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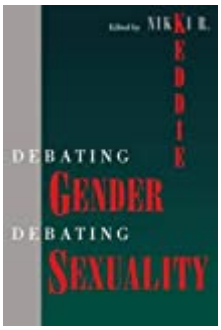

Nikki R. Keddie, ed. *Debating Gender. Debating Sexuality.* New York: New York University Press, 1996. xv + 331 pp. $22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-4655-4; $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-4654-7.

Reviewed by Laura A. Belmonte (Oklahoma State University)

Published on H-Women (November, 1997)

Heated Issues

When I received this volume, I expected to find debates surrounding issues such as sexual harassment, pornography, affirmative action, and gay rights. Instead, I discovered a series of extremely engaging–and often provocative–essays discussing procreation, feminist theory, welfare, Marxism, Foucault, and Freud. Quite the intellectual smorgasbord. And, indeed, *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality* offers one much to digest.

"Procreation and Female Oppression" features Nicky Hart, Juliet Mitchell, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in a spirited debate of the similarity versus difference question. Nicky Hart begins by calling for society to recognize women's reproductive labor as "the most vital of all human labor" (p. 7). She claims that despite improvements in medicine and nutrition, procreation continues to be "under-valued by society and by much of the male and female intelligentsia alike" (p. 10). By focusing on wage employment as the basis of individual fulfillment, Hart contends, feminists have not remedied persistent gender inequalities. In order to solve this problem, Hart calls for the politicization of procreation, a redefinition of labor, and a redistribution of income.

Hart then embarks on an extended critique of "anti-essentialist feminism." To Hart, the question of whether or not men and women are biologically identical is irrelevant to the determination of social, moral, economic, and political worth. "A truly progressive feminism," Hart asserts, "must root out the structural causes of women's inferiority, not seek to erase femininity in order that women may compete in an otherwise antagonistic environment" (p. 29). Hart distinguishes her version of feminism from "contemporary feminism" which she believes is "paralyzed" by "fear of biological essentialism" (p. 33). She castigates feminists for demeaning motherhood and using "masculine" standards to gauge mothers' social worth. She believes that feminists have adopted a minimal conception of "reproductive rights" which focuses on birth control, abortion, and childcare. Hart argues that this limited purview devalues the role of motherhood in the lives of most women.

Hart calls for society to stop privileging the individual over "people with kinship commitments and obligations" (p. 42). Not satisfied with tax credits for each child, Hart advocates a lifetime tax exemption to compensate

for the opportunity costs of bearing and rearing children. This benefit could be transferred to whichever parent holds primary responsibility for full-time child care. She also recommends national heath insurance and increased funding for federal children's programs. But manipulation of the federal tax code is not enough for Hart. She also endorses the redistribution of income from non-childbearers to childbearers with no required means test. In Hart's views, such a program will properly reward "society's most vital work." (p. 45). She also challenges women to reject male conceptions of political participation and citizenship.

Throughout Hart's article, I was dismayed by her broad denunciation of "feminists" and "feminism." Though she draws the distinction between academic feminist theorists and the organized women's movement, she offers few examples of specific individuals or organizations which are devaluing mothers and the role of motherhood. Who is making these claims? This imprecise use of evidence weakens her argument. I challenge preferential economic treatment of child-bearers as inherently biased against both the voluntarily and involuntarily infertile. I also question the global applicability of her thesis. In nations consumed by overpopulation, malnutrition, and poverty, one can certainly argue that society's "most vital work" is caring for the children who are already here, not encouraging women to achieve individual fulfillment through additional procreation.

Juliet Mitchell and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese offer additional criticisms of Hart's theses. Mitchell accepts Hart's emphasis on motherhood and reproduction, but challenges her claim that a mother's wage would solve social inequalities. In Mitchell's view, such remuneration may not transcend the class, ethnic, and racial divisions among mothers. Fox-Genovese provides a more extended rebuttal. Fox-Genovese assails Hart's oversimplification of the anti-essentialist feminists and her failure to examine "the radical individualism that advanced capitalism is fostering." "To follow her [Hart's] argument to its logical conclusion," Fox-Genovese asserts, "is to acknowledge women's rights as individuals to bear and rear children at public expense" (p. 54). Fox-Genovese finds Hart's tax transfer plan "distressingly vague." Fox-Genovese explores some of the Orwellian ramifications of Hart's ideas. Even if the state agreed to recognize children as a public concern, how would society determine the "value" of offspring? Would the scion of drug-addicted or alcoholic mothers be "worth" less? Would the state demand input into the rearing of the children it supported? But Fox-Genovese saves her most stinging criticisms for Hart's emphasis on mothers instead of on families. She questions why biological mothers, independent of biological fathers, should receive public support for their reproductive capabilities. Rather than accepting public support for mothers, Fox-Genovese calls for policies that make the labor market more attuned to children and their parents–regardless of gender.

In her rejoinder, Hart responds mainly to Fox-Genovese. She disputes Fox-Genovese's interpretation of her thesis. While acknowledging that most beneficiaries would be female, Hart insists that she "made no prescriptions about the desirable sex of the primary child raiser." She dismisses as "scare-mongering" Fox-Genovese's fears of repressive state interference in family life. Only by making society responsible for the physical and intellectual development of children (i.e., parental), Hart concludes, can rampant individualism be checked.

The "culture" section of the book also addresses gender. In "A Culturalist Critique of Trends in Feminist Theory," Ruth Bloch explores the problems created by "the rejection of biology as the source of gender relations" (p. 73). In relying so heavily on culture as an analytical trope, Bloch believes that most feminist theorists have reduced culture to class distinctions or power differentials. To illustrate her thesis, Bloch surveys the evolution of feminist thought since the late 1960s. Although Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* described cultural reflections of gender inequality, early theorists debated whether sexism stemmed from patriarchy or capitalism. Both the patriarchy and Marxist theories focus on the tangible–either biology or economics. Consequently, Bloch argues that neither fully appreciate gender symbolism on its own terms.

She then describes the rise of "women's culture" in the mid-1970s. These scholars focus on the intellectual and emotional qualities which define women as a social entity. Critics disparage this work as biological determinism. Nicky Hart, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and others demand that society acknowledge and reward women's difference. Others assert that defining a "women's" culture distorts the experiences of women of color, lesbians, or the working-class.

Since the early 1980s, post-structuralists have extended this critique of essentialism. These theorists have "shifted away from categorizing women as a sex to concentrating on the cultural representations of sexual difference and the attitudes toward femininity and masculinity" (p. 83). This mode of analysis encompasses cul-

tural diversity and notions of "otherness." In these analyses, gender joins race and class as culturally-constructed forms of power.

After completing her survey of feminist thought, Bloch proclaims her dissatisfaction with current conceptions of culture and its relation to gender. Calling for notions of culture which encompass more than power relations, she urges scholars to examine "broader cultural perspectives on human interconnectedness" (p. 89). "A cultural analysis of the meanings of gender," Bloch asserts, "would address the problem of gender inequality without reducing it to either individual psychodynamics, political struggle, or class relations" (p. 91).

Barbara Laslett and Sandra Harding respond to Bloch's proposals. Laslett questions whether culture can be divorced from social institutions, politics, and material conditions. She calls for more complex feminist theories which simultaneously address the political, intellectual, sexual, economic, and cultural contexts of gender. Harding also questions the viability of Bloch's cultural approach. Harding finds Bloch's characterization of the women's liberation movement far too narrow. In Harding's view, Bloch's focus on cultural issues erases the sweeping political, economic, legal, and institutional changes ushered in by these feminists. Harding also criticizes Bloch for denying the interconnectedness of "symbols, social structures, and individual identities." Culture, Harding argues, is not autonomous (p. 117).

In her rejoinder, Bloch reminds readers that her purpose was not to write a comprehensive history of recent women's activism, but to explore the "countercultural sides of feminism" (p. 120). While acknowledging the difficulty of precisely defining culture, Bloch claims that Harding and Laslett have misinterpreted her argument. Bloch agrees that "culture is mixed together with other structures like organizations, economic systems, politics, and family systems–as well as with psychological variables like desire, whether sexual or otherwise" (p. 123). She then reiterates her call for the use of culture as an independent analytical category.

The remaining essays in the gender section of *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality* are as stimulating as those on procreation and culture. Linda Gordon and Theda Skocpol engage in an extended debate on Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* and their different approaches to welfare history. Deborah Valenze, Iris Berger, and Philippa Levine examine Marxist approaches to women's history and debate whether this analysis remains relevant in the post-Cold War world. The final two essays stand alone. Susan Rubin Suleiman reexamines her heroine Simone de Beauvoir in light of recently released documents. The discovery of morally troubling information about de Beauvoir prompts Sulieman to reassess the connections between history, fiction, and memoir while reevaluating her admiration of de Beauvoir. In "The Male's Search for a New Identity," Theodore C. Kent provides a humorous discussion of man's quest for meaning from pre-historic to modern times.

The shorter sexuality section features two fascinating discussions of Foucault and Freud. Roy Porter and Mark Poster debate Foucault's theories on sexuality. Porter poses the question of whether Foucault is useful for understanding sexuality in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In Porter's view, Foucault challenges us to reexamine the Western belief that "sex has been stifled and penalized, all too often at the cost of hypocrisy or neurosis" (p. 248). Foucault, Porter asserts, believes that the real story of Western sexuality is not one of repression, but of "greater emphasis on sex in every dimension of our lives, and variegation and intensification of libidinous pleasures (not least the pleasures of knowing and talking about sex) (p. 249).

Porter attempts to debunk Foucault's "repression hypothesis." He claims that a proliferation of discourse about sex does not necessarily translate into more liberal sexual attitudes, citing the Bowdlerization of *As You Like It*, the censorship of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Margaret Thatcher's 1989 veto of a national survey on British sexual habits as examples. "What is surely at stake is not whether the silence was total," Porter argues, "but the question of *who* was permitted to say *what*, and *who* was prohibited, or dissuaded, from saying *what*, and *who* had what kinds of powers to enforce the taboos" (p. 253). Porter claims that Foucault fails to take seriously the plethora of historical accounts describing sexual repression and confining healthy sexuality to marriage.

Mark Poster claims that Porter has misunderstood Foucault. In Poster's view, Foucault argues that "since human beings experience the world through the mediation of language their experience cannot be divorced from their formulations about it" (p. 270). Foucault's model of discourse/practice, Poster asserts, broadens the concept of sexuality beyond white men and Freudo-Marxist repression. Poster is dismayed at Porter's reading of Foucault's views on the Victorian era. Poster believes that Foucault broadened a critique of Victorian sexuality by including not only its punishments and prohi-

bitions but also the language of sexuality. How anyone could turn Foucault into "an enemy of sexual pleasure" is beyond Poster.

In "Freud, Sexuality, and Repressed Memory," Roy Porter, Jeffrey Masson, Frederick Crews, and Jeffrey Prager battle over the meaning of Freud and modern psychiatry. Porter begins the dialogue by examining Jeffrey Masson and his controversial book *The Assault on Truth*. Porter believes that Masson's personality has detracted attention from his ideas. Since the early 1980s, Masson has attacked Freud and the psychiatric establishment. Although the psychoanalytic community has denounced Masson and his work, some feminists have embraced his views on sexual abuse and repressed memory. Porter praises Masson for illuminating inconsistencies in Freud's switch from the seduction theory to the repressed memory thesis. Masson argues that the earlier seduction theory was correct. But Freud, Masson contends, abandoned it out of fear that it would impede his career. Later, Freud argued that his patients' accounts of seduction stemmed from their fantasies, not from memories of childhood abuse. The notions of infantile sexuality and the unconscious thus emerged as the hallmarks of Freudian psychology. Masson rejects this traditional interpretation of Freud. He argues that Freud intentionally betrayed his patients and scientific truth.

Porter questions Masson's thesis. He claims that Masson has based his claims on weak evidence. Porter also doubts that Freud's fantasy theory was any more popular with the psychiatric community than the controversial seduction theory. Porter maintains that Freud's intellectual shift stemmed from a natural progression of his thought processes not from an intentional deception. Furthermore, Freud never disputed the existence of actual cases of childhood sexual abuse. That said, Porter reiterates his belief that Masson's work deserves serious consideration.

Such commentary does not sit well with Jeffrey Masson. He begins by stating, "What is distressing about Roy Porter's vitriolic review of my books and my life is that he seems not to know much about either" (p. 296). Masson insists his primary interest is not Freud's motives, but the appearance of documents which demonstrate Freud's confusion. He challenges historians to "tear themselves away ... from the preoccupation of how many women I slept with" to find hard evidence which refutes his research (p. 297). Citing German reviews of the *Three Essays*, Masson stresses that Freud's theory of childhood sexuality *was* better-received by critics than the seduction thesis. Masson's examination of German psychiatric literature published from 1909 to 1915, reveals that not a single article on sexual abuse appeared. Psychiatric interest in sexual abuse of children, Masson asserts, has *not* always been widespread, but is a very recent phenomenon. Furthermore, Masson concludes, the psychiatric community refuses to acknowledge the terrifying frequency of this abuse.

Frederick Crews offers an entirely different view of Freud. Crews claims that neither Masson nor Porter ask "whether Freud discovered *anything at all* about his hysterical patients" (p. 301). Crews is not surprised by Masson's failure to pursue this thesis. Masson, Crews sardonically observes, is too obsessed with his own notoriety to reevaluate his ideas. Crews does acknowledge the importance of Masson's edition of the complete Freud-Fleiss letters. But Crews denounces Masson's refusal to consider that Freud may have been guessing wildly in formulating both the seduction and fantasy theories. He also attacks Masson's claim that a quarter of all American girls have been molested. Masson, Crews argues, is more concerned with aligning himself with radical feminists than with uncovering the truth about sexual abuse.

Finally, Jeffrey Prager responds to Masson and Crews. Prager states that both Masson and Crews–albeit from opposite ends of the political spectrum–are determined to be the one "to hammer in the last nails of Freudanism's coffin" (p. 316). Prager claims that neither Masson nor Crews acknowledge the complexity of current research on repressed memory. Furthermore, in their separate quests to vindicate views on Freud and psychiatry, both Masson and Crews distort the past.

Obviously, *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality* covers a broad range of topics. The essays are uniformly well-researched and well-written. One does wonder, however, why these topics were selected and others were omitted. Other than their common appearance in the journal *Contention*, I gained little sense of the linkages between these essays. The volume contains only cursory introductions to its subjects and authors. For this reason, I often felt I was joining *in medias res* arguments. Accordingly, I would be reluctant to assign this book to my graduate students without supplementing it with accompanying literature. These quibbles aside, my overall impression is a very positive one. *Debating Gender, Debating Sexuality* will make you think.

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Citation: Laura A. Belmonte. Review of Keddie, Nikki R., ed., *Debating Gender. Debating Sexuality*. H-Women, H-Net Reviews. November, 1997.

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