

## 626 - LECTURE

# WOMAN AS BODY & POSTMODERN UTOPIA

### I. PLATO

In Plato we're talking about a different metaphysics.

#### A. Similarities

1. Senses deceive us.
2. The soul is the place to acquire real knowledge
3. Immortal soul

#### B. Differences

1. Epistemology
  - a) **NOT BECAUSE UNDERSTANDING THE MATERIAL WORLD REQUIRES THE FACULTY OF JUDGEMENT BUT BECAUSE THE MATERIAL WORLD IS NOT THE SITE OF IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE**
  - b) **THE FORMS/IDEALS ARE THE HOST OF REAL KNOWLEDGE AND THEY ARE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE MATERIAL WORLD.**
  - c) **THE SOUL CAN ACQUIRE REAL KNOWLEDGE BECAUSE IT CAN TRANSCEND THE LIMITS OF THE IDIOTIC MATERIAL WORLD.**
  - d) **REAL BUSINESS OF LIFE OCCURS AFTER DEATH**
2. Virtue and knowledge are tightly tied together. (Continued in Kant)
3. Aesthetics
  - a) **REAL BEAUTY DOES NOT PARTAKE OF THE REAL WORLD**
  - b) **REAL BEAUTY CAN ONLY BE SEEN BY THE SOUL, AND ONLY EXIST IN THE SOUL.**
4. Politics
  - a) **RATIONAL PART MUST RULE THE STATE JUST AS THE SOUL/BODY**

#### C. The Mind/Body Distinction

1. The body keeps us from real knowledge.
2. It is through the soul that we acquire real knowledge
3. The *Symposium* is about the evils of pretty young boys trading their bodies for the attentions of the souls of beautiful older men.
  - a) **SPIRITUAL LOVE BETWEEN MEN IS SUPERIOR TO PHYSICAL LOVE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**
  - b) **PHYSICAL LOVE BETWEEN MEN SERVES NO PURPOSE BUT TO SHAME AND DEGRADE THE SOUL.**
4. You must free yourself from the temptations of the body.
5. Thus a hierarchy is established
  - a) **THE BODY**
    - (1) must be ruled

- (2) is irrational
- (3) is shameful/degraded
- (4) is an obstacle to all that is good
- (5) A tomb, a prison
- (6) A team of wild winged horses, a brood of beasts
- (7) insignificant

**b) THE SOUL**

- (1) must be the ruler
- (2) is rational
- (3) is the crown of virtue/knowledge and existence
- (4) is the path to all that is good
- (5) temporarily imprisoned
- (6) a charioteer
- (7) important

## II. WOMAN AS BODY

### A. To clarify the hierarchy/relationship an example

1. Look to the lives of those who are ruled by the body

**a) CHILDREN**

**b) BEASTS**

**c) WOMEN...**

- (1) Hysterical over death
- (2) Overpowered by emotions
- (3) Wrangling with her husband
- (4) Defying heaven
- (5) Boasting
- (6) Fortunate in her conceit
- (7) Worse still she who is sick in love, or in labor

2. Women are models for failure

**a) IN HEALTH**

“In the matter of good or bad health...any woman or child — or animal, for that matter

**b) IN AESTHETICS**

**c) IN LOVE**

- (1) Older men resemble women in that they cannot control their passions.
- (2) Younger men model women in a more literal way

3. Plato, like many others, identifies women with the body despite the contradictions

**a) SINCE THE BODY IS NOT IMPORTANT, WE CANNOT BELIEVE THAT EMBODIMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE TO YOUR SPIRIT**

**b) HOWEVER, IT SEEMS TO JUST HAPPEN TO BE THE CASE THAT WOMEN ARE PERFECT IN EXEMPLIFYING THE WAY THOSE INVESTED THE BODY FAIL.**

- (1) It's an important example, children and beasts are different kinds of things.
- (2) Women are just a failure of the possibilities for adult spirits just like men
- (3) Women constitute a deviant class

**B. The Excuse**

“Their remarks on women are unofficial asides which are unrelated to the heart of their philosophical doctrines. After all, it might be thought, how could one's view about something as unimportant as women have anything to do with one's views about something as important as the nature of knowledge, truth, reality, freedom? Moreover — wouldn't it be charitable to consider those opinions about women as coming merely from the *heart*, which all too easily responds to the tenor of the times, while philosopher “proper” comes from the *mind*, which resonates not with the times but with the truth?

1. In his articles, Mills charges that traditional philosophy either ignores or brushes over the important philosophical issues that make themselves apparent either to or through those who are raced or gendered.
2. To be clear, traditionally whites are not raced; they are neutral. Men aren't gendered; they are neutral. Spelman's article helps to articulate how this works.

**C. What it does/What to do**

1. It participates in, justifies the depreciation and degradation of women.
  - a) **LOOK WHO WOMEN COMPARE TO**
    - (1) Slaves
    - (2) Children
    - (3) Deviants
  - b) **WOMEN PROVIDE THE MODEL FOR HOW TO DENIGRATE OTHERS**
2. Should we adopt this distinction?
  - a) **DE BEAUVOIR JUMPS RIGHT ON THE TRANSCENDENCE BANDWAGON**
  - b) **FRIEDAN ARGUES FOR “CULTURAL” CREATIVITY**
  - c) **BUT WHAT ABOUT THE WAY THEY DO IT**
    - (1) Who's going to do the housework
    - (2) That stuff doesn't go away
3. For Plato don't invest in the body don't invest in the world
  - a) **WHAT ABOUT MEDICINE**
  - b) **WHAT ABOUT DANCE**
  - c) **WHAT ABOUT SPORT**
  - d) **WHAT ABOUT PARENTING**
  - e) **THIS HIERARCHY IS NOT ONLY NOT APPARENT; IT ALSO REQUIRES A HUMAN HIERARCHY SO SOMEONE CAN DO THE LABOR.**