

of women would be necessary. Jay's work seems especially relevant to Foucault's analysis of the powers operating within discourse to control, refine, and supervise the production and circulation of discourse, techniques that ensure the predictability and on-going cohesion of discourses. Binary polarization remains one of the major theoretical methods by which certain kinds of power relations – especially those governing relations of oppression – are represented and rationalized.

Jay's paper provides as clear, concise, and convincing an analysis of the ways in which the binary structure pervades our conceptual categories as I have seen. Above all, she makes explicit the ways in which it has functioned to define the sexes according to patriarchal norms by providing a naturalistic or self-evident justification for women's (conceptual, social, sexual) subordination. In this sense, her paper provides a powerful critical tool in feminist displacements and re-writings of patriarchal knowledges.

A Reader in Feminist Knowledge
ed S. Grew, Routledge 1991

GENDER AND DICHOTOMY

Nancy Jay

The social conditions and consequences of the radical use of logical dichotomy are generally neglected by logicians and sociologists alike. Logicians, no doubt, can safely ignore them, but social theorists do so at their own risk. This paper examines some ways in which logical dichotomy and radical gender distinctions are associated, some consequences of conceiving of gender distinctions as formally dichotomous, and some reasons why it is in the interest of certain social groups to understand gender distinctions in that way. The point of departure will be an examination of Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. This book serves as a model of how one may begin to understand relations between intellectual concepts and social distinctions. It also serves as a cautionary tale, for Durkheim's uncritical use of dichotomy can be shown to create certain problems, among them that he wrote a brilliant sociology of knowledge, which if followed closely, leads directly to the conclusion that women are unable to think.

One of Durkheim's major interests in primitive religions was as material for a theory of knowledge. He wanted to find the origin of those essential ideas which 'philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of the understanding: ideas of time, space, class, number, cause, substance . . . etc.' These concepts 'are like the solid frame which encloses all thought: this does not seem to be able to liberate itself from them without destroying itself, for it seems that we cannot think of objects that are not in time and space, which have no number, etc.'¹

Empiricist thinkers, Durkheim claimed, who must derive everything in consciousness from the individual's sense impressions, are unable to account for the origin of these categories; and idealist thinkers account for them only by claiming they are given, *a priori*, in the nature of the mind. Durkheim proposed to find a source that has empirical reality for the categories in society itself, through religion. The categories, he said, 'are born in religion and of religion: they are a product of religious thought.'²

Durkheim chose to study Australian religion because it was well described, and at the time was universally believed to be a truly primitive

or 'elementary' religion. He claimed that Australian men, in performing rituals, represent their own society to themselves, thus making aspects of their society available to consciousness as concepts. This representation and conceptualization in turn reinforces and actually creates and recreates the social structure as represented in ritual. It is in these 'collective representations' that the categories originated. For example, the category of class grew out of totemic rituals symbolizing the clan and phratry divisions of society. Ritual is the medium that, by symbolizing these social divisions, transforms them into concepts, and in so doing reciprocally creates them. 'It is the phratries which have served as classes and the clans as species. It is because men were organized that they were able to organize things.'³

It is only through ritual representation that the categories first arise in consciousness. Furthermore, ritual is essential not merely to give birth to the categories, but also to maintain them, so that society can continue to conceptualize itself and the world. This is an essential function that religion performs, and a reason for its continued existence. A secular society is only possible when science and philosophy are sufficiently developed so as to take over the cognitive work originally accomplished only in ritual action.

This sociology of knowledge, this recognition of religion as not only a way of knowing, but as originally *the* way of conceptual knowing, is tied to a truly dichotomous understanding of religion. Durkheim both defines and identifies religion by reference to the radical separation of, the total opposition between, the sacred and the profane. 'This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive characteristic of religious thought.'⁴

Durkheim found a social origin for this split between sacred and profane, but it is a strangely vague and subjective one, unlike those 'with empirical reality' that he found for the categories. We are somehow aware of purely moral forces in society:

But the sentiments which they inspire in us differ in nature from those we have for simple visible objects. . . . Consequently, we get the impression that we are in relations with two distinct sorts of reality and that a sharply drawn line of demarcation separates them from each other: on the one hand is the world of profane things, on the other that of sacred things.⁵

We can certainly make that distinction in reflection, but it is difficult to find there the same kind of dichotomy that Durkheim did. Even Durkheim found it hard to identify the character of the sacred more precisely. He tried to specify the features that distinguished it from the profane, and having ruled out a number of possibilities, concluded:

'There is nothing left with which to characterize the sacred in relation to the profane except their heterogeneity', the opposition itself which is made between them.

However, this heterogeneity is sufficient to characterize this classification of things and to distinguish it from all others, because it is very particular: *it is absolute*. In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition of good and bad is nothing beside this: For the good and the bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common.⁶

The sacred possesses no objective features that necessarily distinguish it from the profane; on the contrary, mere proximity with the profane destroys the distinction. The dichotomy is only maintained by constant effort (like the urgency in parts of the Old Testament about keeping 'the difference between' the clean and the unclean). But Durkheim does not ask why this should be so. He offers no functional analysis for the sacred/profane dichotomy; he never asks what it is for. Unlike other aspects of religion that he did take as fully problematic, it does not serve as one of the sources of the categories of understanding.

Following Durkheim, the radical separation of the sacred and profane leads directly and necessarily to a radical separation of women and men in religious life. Because women are profane in relation to men, they are, according to Durkheim, excluded from all rituals, even from knowledge about them.⁷ In fact, women are not supposed to know *any* of the process by which conceptual thought is formed. Over and over he refers to their exclusion.⁸ For Durkheim, the exclusion of women even provides an identifying sign to distinguish truly religious practices from those that are mere magic. Religion performs its essential function - of establishing conceptual thought - for men only. If it serves women, Durkheim never shows how.

We can understand why Durkheim himself was not troubled by the anomaly of the thinking woman from convictions he expressed in his earlier work, *The Division of Labor in Society*: 'The two great functions of psychic life are . . . dissociated . . . one of the sexes [female] takes care of the affective functions and the other of intellectual functions.'⁹ But this explanation is troublesome, for according to Durkheim, the dissociation grows with the progress of civilization.

The woman of past days was not at all the weak creature that she has become with the progress of morality. . . . Dr Lebon has been able to establish directly and with mathematical precision this original resemblance of the two sexes in regard to the pre-eminent organ of physical and psychic life, the brain. By comparing a large number of crania chosen from different races and different societies, he has come to the following conclusion: 'The volume of the crania of man and woman, even when we compare subjects of equal age, of equal height and equal weight, show considerable differences in favor of the man, and this inequality grows proportionally with civilization, so that from the point of view of the mass of the brain, and correspondingly of intelligence, woman tends more and more to be differentiated from the male sex. The difference which exists, for example, between the average cranium of Parisian men and women is almost doubled that observed between male and female of ancient Egypt.'¹⁰

But this only explains why women no longer think, not why they were originally able to do so.

If the capacity for conceptual thought is not inherent in human beings, but is acquired only through participation in a process that specifically excludes women, how does it come about that women can think? There is no way whatsoever, based strictly on Durkheim's analysis, to answer this question. The question only arises when someone says, but they *can* think. Similarly, the tendency of certain forms of religion to split the world into good, right, male, light, spirit, and so forth, and evil, left, female, dark, flesh, and so forth becomes problematic only when it is observed that women are not more evil, mortal, dark, or left-handed than men. But Durkheim took sexist, dualist religion utterly for granted (and, as we shall see, even created his own brand of dualist religion in his sacred/profane dichotomy). Had he wanted to question it, his own method would have allowed him to do so easily, and in the same process to provide a functional explanation for his sacred/profane dichotomy, and also to account for women's ability to think.

Suppose he had set out to account for the origin, not of the categories of understanding, but of something quite similar: the basic laws of formal logical thought.¹¹ These too were first classically formulated by Aristotle, and (as Durkheim said about the categories) they comprise 'a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life'.¹² Also similar to the categories: 'They are inescapable because any attempt to disregard them reduces our thoughts and words to confusion and gibberish.'¹³

The most basic of these logical rules are three. They are the Principle of Identity (if anything is A, it is A); the Principle of Contradiction (nothing can be both A and Not-A); and the Principle of the Excluded

Middle (anything, and everything, must be *either* A or Not-A). As Durkheim claims for the categories, the origin of these principles cannot be explained by either the empiricist or the idealist. They are not representative of the empirical world: they are principles of order. In the empirical world almost everything is in a process of transition: growing, decaying, ice turning to water, and vice versa. Because these logical laws cannot apply directly to anything in transition, they cannot have their origin in the individual's sense impressions. Similarly, the idealist can account for them only as given, *a priori*, in the nature of the mind. But if we follow Durkheim, and try to account for their origin in society, as represented in religion, we find that he has done almost all the work for us.

In his sacred/profane dichotomy, we find a clear religious representation of these laws. The dichotomy creates, he says,

a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable, into two classes which radically exclude each other. Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate [A]; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first [Not-A].¹⁴

Durkheim believed that the distinction between the sacred and profane is unique: 'In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another.' But this kind of dichotomous distinction is not unique at all; on the contrary, it is the same principle by which logicians have wished to understand every proposition (known and knowable) to be *either* true or not true, one or the other but not both, separated by the excluded middle. In Durkheim's contrast of this discontinuous distinction with that between good and bad, or sickness and health, he is turning to the empirical world, where things are indeed found to be on a continuum and do not fall into rigid either/or distinctions.¹⁵

Between the sacred and the profane, says Durkheim:

There is a break in continuity. . . . Since we picture a sort of logical chasm between the two, the mind irresistibly refuses the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even to be put in contact with each other; for such a promiscuity, or even too direct a contiguity would contradict too violently the dissociation of these ideas in the mind.¹⁶

All that is true of A, Not-A, and the excluded middle, as it is of the sacred and the profane. Durkheim does not use the phrase 'excluded middle', instead he speaks of the need 'to create a sort of vacuum between them'.¹⁷

Now there is, in every society, a dichotomous distinction: that between

male and female. Although this dichotomy need not be phrased in terms of A and Not-A, it is particularly susceptible to such phrasing. In societies through the world, *everyone*, 'known and knowable', is either male or female, one or the other, but not both. Furthermore, there is no third possibility (*tertium non datur*); neither we nor the Australians sort people into female, male, and 'other'. Although biologically sex is a continuum, it is not one socially. A modern transsexual does not move a certain distance along the continuum socially; she or he makes a complete leap from one category into the other.¹⁸

Still following Durkheim, we can say that because society was dichotomously organized, people were able to organize the world dichotomously. This formulation also solves the problem of the woman who can think: in being female and profane, that which must be excluded, and therefore Not-A, women have just as immediate social experience of A/Not-A dichotomy as do men in being male and sacred, that which must be kept pure, A. Thus women have fully adequate access to knowledge of the rules of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle, or, in Durkheim's sense, to the social grounds of the capacity for formal logical thought. This formulation is especially Durkheimian because A/Not-A gender distinction is necessarily a *social* distinction. It cannot arise from biological sex difference. But Durkheim himself could not have made this analysis because he took rigid dichotomous gender distinction for granted, a biological given, and never looked at it sociologically.

Religious dualism certainly exemplifies the process that Durkheim described: formal representation of social distinctions acting reciprocally to recreate those very distinctions. But if this process were sufficient explanation, because all societies make dichotomous gender distinctions, they would all end up making them with comparable rigidity, all religions would be dualist, and all thinkers would rely equally on formal logic. In fact, great variety exists in all these institutions. So here we must part company from Durkheim. Because we no longer hope to find the origin of social institutions by looking back down a linear evolutionary line to the Australians, we are spared many a confusing chicken-or-egg problem. We can simply assert that our social institutions shape our thought, which in turn shapes our society. In these very general terms I want to examine some relations between ways of thinking and ways of making gender distinctions.

Although gender distinctions are regularly dichotomous, they do not always carry out the full implications of formal A/Not-A phrasing. When they *are* so phrased, men and women are conceived of in ways that cannot be a consequence only of conceptualization and reinforcement of empirical distinctions between them. Concepts of femaleness and maleness come into being that have nothing whatever to do with human

sexual differences, but follow from the nature of contradictory dichotomy itself. First I shall examine what these concepts are, and then shall suggest why it is in the interest of some social groups to distort human sexual differences in that way.

To begin with, all dichotomous distinctions are not necessarily phrased as A/Not-A. Consider some differences between the phrasings A/B and A/Not-A. A and B are mere contraries, not logical contradictories, and continuity between them may be recognized without shattering the distinction. (Durkheim's good/bad and sickness/health distinctions are A/B distinctions.) Continuity between terms is a logical impossibility for distinctions phrased as contradictories, as A/Not-A. Thus men and women may be conceived as men and not-men, or women and not-women, between which there is logically not continuity, or as two forms (A,B) of the class 'human' which may be supposed to have a good deal in common. Further, in A/B distinctions both terms have positive reality. In A/Not-A dichotomies only one term has positive reality; Not-A is only the privation or absence of A. A/B distinctions are necessarily limited; in themselves they do not encompass C, D, and so forth. But there is nothing about them that necessarily prevents also considering C (a third possibility), and then the distinction becomes A/B/C. In other words, mere contrary distinctions are not eternally tied to dichotomous structure, and *as* dichotomies they are limited in scope. The structure of A/Not-A is such that a third term is impossible: everything and anything must be either A or Not-A. Such distinctions are all-encompassing. They not only cover every possible case of the category (gender, propositions, and so forth) to which they are applied, but they can, and logically *do*, order 'the entire universe, known and knowable'.

This all-encompassing capacity is a consequence of a quality of Not-A called 'the infinitation of the negative'. As John Dewey has written, 'If, say, "virtue" be assigned to A as its meaning, then Not-A includes not only vice, but triangles, horseraces, symphonies, and the precession of the equinoxes.'¹⁹ The infinitation of the negative, and the consequent lack of internal boundaries in Not-A, is the logical structure behind the 'contagion' of pollution. For example, the notion in the Levitical law that a man who touches a menstruating woman, or anything directly in contact with her, becomes unclean himself. Only the excluded middle, the essential empty space between A and Not-A (the 'difference' that must be kept between the clean and the unclean), holds the chaos of Not-A at bay. Whatever is contiguous with Not-A is necessarily Not-A itself.

The infinitation of the negative can also be used very differently. It is why theologians sometimes like to 'define' God negatively (the *via negativa*): God is not this, and not that. This keeps Him infinite as no other method of definition can do. But this is not what is ordinarily

meant by 'definition'. Except that it is not A, Not-A is wholly undefined and undefinable.

Where gender dichotomy is a form of A/Not-A dichotomy, can we decide who is Not-A and consequently 'tends towards infinitation'? At first glance, societies with dualist religion may seem to put maleness in the infinite, Not-A, position: immortality, spirit, and transcendence are male in such religions. For the Greeks, said Jane Harrison, becoming a man was ceasing to be a woman. Anthropologists are generally agreed that one function of male initiation rites is to separate boys from women and children, to make them not-women. It is claimed that, because in infancy males were physically and experientially part of women, they need an experience of radical separation. Thus societies with strong sex segregation, where young children of both sexes spend their time almost exclusively in the company of women and other children, are the most likely to provide radical separation experiences for boys. It is probably true that, in all societies, men go through a more marked separation experience than do women in the development of gender identity. Girls can go on being women: boys must become something different.²⁰

If we try to interpret men as not-women, tending towards infinitation, all finitude appears compressed into a female, A, side of the dichotomy. But it is nowhere near that simple: dualist religion will not fit this formulation. In dualist religion, the *female* side is regularly phrased as Not-A, and therefore tends towards infinitation: impurity, irrationality, disorder, chaos, change, chance (the goddess Fortuna), error, and evil. That which is defined, separated out, isolated from all else, is A and pure. Not-A is necessarily impure, a random catch-all, to which nothing is external except A and the principle of order that separates it from Not-A. Those very Greeks, who seemed to Jane Harrison to see men as not-women, offer the clearest expression of the reverse.

The Pythagorean table of opposites, cited with approval by Aristotle, puts the 'limited' (A) on the male, good, light, right side, and the 'unlimited' on the female, evil, dark, left side. You might expect that this formulation would lead to a reversal of the nature of an infinite God, approached by the *via negativa*, who perhaps would turn out to be female. Not at all, divinity and immortality are still safely male. For example, Plato's *Phaedo* opposes what is 'divine and immortal and intelligible, and uniform and indissoluble and ever constant and true to itself', on a positive, A, side to what is 'human and mortal and manifold and not intelligible and dissoluble and never constant nor true to itself', on a negative, Not-A side.²¹ Eternal, perfect form is opposed to its own negation, privation, or absence. Immortality and divinity are limited, A, because the transitory ways of the flesh, birth and death, growth and decay, are all alike imperfections (the womb-tomb equation). All change falls necessarily into Not-A.

Aristotle thought all dichotomous terms had this structure: the one a positive, the other a mere negative.²² All contraries then become contradictories. If the sexes are distinguished in this way, there can be only one perfect form, which, not surprisingly, is the male. Opposed to it can be only not-male, not form. Consequently, the female 'form' is not really a form at all, but only a deformation of the male. Deformities, privations of form, are unlimited, as is formlessness itself.

This formal logic is behind Aristotle's famous notion of woman as 'misbegotten male', an idea endorsed by patristic and scholastic theologians. A woman, having no positive sexual reality of her own, is only a failure to become a man. Aristotelian embryology claimed that, because all form, like the soul, is in the semen, and only formless matter is contributed by the mother, it is the true nature of all pregnancies to result in boy babies only. If girl babies are born, it is because of some failure in the gestation process, probably the south wind blowing too much, thought Aristotle, or perhaps something else went wrong. (The possibilities of error tend towards infinitation.)

You do not have to move very far from this position to *appear* to be no longer expressing gender distinctions as dichotomous, as for example, in Tennyson's line, 'Woman is the lesser man'. The notion of woman as 'the lesser man' is fairly common. You find it in Freud, for example, with the notion of women as castrated men, 'sexually inferior'. Hidden behind this notion is still the idea of femaleness as only a privation of maleness, of women as deformed or diminished men, lacking positive sexuality of their own.

The suggestion of continuity in the 'lesser man' notion is deceptive for A/Not-A gender distinction is only concealed, not abandoned in such notions. In some societies women may be given diminutive, 'lessened', and therefore feminized, men's names (Henrietta, Jaqueline). The absence of the reverse reveals the hidden dichotomy. Men are almost never given aggrandized or masculinized women's names. (You can imagine some: Annelegrand, Susanissimo; but you will not find them being used.) If women were truly similar to men, but only lesser, men would acceptably be greater women.

Hidden, taken for granted, A/Not-A distinctions are dangerous, and because of their peculiar affinity with gender distinctions, it seems important for feminist theory to be systematic in recognizing them. Sometimes such distinctions are obvious, as in clean/unclean, but more often they are concealed and go unrecognized. Durkheim failed completely to see the A/Not-A structure of his own sacred/profane dichotomy, and among criticisms of it, I know of only one that recognizes that structure. The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, in describing the confusion in the category 'profane', wrote: 'Things so disparate cannot form a class unless a class can be marked by a property, its absence, and its

contrary.²³ What he recognized was the infinitation of the negative and the consequent lack of internal order in Not-A.

Feminist theory can similarly be alert to structural clues revealing unstated A/Not-A gender distinctions. One such clue is the presence of only one positive term, the other being characterized only by privation of that positive, as in the 'lesser man' notion. Evidence of the infinitation of the negative is another clue. The A/B/C distinction 'men/women/children' is harmless, but it is well to be suspicious of the dichotomy 'men/women and children', with its hint of infinitation of the negative, for it may reflect the notion that women and children have in common that they are not-men. In this case, the logically inevitable absence of internal boundaries within Not-A lends powerful support to the notion of women as immature, as infantile in relation to men. This widespread distortion is evident in such disparate cases as ancient Roman law and early psychoanalytic theory. An example is Marie Bonaparte's acceptance of the idea that 'a woman is a man whose development has been arrested, a sort of adolescent to whose organism is subjoined, in a kind of symbiosis, the apparatus of maternity, which is responsible for the check in development'.²⁴

Other clues to hidden A/Not-A distinctions are the threat of chaos (or pollution) if the excluded middle is not maintained, the insistence on rigid either/or distinctions without alternatives (third possibilities). The social dichotomies on which orthodox Puritans understood their social order to rest were not overtly phrased as A/Not-A. At first glance they look like mere contrary distinctions, but they could be understood (and were understood by many New England thinkers) as inseparably part of a single dichotomous system of formal logic that encompassed the entire universe, known and knowable.²⁵ When that dangerous woman, Anne Hutchinson, was banished from Massachusetts in 1638, she was accused of having violated social dichotomies: 'You have stept out of your place, *you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject.*'²⁶ The hidden A/Not-A structure of these dichotomies is indicated by the frightful sexual and social chaos threatened by her actions and beliefs:

The filthie Sinne of the Comunitie of Woemen and all promiscuous and filthie cominge together of men and Woemen without Distinction or relation of Marriage, will necessarily follow. And though I have not herd, nayther do I thinke, you have bine unfaythfull to your Husband in his Marriage Covenant, *yet that will follow upon it . . .* and soe more dayngerous Evells and filthie Unclenes and other sines will followe than you doe now Imagine or conceave.²⁷

It is not only feminist theorists who need to be wary of A/Not-A distinctions. As a fundamental principle of formal logic, the A/Not-A

dichotomy is wonderfully simple and supremely all-encompassing. But it is necessarily distorting when it is applied directly to the empirical world, for there are no negatives there. Everything that exists (including women) exists positively. Dewey has warned of the dangers of giving A/Not-A distinctions direct existential reference:

The notion that propositions are or can be, in and of themselves, such that the principle of the excluded middle directly applies is probably the source of more fallacious reasoning in philosophical discourse and in moral and social inquiry than any other one sort of fallacy.²⁸

This is well illustrated by Durkheim's direct application of his sacred/profane dichotomy to religion. For him, all religion was actually founded on that contradictory dichotomy and anything that did not exhibit that characteristic was not religion. But his dichotomy has not been found by most good ethnographers studying 'primitive' religion. Evans-Pritchard, Nadel, Lienhardt, Goody, Turner, *all* fail to find it.²⁹ This is not surprising. These ethnographers were not concerned with purely formal logical structures found only in the mind, but attended to what real people were doing in the world. From this perspective there is a continual interpenetration of religious and mundane affairs, which are never wholly separable from one another. What Stanner, a fine ethnographer of Australian religion, has written of Durkheim's sacred/profane is also true of A/Not-A gender dichotomy: 'The dichotomy itself is unusable except at the cost of undue interference with the facts of observation. . . . To use the dichotomy is to disregard what is the case.'³⁰

Another illustration of the distorting effects of direct application of A/Not-A can be found in Greek science. In opposing eternal, perfect form to its own privation or absence, some Greek thinkers created a realm of fixed and eternal essences. These perfect and permanent forms were not merely ways of knowing, but were ultimate ontological reality itself: Being. The realm of Being necessarily excluded, by its very nature, all that was changing, contingent, and therefore ontologically imperfect: Non-being (which logically did not have real existence). Science was a process of purification, of separating eternal from transitory, form from matter, essence from accident, order from disorder. But then, because the transitory natural world, as Non-being, had been stripped of all possibilities for order, science could consist only in the definition and classification of the perfect unchanging forms which (from our point of view) it constituted itself. Only Being was a proper subject for science; the material world, and with it all changing individuals of any kind, was ruled out as Non-being.

It is worth noting that the 'eternal' realm of Being has vanished with Greek civilization, while the transitory natural world is still with us. This is because direct applications of A/Not-A to the world are unsupported

by any natural order, but are social creations, and as such require continual work to maintain them. Especially in the case of the direct social applications of A/Not-A distinctions, like gender distinctions, this work is done with deadly seriousness. Ethnographers, even comparatively recent ones such as Lloyd Warner,³¹ claim that if an Australian woman happened to see the rituals of sacred objects that were to be known by men only, she was immediately killed, thus removing the anomaly and keeping the dichotomy intact. Joan of Arc, a woman in armour, muddying up the excluded middle, met a similar fate. Measures taken nowadays are a good deal less extreme; but they still exist, and are still a source of suffering.

One cannot but be struck by the enormous amount of social effort expended, of sustained, co-operative work performed, and of oppression and violence done in the creation and maintenance of such social dichotomies. Is all that effort necessary simply for the creation and maintenance of logical categories? Surely we can tell the sheep from the goats, the quick from the dead, the males from the females, and A from Not-A, without resorting to traditional forms of oppression, both physical and spiritual. A disinterested respect for formal logic is inadequate as a motive for murder. Then what is radical social dichotomy 'really' for?

There are, of course, many ways to answer this question. I want to suggest one answer based on the resistance of formal logic to the understanding and acceptance of change. Within such thinking, because change, natural and social, falls into Not-A it is experienced as disorder, as unintelligible. (Thus modern science and formal logic have long parted company, although formal logic was fully adequate for Greek science, a science specifically uninterested in problems of change.) In this brief exploration of some relations between formal logic and resistance to change, I shall look in turn at social theory, religion, and political ideology. These will be only glimpses, necessarily superficial, but they may suggest another way of thinking about a phenomenon long recognized by feminist theory: the persistent relation between conservatism and rigid gender dichotomy.

Consider first some differences between Durkheim's sociology of religion and that of Max Weber. A central concern of Weber's sociology is the role of religion as a factor in social change. In marked contrast, Durkheim's sociology of religion is not in any way useful for understanding either religious or social change, although it has proved valuable for studying religion as a source of social stability. Both men relied heavily on dichotomous distinctions, but they differed in the kinds of dichotomy they made and in how they used them. As we have seen, Durkheim's theory depended on the use of A/Not-A, not merely as a way of thinking, but also as having direct-existential reference, as accurately

describing real religion. Weber's dichotomies were mere contrary A/B distinctions: otherworldly/innerworldly, asceticism/mysticism, and so forth. In further contrast to Durkheim, Weber did not give these distinctions direct existential reference. They were only ways of thinking about religion, 'ideal types' not real ones, 'theoretically pure', not actually pure, used only to clarify aspects of religious phenomena, not completely or directly to describe them. Weber frequently reminded his readers of this withholding of direct existential reference; for example, of 'priest' versus 'prophet': 'Yet even this distinction, which is clear enough conceptually, is fluid in actuality.'³²

This difference is also evident in their respective attitudes to the problem of definition. (An exhaustive definition is a creation of a dichotomy, an isolation of A as distinct from everything else, which is Not-A.) Both men began the first paragraphs of their major monographs in the sociology of religion with the question of a definition of religion. Durkheim said it was impossible to begin without one and produced one based on his sacred/profane dichotomy. Weber said it was impossible to produce one at the beginning of such a work and went ahead and wrote *all* of his enormous work in the sociology of religion without ever making one.³³ The two men also differed radically in the kinds of gender distinctions they made. Although Weber cannot be called a feminist sociologist, his work is most definitely not characterized by the monolithic, unexamined, rigid, and distorting sexism that mars Durkheim's work.

In his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey has shown how the attempt to retain the structure of Aristotelian logic in a world recognized to be a changing one resulted in a purely formal logic without reference to the existential world. Thinkers who still try to apply such logic directly to the world fall into traps as did Durkheim, for if you congeal the world in order to clarify it, you lose more than you gain. Because, says Dewey, we cannot simply disregard the principles of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle, needing them as we do to order our thought, he proposes a 'functional use', very like Weber's ideal types, which

denies that affirmative and negative propositions have a one-to-one correspondence with objects as they are, but it gives them the operative and instrumental force of means of transforming an unsettled and doubtful situation into a resolved determinate one.³⁴

But suppose it is not merely in our thought, but directly in the social world that we wish to transform 'an unsettled and doubtful situation into a resolved determinate one'. Suppose we want not social theory, but social order. The direct social application of A/Not-A distinctions is an effective means of achieving just that.

Louis Dumont, in *Homo Hierarchicus: an essay on the caste system*, claims that members of that most conservative of all social organizations, the Indian caste system, conceptualize it as the social elaboration of 'a single true principle, namely the opposition of the pure and the impure'.³⁵ This particular social order is legitimated by religion, a religion grounded in an A/Not-A distinction. (Although all religion is by no means characterized by Durkheim's sacred/profane dichotomy, many religions do insist on A/Not-A distinctions of various kinds.) We can look within our own Judaeo-Christian tradition for illustrations both of the insistence on A/Not-A dichotomy (associated with resisting change) and of abandoning dichotomy (associated with striving for change). For example, contrast the prophets (second and third) Isaiah and Ezekiel (who, as Weber observed, was more priest than prophet).

Ezekiel, whose mission was to restore a *former* order, lost in the Babylonian exile, always insisted: keep things separate, don't mix the clean and the unclean.³⁶ And he was also profoundly sexist, regularly identifying sin with femaleness, horrified of 'menstruous women', and utterly condemning of women who had minds of their own. 'And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own minds,' said the Lord to Ezekiel.³⁷

Isaiah's mission was to tell of a *new* kingdom. 'Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing,' said the Lord to Isaiah.³⁸ In this new kingdom, dichotomous distinctions will vanish; the wolf and the lamb, who ordinarily keep discreetly separate, shall dwell together, and, Isaiah proclaimed, 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low'.³⁹ When 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, *all flesh* shall see it *together*'.⁴⁰ Neither the Lord nor Isaiah was fussy about gender dichotomy: 'As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you,' said the Lord to Isaiah, or even more startlingly: 'You shall suck the breast of kings.'⁴¹ There is also a remarkable passage in which the Lord unites in Himself the two halves of the dualist split, losing any clear gender identity, but solving the problem of theodicy:

I form the light and create the darkness: I make peace and create evil:
I the Lord do all these things. . . . Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? Woe unto him that saith unto a father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?⁴²

(Notice that both darkness and evil have positive reality; they are not mere privations of light or good.)

The Pauline Epistles represent both these positions: stressing dichotomous social distinctions and order, and denying dichotomy and striving for change. Paul's letters have long provided both arch-conservatives and

religious revolutionaries with appropriate texts. Paul himself was an advocate of radical religious change who also needed at times to insist on order in the young church.

The Corinthians were the most wildly disordered of the early congregations. Paul scolded them for orgies and incest as well as for unfettered prophecy and speaking in tongues. It was to these enthusiasts that Paul made his most extreme and dichotomous gender distinctions.⁴³ For example, in 1 Cor. 11: 3, the distinction between woman and man is the same as that between man and Christ, between Christ and God. (Although this is not overtly phrased as A/Not-A, its tendency to be all-encompassing makes it suspicious.)

The Galatians, on the other hand, seem to have been conservatives, in danger of deserting the new gospel and returning to established religion, order, and the Law. To them Paul wrote a perfect expression of contradictory dichotomy abandoned for the sake of change: 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.'⁴⁴ To them he also wrote, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'⁴⁵

It is clear that the degree of direct application of formal dichotomy to the social world varies within complex societies, and even from social situation to social situation. One can ask in *whose* interest it is to preserve social dichotomies, *who* experiences change as disorder. Within the Indian caste system, it is those at the top of the hierarchy who are most endangered by pollution from contact with the impure, and who have the greatest interest in maintaining the social order unchanged. It is not only women, but all inferior persons, who are kept in their place by this social application of the pure/impure dichotomy. Weber has observed: 'The religion of disprivileged classes is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women.'⁴⁶

The association of abandoning rigid gender dichotomy with striving for change is most obvious in revolutionary movements. This is true of the English⁴⁷ and French revolutions as well as the Chinese, which is perhaps the most dramatic example, both in degree of social change and of reduction of rigid gender dichotomy.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that traditional Chinese society, far more profoundly than the English and French aristocracies and monarchies, embodied in its very structure the principle of A/Not-A, with women in the Not-A position. This is the structure of exogamous patrilineal descent groups, in which 'A' men must always marry 'Not-A' women. Like the eternal, unchanging quality of A/Not-A, such structures are characterized, as Meyer Fortes has said, by 'presumed perpetuity in time'.⁴⁹

Turning to our own society, the association between conservative political thought and the insistence on rigid gender distinctions is clear.

The feminist movement in this country grew out of an attempt to bring about social change, to abolish another social dichotomy, the movement to end slavery. And it was revitalized in the 1960s along with massive resistance to racial barriers and the emergence of other kinds of movements for social change and 'alternative lifestyles'. Now, in a new conservatism (as it were, an Ezekiel-like attempt to restore a lost social order), the Republican Party, for the first time in forty years, has failed to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment.

Attention to relations between conservatism and dichotomous thinking seems particularly important for feminist theory because of the great susceptibility of gender distinction to A/Not-A phrasing. The exclusively binary structure of gender distinctions may explain this susceptibility, but not why women, rather than men, are so consistently put in the Not-A position. Those who seek an 'origin' for this widespread tendency need to look elsewhere than to Durkheim for help. They may, perhaps, do better looking at individual development, where, in the process that Margaret S. Mahler⁵⁰ has called 'separation-individuation', an I/Not-I experience of the self or ego as distinct from all the rest of the world (known and knowable) comes into being. Because infancy begins in undifferentiated union with the mother, separation from *her* is fundamental in this process. Thus all those who, for whatever reason, tend towards formally dichotomous thinking, have at the roots of their development an experience of femaleness in a Not-A position. The degree of rigidity, of impermeable ego boundaries, of intolerance for continuity, developed in this process is, of course, influenced by many factors, including social structural ones. (Notice, by the way, the great degree of continuity that Isaiah accepts both with women *and* with infancy. This is in sharp contrast to Ezekiel.)

No doubt there are other, and perhaps better, ways to understand why women are so regularly Not-A. It is far easier to understand why almost any ideology based on A/Not-A dichotomy is effective in resisting change. Those whose understanding of society is ruled by such ideology find it very hard to conceive of the possibility of alternative forms of social order (third possibilities). Within such thinking, the only alternative to the *one* order is disorder.

NOTES

My thanks to Rosalind Ladd for help with philosophical concepts and to Nancy Chodorow, Robert Jay, Sherry Ortner, Rayna Rapp, Michelle Rosaldo, and Kurt Wolff for criticism and encouragement.

- 1 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 9.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 9.

- 3 *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 37.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 212.
- 6 *ibid.*, p. 38-9.
- 7 Actually, Australian women do take part peripherally in some men's rituals, and they also have their own rituals from which men are excluded. See Phyllis M. Kaberry, *Aboriginal Women, Sacred and Profane* (New York: Philadelphia: Blackstone, 1939). The male ethnographers who were Durkheim's source did not describe women's rituals, and Durkheim himself gave little significance to women's marginal role in men's rituals. But I am not trying here to test the accuracy of Durkheim's description of Australian religion, rather to follow out some consequences of his theory.
- 8 For example, Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, pp. 120, 126, 137-9, 303-5, 319.
- 9 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 60.
- 10 *ibid.*, pp. 57-8.
- 11 Durkheim does devote much of his conclusion to claiming to show the origin of logic and 'logical thought' in society through religion, but he limits himself to examining logical thought as 'conceptual thought' and does not touch on problems of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle.
- 12 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 9.
- 13 Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934), p. 187.
- 14 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, pp. 40-1.
- 15 A/Not-A dichotomy will not work for propositions in the world either, for the truth of these can change as with the proposition 'I am hungry', which is sometimes true and sometimes not true.
- 16 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 40.
- 17 *ibid.*, p. 318.
- 18 Cf. M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies, *Female of the Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), ch. 4. For how this leap is managed, see Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), pp. 116-85.
- 19 John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, 1938), p. 192.
- 20 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978).
- 21 Quoted in G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 23.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 65.
- 23 W.E.H. Stanner, 'Reflections on Durkheim and Aboriginal religion', in *Social Organization: Essays Presented To Raymond Firth*, ed. Maurice Freedman (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), p. 232.
- 24 Marie Bonaparte, 'Passivity, masochism and femininity', in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1966), p. 136. Bonaparte is here citing the ideas of 'the great biologist Maranon', but she claims he 'was in the right'. *ibid.*, p. 132.
- 25 Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 111-53.
- 26 David O. Hall (ed.), *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary*

- History* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), p. 383. Italics in original.
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 372.
- 28 Dewey, *Logic*, p. 346.
- 29 For good discussions, see Jack Goody, 'Religion and ritual: the definitional problem', *British Journal of Sociology*, 12 (1961): 142-64; Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 24-8; and Stanner, 'Reflections'.
- 30 Stanner, 'Reflections', pp. 229-30.
- 31 Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Study of an Australian Tribe*, rev. edn (New York: Harper and Row, 1937).
- 32 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 29.
- 33 I am indebted to Karen Fields for this observation about Max Weber.
- 34 Dewey, *Logic*, p. 198.
- 35 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus; an essay on the caste system*, trans. Mark Sainsbury (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 43.
- 36 For example, Ezek. 22: 26; 44: 23.
- 37 Ezek. 13: 17.
- 38 Isa. 43: 18-19.
- 39 Isa. 40: 4.
- 40 Isa. 40: 5 (emphasis added).
- 41 Isa. 66: 13; 60: 16.
- 42 Isa. 45: 7-10.
- 43 1 Corinthians also contains a passage (14: 34-6) used for centuries of legitimate untold repression: 'the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the law says. . . .' This passage is almost certainly a later interpolation. In both vocabulary and theology it is unlike anything else by Paul. See William O. Walker, Jr, 'First Corinthians 11: 2-16 and Paul's views regarding women', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 94 (March 1975), pp. 94-110. It is not surprising, however, that it was interpolated into 1 Corinthians; it would never fit in Galatians.
- 44 Gal. 6: 15.
- 45 Gal. 3: 28.
- 46 Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 104.
- 47 Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the civil war sects', *Past and Present*, 13 (April 1958): pp. 42-62.
- 48 Judith Stacey, 'When patriarchy kowtows: the significance of the Chinese family revolution for feminist theory', *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2-3 (1975), pp. 64-112.
- 49 Meyer Fortes, 'The structure of unilineal descent groups', *American Anthropologist*, 55 (1953), pp. 17-41.
- 50 Margaret S. Mahler, in collaboration with Manuel Furer, *On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation, vol. 1: Infantile Psychosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968).

Part IV

FEMINISM AND
SUBJECTIVITY