

REASON AND VIOLENCE: THREE FIGURES OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

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This interdisciplinary workshop on reason and violence is meant as an exploration of their connections from a feminist perspective. In my closing remarks, I shall focus on three possible figures of the relationships between reason and violence: the traditional antinomy, the neoclassical connection and the recent inversion. These figures were suggested to me by the papers presented during this workshop, along with the discussions following their presentation; in delineating their features, I shall also refer to some of my own research in women's studies, especially that devoted to the notion of reality of aggression.

My reflections will begin in a manner somewhat similar to Geraldine Finn's introductory remarks on the more than false antithesis between reason, as traditionally interpreted and violence as traditionally practiced. As Geraldine Finn has argued, the traditional interpretation of the relationships between reason and violence is pervaded by moral connotations and rests on an antithesis: reason is good and violence is false. My own reflections will address, however, a different and perhaps more epistemological issue than the moral antithesis.

I agree with Geraldine Finn's thesis that the typical qualification of reason and violence by means of moral connotations rests on a false antinomy. I also think that Geraldine Finn's argument—that we could not improve the theoretical and practical network of issues at stake here by the attempt to weaken the side of violence, while dismissing the side of reason as a mere historical accident of rationality is quite crucial. However, my concern here is different. Indeed, much in the line of today's repeated strictures against dualism, dichotomies, antinomies, etc, the attempt to check violence against women should not lead us to a rhetorical stance. The main problem I have in mind is the tendency to label indiscriminately any form of behavior concerning women that is morally unacceptable as violent behavior.

I take it to be one of the most interesting and promising result of today's discussion that the more we were specific on the issues of reason and violence, the better we could see, tell and prove the tricky and inadmissible nature of their relationships when discussing the question from a feminist perspective. My plea, therefore, will be in favor of specificity as a heuristic device, bearing in mind that the rejection of a (false) antithesis between reason and violence does not commit ourselves to the endorsement of their identity. As a matter of fact, it would seem that the only possible level of identification of reason and violence lies in the kind of broad statements on their "total" nature, which have the unfortunate effect of slipping from the absence of any recognized connection between reason and violence to the diffuse presence of a relationship everywhere. From a methodological point of view, this transition leads us back again, all too often, to the starting point, to nowhere.

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In order to present a more specific approach and in order to avoid possible misunderstandings, let me add that in arguing against the identification between reason and violence, I am not intimating that violence against women is *not* manifold, systematic, connected in many ways with reason, and in *this* sense, that their relationship is everywhere. Nor I am suggesting that it could be possible to solve, or to check one particular form of violence against women, without addressing quite a variety of other forms of violence and of other factors. What I am saying is that in order to deal accurately with this overwhelmingly complex network of issues, we do not have to treat all forms of violence against women as if they were alike, and all forms of rationality as similar—including women's experience which Helen Levine forcibly described, today, as a genuine form of knowledge.

This plea in favor of specificity as a heuristic device can be illustrated by reference of today's discussions. For example, there are important connections between raping or beating and what Debra Lewis described as the "day-to-day" experience of violence, such as, for a woman to be afraid of walking alone on a street at night. However, one should also be wary of frequent trivialization of such demonstrations, the putting of, say, rape or battering on a par with, say, the social prohibition of a woman's disagreement with men; or of shock-treatments as a privileged resort for women with a lack of emotional support on behalf of male friends or husbands; or, again, the consumption of D.E.S. with male/female discrepancies in income, etc. The point is, indeed, that it is too easy to invoke the (perceived) less damaging forms of violence against women in order to trivialize them all. As well put by Pat Hughes today, it is too easy to explain away obvious cases of violence against women by focussing on less obvious ones. Again, and this point was well illustrated by Lesley Silver and Denise Stone, it is very easy to proceed to a "communalization" of violence against women.

It would seem, therefore, that our concern to avoid false dichotomies, erratic dualisms or ungrounded oppositions should not lead us to re-enact new forms of dualism. Geraldine Finn has remarked that it was part of the traditional interpretation of the relationship between reason and violence to provoke a higher indignation toward physical violence, in comparison with legal violence. Be that as it may—it would seem that, at least in the legal domain, the situation is not as clear-cut as it is claimed here; given the analysis of Pat Hughes and Sandra Léveillé, it would seem difficult to provoke indignation even in the case of physical violence against women—my concern is that we do not endorse a new dualism now, treating, for example, physical violence against women as if it has only physical effects.

In other words, our choice is not between all or nothing, univocity or elasticity. When reflecting upon the relationships between reason and violence, from a feminist perspective, the point is to be specific enough to become able to delineate the different figures of these relationships, thereby becoming equipped to diagnose the moment when any given figure gives rise to unacceptable effects for women. This, I think, is one of the reasons why the topic of today's discussion is so difficult: when considering the impediments of one form of connection

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between reason and violence, one is inclined to resort to its opposite. Yet, this other form of connection implies other problems, a point which was well illustrated today by Pat Hughes's puzzling questions concerning the exact nature of a desirable change about the judicial notion of rape, with reference to the new phrasing of Bill C-53.

I now turn to the *first figure* of the relationships between reason and violence, *the traditional antinomies*.

Traditionally, reason has been represented as the result of a calm, cold, moderate pursuit, whereas violence has been linked with passion, excessive ardour, impetuosity or immoderate behavior. In this context, of course, reason and violence are opposite notions, in the sense that reason is held to contrast with passion to the point of being diametrically different from it. More to the point, violence is not a rational phenomenon, nor could it *be made so* by applying reason to the study of its manifestations.

Though traditional, this view of the antinomy between reason and violence is not obsolete. It remains, so to speak, in the very *absence* of certain kinds of questions about violence and, more specifically, about the use of violence against women. For example, one does not ask "why" such and such a male person did commit harm or inflict injury to such and such a woman, in the sense in which one would ask "why" did the same person endorse this or that political creed.

A striking example of the importance of what is *missing* in terms of questions raised about violence or procedures delineated against it has been given today by Harriet Simard's study of the manufacturing of D.E.S., now linked to a rare form of cancer in the reproductive system of D.E.S. daughters. Approved as a medication for pregnant women in 1947, D.E.S. had been introduced without tests and animal experiments; it was not banned until 1971, though independent scientists discovered its ineffectiveness in 1953, and it is still on the market under so many names that its withdrawal defies any legal attempt.

To the traditional account of the antinomy between reason and violence, therefore, I think that a feminist perspective does add a refusal to ignore certain questions and an ability to raise them forcibly. In other words, as erroneous as this view might appear, the traditional antinomy between reason and violence has not even produced the kind of beneficial effects it might have implied, for example, in condemning and banishing—as the logic of this antinomy should imply—the kinds of irrational double-standard we find when considering violence against women.

Besides, it would seem that recent research in women's studies provide us with new insights and a few refutations concerning this traditional and not obsolete interpretation between reason and violence as antinomies. Indeed, such research tends to show that many of the traditional forms of violence against women are not at all the result of the so-called "uncontrollable urge" of men. Leaving aside the issue of the controllability of urges or passions—the kind of theoretical issue which was most discussed before women's studies—those studies show indeed that, be that as it may, it simply is not the case that a rape, for example, could be explained by reference to "passion". On the contrary, as Susan

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Brownmiller has shown for the U.S., and as Lorene Clark and Debra Lewis have shown for Canada, rape is usually an action that is planned in advance, perpetrated by a group of men rather than a solitary outburst, and that it is "motivated" by a "cold" contempt, as well as a "designed" desire to demonstrate men's masculinity by exercising power over (and against) a given woman.

Again, as it has been exemplified by the recent Canadian report of the Permanent Committee on Health and Welfare, the "wife beating pattern" does not merely consist of slaps in the face or the throwing of dishes: it is made up of strangulations, rapes and all too genuine and brutal beatings. This "pattern" truly is a pattern in the sense that it is not a rare phenomenon: up to 10 per cent of Canadian women are brutalized every year. Such brutality is not associated with clear cases of psychological pathologies; rather, it is linked with all too normal personalities.

In today's sessions, we have had a few more suggestions in this line. Thus, as argued by Barbara Roberts, deliberate and random direct *physical* violence against women benefit directly and indirectly from *structural* forms of violence, related to poverty, inequality, subordination, dependence, etc. In turn, those structural forms of violence themselves result from the systematic appropriation of female labour, etc. Again, as argued by Helen Levine, the external and internal forms of violence against women continue unchecked because of a "reason" which, in contemporary psychiatry, "helps" women to conform to oppressive life conditions, and fixes women's attention in the wrong direction, that of a "private" problem. In Lesley Silver's paper, we are shown that the very language used in the "helping" professions renders violence against women acceptable, thereby reinforcing the double-standard approach to the question of protection from violent assaults in the legal system. The urgent need would seem to be to protect men from other men rather than women from men. This last thesis has been reinforced today both by Sandra Léveillé's study of the withdrawal of sanctions against assailants in cases of sexual assault against women, and by Pat Hughes' comments on violence against women as a means a social control, a notion still to be found in the new writing of Bill C-53.

In other words what most of today's papers challenge is the traditional dichotomy between reason and violence, as traditionally understood, mainly on the basis of the following awareness: what is generally held to be "irrational", that is, violence, is at once too concrete, too frequent, too structural, too systematic, too easy to explain and too readily "helped" by the use of (ordinary and scientific) reason to be taken as a case of antinomy.

In considering this traditional view of the relationship between reason and violence, a feminist perspective is thus lead to require that we stop practicing a systematic blindness to, and/or a systematic neglect of a whole series of brutal facts. All in all, this whole series of brutal facts suggest rather that far from being a matter of antagonism, the relationship between reason and violence is rather a matter of justifying violence by the use of reason, including, let me insist, the justification of the most physical, obvious and brutal forms of violence against women.

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It is, I think, in this line of justification of violence by reason that Rachel Vigier's analysis of the Rational Violence of Male-Stream Thought takes its full sense. She reminds us that the traditional dichotomy between reason and violence does not bear the touchstone of historical facts related to philosophy. Philosophers, she argues, upheld the very relationship between reason and violence to be essential to life: the mind sees the world as an hostile environment, the body as an affront to the purity of thought, and other beings as a violation of the Self. Consequently, they saw women as threats: their biological security about the continuity of the species (the fact that they give birth) would destroy men's possibility of becoming a potent force in the world, a mediating force between life and death.

My claim here therefore is that there are crucial questions, which are not commonly raised about violence, and more specifically about violence against women, because violence is presumed to be irrational in being the perfect antithesis to reason. This assumption is what a feminist perspective ought to challenge. In the light of recent research indeed the truth of the matter seems to be that violence is anything but irrational and that reason is anything but a rampart against violence. After all, even such a feminist thinker as Ashley Montagu has argued in the still-quoted *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1952), that misogyny was a reaction formation due to men's envy of women's biological superiority: women give birth, they have two X chromosomes, they endure stress better and deprivation, they are longer-lived, etc.

Considerations such as these lead us to the *second figure* of the relationship between reason and violence, *the neo-classical connection*.

For the purpose of clarification, let us recognize, that in matters of violence, something like Pascal's saying about the relationship between reason and what he called "le coeur" might be at stake. Pascal's famous statement was: "*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.*" In other words, there is another way of looking at the relationship between reason and violence on the basis of which one would be inclined to say that, though different from logic, there is a certain rationality to be elicited from violent manifestations of males against women. There is, one would say, a certain "logic" to passions, ardour, aggressiveness, subconscious needs, and even perhaps a certain "chic" to what philosophers now call "la démesure", the going beyond or out of measure, perhaps what Helen Levine described, today, as the "clarity of madness".

In this context, reason is not to be identified with ordinary common sense, folk psychology, the search for balance and the proper middle, not even with the abstract and linear form of thinking which is dominant in most disciplines. Nor is violence to be presented as irrational, absurd or ridiculous. It could just be, so this interpretation would go, that the relationship between reason—a way to account for various phenomena—and violence—a way to find otherwise unavailable outlets—constitutes a fundamental feature of the human (or perhaps the male's) biography.

In *The Descent of Woman* (1973), Elaine Morgan argued that the "Tarzan theory of evolution" takes it for granted that male hormones give them a greater

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propensity for aggression. Again, as Mary Ann Warren argues in her encyclopedia on *The Nature of Woman* (1980), sociologists who look for ethology in order to find clues to laws of human interaction generally argue that aggressiveness, dominance and status keeping are inherent male traits. She cites Morris, Tiger, Storr, Lorenz (as interpreted by Fast), Maccoby and Jacklin, Goldberg, Johnston, Ellis, etc. She also quotes Ardrey, who insists on the rather telling "fact" that males compete among themselves for territory and for status, but not for females. She refers to Wilson's thesis on the male dominance over women as an example of hypertrophy, that is, the magnification of small innate differences by (so-called) economic and cultural progress.

There are, of course, debates. Some like Bardwick argue that aggressiveness is not a trait toward which males have an inherently greater disposition than women. Others argue that there is no necessary connection between aggression and power, while still others claim that though "natural", or hereditary, male aggression and violence need not be inevitable (Tiger, Fox) or morally justifiable (Holliday, Tiger, Fox).

What I think a feminist perspective does add to such debates, and I think today's session is a good illustration of this fact, is a healthy refusal to be caught up in the bird-and-egg problem about innateness *versus* environment in violent behavior. This might be done in many ways but this refusal basically implies the following conviction: whatever kind of reasons could be given to explain men's violence against women—reasons which in many ways cannot explain the double standard approach to protection we mentioned earlier in the first figure—the most important and urgent issue lies in the diagnosis on what seems susceptible of being acted upon, now. Perhaps, after all, the issue lies more on the side of reason, than on the side of violence, reason being in this figure a cultural phenomenon, and violence, a natural one. In any case the issue surely lies on the side of all the institutional parameters which explain the continuity of violence against women.

Thus, today, Barbara Roberts addressed the economic variable of vulnerability toward violence; Helen Levine questioned the actual institution of psychiatry, Harriet Simard, the institution of medicine and pharmaceutical networks; Lesley Silver; Pat Hughes and Sandra Léveill e, the legal system; Geraldine Finn and Rachel Vigier, the institution of philosophy, while tonight papers will deal with the media.

In other words, and this is my second thesis, too much research time has been spent on the "deep" (natural) explanation of the male urge to dominate, to aggress, to be violent—and too little research time has been spent on the way to design effective scenarios, or in Wilson's phrase, "cultural ritualizations" by which the aggression drive of males—supposing it to be both natural and inevitable—would be redirected *away* from women.

I take it to be one of the important conclusions of the present workshop to realize that the generally endorsed moral thesis according to which all human beings should be protected from one another should not go on as the cutting by half of the universality of the prescription; that is, it should not go on in *not*

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explicitly and systematically trying to include women in the application field of the norm.

This, I suggest, is the paradox of "protection" which feminist studies begin to make clear and to which Debra Lewis' paper referred this morning (when she showed the connection between protection and privacy, when talking of women) and which Barbara Roberts' analysis shows to be as much of a myth as the myth of women dependence. The "myth of protection" (women need protection) is a myth to the extent that institutions attempt to protect men from other men, but not women from men. The paradox of protection is the following: when it is time to "protect" women from indulging into the side effects, the after-effects or the bulk of equality treatments, we *do* find a lot of well documented studies, all quite copious in careful warnings. When it is time to assess violence, we have a lot of studies showing not merely the general thesis that any criminal is more to be pitied than condemned, but also the more specific (and sexist) thesis that a male criminal (for example, a rapist) is more to be pitied than his victim (the raped woman) and is the person who needs protection if he goes to jail for his crime (from other male convicts).

This inverted compassion is what I mean by the paradox of protection. It shows that if we do not have to face the neglect or the blindness that pervades the first figure of the antinomy between reason and violence, we have to face a complete reversal of moral categories, while dealing with the second. Poor males, says this figure, how unfortunate you *must* be in order to *need* such violent outlets! And, let us add, on *this* scale, it certainly is not difficult to explain why all women are depicted as Amazons, nor is it difficult to understand why, as Debra Lewis remarked today, the increase in male violence is readily attributed to a never-empirically assessed rise of feminism. The only innovative attitude, as related by Pat Hughes' comments today, would seem to say that, poor rapist, he did not know that his victim did not consent.

Thus, to go back to my point, when it is time to protect women from real and brutal physical and other sorts of assaults from men, rather than protecting them from the pitfalls of feminism, we readily fall back into conservative metaphysics, or negative heuristics, that is, the paths which ought to be avoided in research.

The irony of this story lies in the fact that, with this neoclassical figure of the connection between reason and violence, women are (for once) allowed reason but when and only when, like Lucia die Lammermore, they are said to have lost it. Or, in Sandra Léveill e's terms, women are ascribed the capacity to make responsible choice, only when they are the victims of rape. Or, again, as the studies of Lesley Silver and Denise Stone suggest, instead of looking for equality of protection for both men and women, we are looking for equality of assaults by men and women. The everlasting interest arisen out of statistical dust on women's aggression against men is the neoclassical way to trivialize the issue of violence against women.

The *third figure* of the relationship between reason and violence which I wish to adumbrate here is related to the last point; I have called it *the recent inversion*.

There is, indeed, still another line of interpretation of the relationship

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between reason and violence which differs both from the antinomy and the deep connection. This interpretation actually makes violence a condition for reason itself, or at least, a condition for the superiority of men's reason over women's reason. Thus, according to Anthony Storr, in *Human Aggression* (1968), aggression is a natural instinct for males which accounts for many things but, more specifically, for the "undoubted superiority of the male sex in intellectual and creative achievement." Aggressiveness, in males, is thereby an "intrinsically desirable phenomenon" becoming destructive "only" when its "expression is inhibited". Men, Storr continues, become mentally ill when they do not behave aggressively enough, and women become mentally ill when they behave too aggressively.

Storr's statements, let us add, remind us forcibly of Charles Darwin's own thesis in *The Descent of Man* (1871): "Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius."

Of course, neither Darwin, nor Storr tell us to what extent the "courageous, pugnacious and energetic" nature of man will actually lead to a "more inventive genius", by means of physical, structural and brutal assaults against women. As Corinne Hutt has argued in *Males and Females* (1972) "evidence suggests a strong link between male aggressiveness and greater creativity, ambition and achievement."

At this point, indeed, it is tempting to imagine that a parity of aggressiveness might be the answer. As a matter of fact, while only Rachel Vigier's paper addressed "positively" the violence issue on behalf of women, the discussions of this afternoon's workshop gave this question dramatic prominence. For obvious reasons, the third figure of the relationship between reason and violence is the most difficult to assess and to counter adequately. Up to a certain point the first figure, the antinomy, can be refuted; the second figure, the connection, can be completed and better balanced. But the third figure, the inversion, leads to the most puzzling logical and moral dilemma. Indeed, if women choose not to react violently—except in self-defence—then, they apparently choose not to modify the basic structure of societal violence by means of "the rules of the game." On the other hand, if women choose to react violently, beyond the self-defence step, then they confirm the ideology of violence, of brutality, of assaults. They further document the underlying ideology of "women as threats" which has been the most powerful instrument of justification both of women's subjugation and of violence against women.

The logical contradiction of condemning violence in males while admitting it in women is not easy to dismiss, even if one is arguing on the basis of a strategy of retaliation, that is, if one argues that we should expand the notion of self-defence from the individual domain to the social network of institutions. Though the last thesis would seem the most arguable tenet in this context, especially if one distinguishes between different sorts of violence, of retaliation and of diagnosis, its talion morality cannot easily get rid of the objection that in acting this way, one re-enacts an aggression morality. In other words, violence is not to be condemned merely because or when it is perpetrated by a certain kind of agent

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(male of female); violence is to be condemned because it is unacceptable behavior. The problem, therefore, is to introduce violence on behalf of women without promoting and consolidating violence as the basis of human relations as a value.

In my opinion, further research is badly needed on this question and I will restrict my comment to a re-enforced plea for specificity: let us try to identify forms of violence which are to be checked; let us identify the forms of retaliations which are necessary for checking violent behavior, and let us then try to identify which forms of retaliations should be promoted by women from a feminist perspective.

But if the issue of women's own violence is still obscure, the feminist perspective does add something quite crucial to the analysis of the third figure of the relationship between reason and violence as an inversion. I refer, indeed, to the explicitation of the curse which such a (male) blessing implies for women, when one faces the glorification of violence itself as a means of superior intellect.

To put the thing crudely, women have then the choice between being violated, in many cases, actually brutalized or—if male phylogenetic violence is redirected away from *them*, that is, *ideally* in creative intellectual achievements—women then have the choice of applauding men's intellectual superiority. Women will then avoid the curse of sociobiology, if only they endorse Aristotle's vision of their more than inferior intellect, or Freud's belief in their "naturally" subservient masochistic propensity.

In today's terms, women must then choose among palatable alternatives such as taking a D.E.S. pill or not to have a child, being "helped" to conform to oppressive conditions or to break-down in the clarity of madness, or else—in Sandra Léveillé's apt phrase—to condone violence against them.

The trick here, on the side of women, is to be performed by the operation of love, a topic to which both Debra Lewis and Denise Stone alluded today. As Wilson wrote, in *On Aggression* (1963), "love and hate are inseparable, because such personal bonds form only in species with highly developed instincts for intraspecific aggression." Again, since the nineteenth century, Havelock Ellis' claim (in his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*,) has been often repeated: "women enjoy and desire experience of physical pain when inflicted by a male lover." In more contemporary terms, most (true) women enjoy being raped.

Today's workshop, I think, including tonight's session, is a powerful reminder that this two-fold glorification of aggression and superiority in males stands as a clear counter-example both for the first and the second figure of the relationships between reason and violence, a formidable case of sexist double standard while explaining the connection between reason and violence.

Helen Levine has insisted on the exclusion of the political context in order to define women's health and ill-health—compared with the legitimation of the political context as a factor of males' difficulties. Harriet Simard has insisted on the exclusion of the normal experimental procedures in the case of the introduction of the D.E.S. medication; Lesley Silver focussed on the professional language which induces an acceptation of male violence against women, while Rachel Vigier pleaded for a feminine account of aggressiveness, an aggressiveness which

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would not be manifest against one another.

My final comment, therefore, will be a question. Could it be possible to designate a philosophy of human relationships which instead of assaults will talk of contacts, instead of aggression as a condition for creative thinking will talk of creative research as a condition for the elimination of violence?

Back to the old and by now somewhat refreshing meaning of reason as a search for the proper middle, my question is: can we designate an identifiable proper middle between reason and violence, not a between "assaults" *versus* "aggravated assaults", but a between women's curse and men's blessing, a middle-point between neglect and brutality?

I shall leave it to you to answer but I am convinced that only a concern with the welfare of women could possibly provide us with the beginnings of a solution.

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