

THE FREEDOM OF WOMEN AND THE FREEDOM OF MEN

1. In mammals generally, and I suppose in normal circumstances always the male or the males are the bosses, have the lead. The female, females follow, are subordinated. Whichever the original reason may be for this ordering, in fact ongoing structure (and probably it is because the females are carrying the young and so the future), any thinking about the relationship of women and men which does not reckon with this fact goes astray.

2. In human societies the relationship between men and women has the same underlying structure as in mammals, the man is the leading one, the woman following. But because it is human, the relationship is much more structured, so taking care that both women and men have their own places, rights, duties, dignities, in fact being. The possibilities for culture to define the differences and their own places for both women and men are endless different, but in the same time the goal is always the same, to make life for both women and men human. Without discounting the biological reality both are given human places.

These differences, which in the same time as such mean freedom, have to do with every aspect of life. With the language, the tools, the division of the tasks etc. See Ivan Illich: *Gender*, London, 1983. For a beautiful example: Nancy Scheper-Hughes: *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics, Mental Illness in Rural Ireland*, Berkeley, 1979, especially p.108ff.

Of course since long there is talked about matriarchy and about matrilineage. Even if matriarchy once, very long ago, was a reality (and not only a very big and striking exception) it could not endure.

Matrilineage is the form of social ordering in some primitive peoples, but on the whole they too are exceptions, built on economic presuppositions. Anyway none of the two change the overall picture and much more important, as far as I understand, they certainly are no possibilities in our present predicament.

3. Before we dismiss the old ordering of the relationship of men and women in which humanity lived for millions of years and survived – so it could not be too bad, both for women and men, otherwise humanity would have disappeared from the earth since long – it is good to see what both women and men got from it. First of all, both had, out of this order, a being, a knowing about identity, living in this relationship in structure. This was given and reinforced by their own different world of women and men. They lived in these worlds. Women stuck, first of all together with women, both when they were unmarried and married, as men did with men. Men took care of the fighting, of the violence, both in war and in ritual. The women, the carriers of the future were outside of it. Even the cruelties, during the wars perpetrated by men against women – I suppose much more a speciality of our post-Christian time than it ever was – was a consequence of the fighting of the men. By violating the women of the opponents, they showed the latter, that they were the bosses. And the worse, the killing, was always for the men. The life of the women was spared. But to give still another example: The so-called missionary position during intercourse too is a position of protection, of the woman by the man.

4. The structures, too the structures of gender were and are dwindling away. The economic, the environmental and eventually other presuppositions, these of the mode of production e.g. have disappeared and are disappearing. Women and men both lost their places. One of the aspects of it is, that they lost the members of their own sex. Women and men both lost their habitat amidst of, respectively, women and men. They drew and draw more and more together. Women did not any longer seek the companionship with each other, but with their husband, and the reverse. Distance, which is needed for difference, dwindled away. The result is, necessarily and obviously, a power-fight, encompassing the whole existence. Women wish to have man's lot, more and more too men wish to have women's. The first result was a new division, a new gender structure. Women are the boss inside of the house, men outside. So both were (and are) estranged of a vital part of reality. So the new division would not do anyway. And the possession of the inside of the house became, out of several reasons, more and more worthless. So the women left the houses, the homes, to fight outside, in the world of men.

As is the case of all rivaling, people fighting together become more and more alike, losing their real possibilities to be, both women and men. Women lost in the fight the possibilities old structure gave, protection against violence. Now they themselves became, necessarily again, violent, listing into the army, into the police force, partaking in masculine sports, wrestling a.s.o. Men lost as well, having nothing to protect any longer. One of the consequences again is the rise of cruelty, between men and women, between women, between men. The rise of cruelty in our nowadays world, in all manners, between everybody and on all levels, is really incredible. It is a direct consequence of the falling down of structures, the destruction of culture.

5. So we have now an all encompassing fight for power. More and more it looks like a fight for naked power, but in fact there is something much deeper at stake. It is a fight for being. Formerly when women and men lived in structures, recognizing each other in her, his own place, everybody had a clear identity, everybody knew who she/he was, everybody existed, without any doubt for her, for him. Now that structures have fallen down, we don't have any longer a clear place, and so we don't any longer exist. We fight with each other to exist. To take the being of the other, to have the being ourselves. All desire, and our world is full of desire, is in its kernel, metaphysical desire, the desire to be.

6. All desire to be is always directed towards her or towards him, who has more being than we ourselves, as we feel, have. That means that at the beginning of the fight women are in a disadvantage. Men have the power in society. The power inside of the house is worth nothing. So men have much more being than women. Or, and that is enough, it looks like.

Fighting to be is fighting with a model-obstacle. The more you gain, the more winning becomes impossible, because the goal becomes more and more important, higher and higher. In the same time because the goal is worth everything, every price to be paid will be paid. And so the sado-masochistic games begin. The woman humiliates herself more and more, in every manner, to get the big price, real being. And so the woman can become, becomes masochistic, prone to violence. Total submission, reign.

And there is another side of the medal. Men, in their eternal fighting with each other and with women, come exactly in the same position. They too are deep in themselves devoured by metaphysical desire, by the desire to be, to get the being which the other, so obviously in the eyes of the desiring person, possesses. They too are living amidst of model-obstacles. For them too, reality, the reality in which we live, or lived, and which was created exactly by the structures we live in, is disappearing. All the games about the millions of dollars in business, about power and violence in international relationships are more and more about nothing. And so men go back, regrediating, to the first and now last reality, the origin of life, to their mother, to women. And again the sado-masochistic plays begins, with now the women in power.

So women and men are now living in reciprocal slavery, in a sado-masochistic game, in which the positions of the master and of the slave are constantly reversing. This reversing is essential of the game as such and is institutionalized because of the power both women and men have in this fight.

7. An aspect of this sado-masochistic game with on the background the so understandable desire to be, the desire to have what we absolutely need to live, although this desire does not give it to us, is that we all, women and men, are so easily seduced. The seducer is always the more powerful, otherwise she, he would not try to seduce me. Fears and desires are immediately in the seduced. Desires, to have at last. Fears, because of the knowing, deep down, that the losing is certain, that there is no win situation.

8. It is very clear that there is no way back. We have still some structure, in culture, in families. That is life saving. But probably it will be eroded more and more. A way back means reaction, cruelty. We only can go forward, to a new relationship between women and men.

This probably means a “paradigma-change” in which we leave the old cultural ways, which were all founded on biological millions years old cultural determination behind us. Thus a way in absolutely unknown land.

We have, to have a possibility at all, to take earnest what Paul says Galatians 3:28 “And there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Jesus Christ (Herus Bible). In Ephesians 9a follower of) Paul tries to reverse in fact the cultural relationship. It is clear that that does not do in our situation. We have to begin from scratch.

That means that we leave the power-fight, the fight for being, behind us. That we leave behind us, thus, all aggressions, fascinations, all desiring. It means to take each other earnest in our being different, with different possibilities for each other. It means that our relationship at last is founded on freedom and love. Not the fascination we call love, nowadays, but the love which receives the other, without conditions, in our life.

Or course every paragraph of this paper and especially the last one, needs more elaboration e.g. to distinguish the freedom, here hinted at from the old cultural freedom, which certainly too existed.

Mary Daly, in: *Beyond God the Father: toward a philosophy of women's liberation* (1973) clearly sees the necessity of a "paradigma-change". Although I don't like the book very much, it is beautiful in its insistence on this point.

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