystique: “You’re not *just a housewife!* You’re a chef, a chauffeur, a psychologist, an interior decorator...”

Extolling feminine virtue soothes social conservatives and flatters women but it comes at a price. When a group of female employees sued Sears for sex discrimination—for denying them opportunities for promotion and excluding them from commissioned sales positions—“feminist” psychologists gave expert testimony supporting the Sears’ claim that women were not promoted because they were more committed to domestic concerns than professional advancement, that women preferred lower fixed wages to the uncertainty of selling big-ticket items on commission because they were risk-averse and, in general, that the differences in the roles men and women played within the firm were a result of self-selection and merit factors rather than discrimination. Sears won its case.

“Radical feminists” hardly noticed, Nor did they take account of subsequent class action suits against the Lucky grocery chain, Home Depot and Walmart alleging sex discrimination. While radical feminists promoted *la difference* in politically correct packaging, affirmative action was dismantled and funding for welfare and other social programs that benefited poor women and children was slashed and sex segregation in blue-collar occupations remained almost complete.

It would be unfair to criticize “feminist philosophers” for engaging in cloistered scholarship rather than political action but one would expect that what purports to be “feminist scholarship” would address the practical concerns that have historically motivated most feminists—sex segregation in the labor force, wage gaps, and exclusion of women from positions of political and economic power, stereotypes, expectations and customs that burden women and all the constraints that restrict women’s options and impede preference-satisfaction. Philosophers who do medical ethics discuss the allocation

of scarce medical resources and other issues with which doctors and nurses deal even if they do not deal with patients or even sit on hospital ethics committees and their theoretical work, one would hope, medical personnel do their jobs. Philosophers of science discuss issues that concern scientists even if they never see a lab and philosophers of religion discuss arguments for the existence of God, the coherence of post-mortem survival and other questions that are of interest to religious believers even if they themselves are not theists. By contrast, philosophers who do “feminist philosophy” for most part seem to neglect the issues concerning women’s participation in public life and in the labor force, which historically have been the primary concern of feminists.

Burgess-Jackson, claims to find it “fascinating as well as interesting” that I consider myself a feminist. “How could a feminist have such disparaging things to say about feminist philosophy and feminist epistemology?” The answer is quite simple: feminist philosophy has not delivered the goods. Worse, it has diverted feminists from pursuing important feminist goals and in some cases it has set them back. These seem to me to be very good reasons why feminists should worry about the direction that “feminist philosophy” has taken in the name of “radicalism”: feminist philosophy “leaves everything as it is.”

What is the difference?

I have suggested that the critique of liberal feminism that has become standard within feminist philosophy is unwarranted and, more fundamentally, that the current taxonomy of feminist positions which distinguishes “liberal feminism” from “radical feminism,” “socialist feminism,” “post-colonialist feminism” and the like is misleading. There is however an important difference to be marked between the concerns of most liberal feminists and the majority of philosophers who regard themselves as feminists. I suggest that this difference concerns what we take to be the fundamental causes of gender inequality and, consequently, what we believe the priorities should be when it comes to fixing it.

We all recognize that gender inequality is multi-dimensional: it concerns women’s role in the home and in the labor force, relations between men and women, sexuality, social customs, and a variety of norms men and women have “internalized.” Historically however feminists have been concerned primarily about women’s exclusion from public and professional life, about sex segregation in the labor force and a variety of economic inequities. Currently these are the issues that concern a great many women who are “not feminists but...” For the past 30 years however most feminist philosophers have increasingly focused on issues concerning male-female relationships and sexuality.

There is no doubt that these issues are inextricably interrelated: because women are disadvantaged in the labor market, and because of the persistence of wage gaps, they have fewer bargaining chips in the home and in personal male-female relationships; because they are subordinate to men in personal relationships, they are subordinate to men in business and professional contexts. Male-female inequality is multi-dimensional: it concerns the role of women in the home and in the labor force, social customs and norms, sexuality, the structure of the family and a range of other issues. The causal

relations between the assumptions and practices that disadvantage women go every which way.

Nevertheless, we can still ask which issues are relatively more fundamental and where we should invest most heavily to fix male-female inequality. It seems that over the past three decades feminist philosophers by and large have focused increasingly on issues concerning sexuality and male-female relations and that these are the issues in which feminist activists have chosen to invest most heavily. In the US, for example, abortion which is at least in the extended sense a sexuality concern, is the signature feminist issue. In addition, feminist philosophers have become increasingly interested in responding to the devaluation of female-identified activities and concerns including the caring work that women do in the home and in the workplace.

Discrimination in employment gets less notice and most feminists do not appear to have taken much interest in important class action suits alleging gender discrimination by Walmart and other firms. For most Americans affirmative action has become a dirty word but feminist activists do not seem to be doing much to change that and feminist philosophers seem remarkably unconcerned about the issue. In spite of the visibility of a few women in high political office and the growing participation of women in politics at the local level, there are proportionately fewer women in US House of Representatives and Senate than there are in comparable national legislative bodies elsewhere in the developed world. While all feminists recognize that the position of women in public life and in the labor force is a matter of concern, de facto it appears that most feminists do not regard these issues as their priority.

It is a matter for conjecture why this is so. I believe that, in part, the focus of feminists in the US on sexuality issues and male-female relationships is a consequence of the origins of the feminist second wave here in the counterculture of the late 1960s, where the position of women was, notoriously, "prone." In part, it is because of Americans' preoccupation with psychological concerns and relationships, a concern with sexuality in reaction to a deeply seated tradition of Puritanism, and perhaps most importantly our aversion to government interference and social engineering.

Sexuality issues, including reproductive rights, and male-female relationships are of course important. It is also important to see to it that women in female-identified occupations are respected and adequately compensated, and to affirm the value of women's "caring" work in the home and the labor force. The question is how important they are relative to other feminist concerns and perhaps more significantly whether these are the concerns in which feminists should be most heavily invested.

Consider, for example, the low wages and poor working conditions that women in many female-identified occupations face. A number of reasons have been suggested to explain why these occupations are poorly paid relative to male-identified occupations which require comparable training, skills and responsibilities. It may be that care-giving jobs are underpaid because we do not place a high value on the caring work that women do or it may be that, as economists suggest, overcrowding in care-giving occupations depresses wages. It seems likely that both overcrowding, which is a consequence of discriminatory

hiring practices that exclude women from a wide range of other occupations, and our tendency to undervalue women's care-giving work figure in the explanation.

However when it comes to the practical business working to see to it that women in these occupations get better pay and working conditions feminists need to decide how to allocate their resources. Should our priority be to persuade employers and the general public that caring work is important or valuable or should we concentrate on alleviating the overcrowding in female-identified care-giving occupations by working to eliminate discriminatory practices that limit women's participation in other occupations?

Empirical considerations suggest that the latter course is more effective. Years of feminist work and popular literature affirming the value of nurturance and care do not seem to have done anything to boost the wages of women in unskilled care-giving occupations. By contrast, the current shortage of registered nurses has boosted wages for members of that female-identified care-giving profession.

It is easy to see what has happened. Crudely, if you've got what it takes to be a nurse, you've got what it takes to be a biologist, a chemist, a dentist, a veterinarian or doctor—professions in which women are now welcome. A great many women who, thirty years ago might have become nurses train for these jobs instead. If you don't have what it takes, and you are female, your options are severely limited. For women without college degrees or special training it is difficult or impossible to get most of the jobs that comparably unqualified males can get.

Now it may be that women have a biologically-based or socially conditioned taste for care-giving that results in their preferring childcare, elder care and social work to truck driving, construction work or house painting. Even so we can still ask how much women are prepared to pay to satisfy that preference. Quite a few undergraduates would rather be poets or professional surfers than accountants, but bite the bullet and get business degrees because they are not willing to pay the price to satisfy their *ceteris paribus* occupational preferences. It seems unlikely that women crowd into poorly paid, unskilled care-giving occupations because they are willing to pay the price to satisfy their tastes for care-giving work, and more likely that they take these jobs because little else is available. It rarely even occurs to working class women to apply for unskilled male-identified jobs because they know that they will not even be taken seriously if they apply.

If the overcrowding hypothesis is correct, then the most effective way to improve wages and working conditions for women in female-identified occupations is to see to it that they have ready access to male-identified occupations as well. Consequently, feminists who believe that all or most women would, *ceteris paribus*, prefer to work in female-identified occupations as well as those of us who believe that a great many women would prefer to avoid the sort of work which women have traditionally done have reason to make the elimination of discriminatory hiring practices their priority. Eliminating these practices not only opens up non-traditional jobs to women who want them: it gives women who prefer to remain in female-identified occupations the bargaining chips to negotiate for higher wages and better working conditions.

Similarly, improving the economic status of women in the labor force provides women with bargaining chips to negotiate for more favorable positions in the home, and in their relationships with men. It may be that the subservient role many women play in the household and, more broadly, in heterosexual relationships is a consequence of low self-esteem and internalized social norms or it may be that it is a result of women's relatively poor options outside the home which put them in a weak position vis-à-vis their families and male partners. It seems likely that both factors are at work. Nevertheless, the question of how feminists should proceed here is open: should our priority be to improve male-female relationships and boost women's self-esteem or should it be to improve the status of women outside the home by eliminating sex-segregation in the labor force and wage gaps?

Again, empirical considerations seem to suggest that the latter course is preferable. It is not clear what feminists could do to boost women's self-esteem or improve male-female relationships. The massive body of self-help literature that has emerged during the past 20 years does not seem to have made women in the aggregate more assertive or self-confident, or less worried, guilty and depressed, and it does not seem to have improved male-female relationships. On the other hand it is easy to see what feminists can do to improve the situation of women in the labor force and in public life—even if it is not easy to do. We can work politically to promote the enforcement of anti-discrimination regulations and the implementation of affirmative action programs. We can support programs that encourage girls to enter the professions, in particular the sciences and other areas where women are underrepresented. We can vote for women. In short, we can do all the things that “liberal feminists” have traditionally done which, within the past 150 years have opened the professions to women, enfranchised them and radically changed their role within the household and in public life.

Here I think is the difference between “liberal feminism,” which is now regarded as heterodox feminism at best, and the current feminist mainstream. Heterodox feminists believe that the most effective way to address gender inequality is by fixing the labor market for women—seeing to it that girls have the same opportunities for education and professional training as men, that discrimination in the labor force is eliminated and that the male-female wage gap disappears—and by making child care and other support services which women have traditionally provided for men available to women so that women can function as men traditionally have in the world of work. The most radically heterodox of us, like myself, believe that personal and domestic concerns—sexuality issues broadly construed, the character of male-female relationships and the role of women in the family are less important and, in any case that gender inequality in these areas will disappear if the labor market for women is fixed and women achieve equality in business, in the professions and in public life.

This is a radical thesis and I am not concerned to argue for it here but rather to suggest the most fundamental question that feminists should address is whether the root of gender inequality is personal or political—and economic. The easy answer as always is that it is both but for practical purposes that will not do. The resources for social change are finite and our answer to that question will determine how we invest them.

The orthodox critique of “liberal feminism” as the dogmatic denial gender-based psychological differences combined with libertarian political views, which Burgess-Jackson rehearses, evades this question. Empirical questions about psychological differences between men and women are not the business of philosophers and most of us who are “liberal feminists” have no sympathy with libertarian political views. I am not aware of any who believe that “formal equality” suffices to achieve feminist goals.

If orthodox feminists wish to provide a useful critique of heterodox feminism I suggest that they address the questions that I have posed about the sources of gender inequality and the most effective ways to fix it.