

TOWARDS A POSTMODERNIST FEMINISM

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Introduction

The task of fashioning a postmodernist feminism seems an impossible one when taken at face value. This is particularly so when one recognizes the fact that feminism and postmodernity have conflicting objectives. Postmodernist argument has issued a number of challenges: to the idea that we can continue to think, write and speak of our culture as representing a continuous development and progress, to the idea that humanity is proceeding towards a telos of "emancipation" and "self-realization", to the idea that we can invoke any universal subjectivity in speaking about the human condition.¹ All these form the hallmark of the Enlightenment, and modernism is usually defined in relation to ideas which emerge from the Enlightenment. Postmodernism is a critique of modernity and its project of enlightenment. For example it has been thought that human beings are possessed of a stable, coherent, rational self, and that rationality applied in the pursuit of science and knowledge will deliver truth.² Postmodernists dispute these notions of self, knowledge and truth. Postmodernism also distances itself from the enlightenment project of attempting to dethrone religiosity, superstition, mythology, mysticism, and enthroned reason.

However, the project of the Enlightenment seems to be in line with some of the main objectives of feminism among which is the promotion of a state of affairs in which women can expect no less from society than men in the way of material and moral support. Feminists are of the view that this aim can be achieved by rejecting the traditional role imposed on women by religion, tradition, customs and so on. In view of this, there

¹ See Kate Soper, "Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism" in *The Woman Question* edited by Mary Evans (London: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 10.

² Sievi Jackson et al., *Women's Studies: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 5.

seems to be not only an alliance between feminism and the project of modernity, there are also areas where postmodernism and feminism converge.

This paper is aimed at examining the prospect of having a postmodernist feminism. Effort will be made towards examining the ideas of postmodernism and that of feminism bringing out the relationship between both so as to draw the conclusion that feminism is necessarily postmodern. For the purpose of this paper, the idea of postmodernism will be categorized under three subheadings. These are postmodernism as a critique of modernity, postmodernism as an aversion towards modernity's universality, and postmodernism as a completion of the incomplete project of modernity.

Postmodernism as a Critique of Modernity

There's always the problem of how far back one can date modernity. But most historians of literature date it back to the 17th century which was also referred to as the period of the Enlightenment. As a period in cultural history, modernism usually denotes advanced or avant-garde European and American art and thought, though it has also been used to describe more general social conditions and attitudes.³ Before this period, European culture or thought was dominated by the Church, superstition and myth. The task of the enlightenment philosophers then was to emancipate the people from religion, myth and superstition through the instrument of reason which must be separated from the emotion and the will.

However, the project of the Enlightenment was viewed as an aesthetic project, the self-conscious endeavor of a group of innovators to further certain values and achieve recognition.⁴ It promised the emancipation of the individual through the cultivation of reason. They therefore turned reason to the only form of knowledge and everything was turned into abstract formality. Reason, for modernists, would bring about

³ Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 447.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

knowledge which would in turn produce power, mastery and dominion over nature and the environment. This would then lead to technological progress. The Enlightenment therefore reduced the whole enterprise of knowledge to the dominance of "reason". In this regard, one can quickly add that while modernism sought depth and abstraction, postmodernism turns toward surface and particularity.

Postmodernism arose as a critique of the Enlightenment quest to turn everything to abstract formality of reason. Thus, Maggie Humm sees postmodernism as a radical break from modernist periodizing.⁵ Postmodernists are of the view that the reduction of everything to reason has reduced reality to mere formal abstraction and thereby failed to take cognizance of the content of the world. As a result, the reality they projected through reason does not portray the world as it really is despite the persistent definition of modernism in terms of an aspiration to reveal the essential truth of the world.

Furthermore, the role of reason as it relates to our acquiring knowledge to conquer, master and to have dominion over nature and the environment was also criticized by postmodernism. The argument is that the dominance over nature being stressed by the Enlightenment could be extended to dominance over the human being; it is also argued that vestiges of dominance over the human being could be seen in the world. For example, it is the technological development that led to the Holocaust, the gas chamber and even the invention of terrible weapons of war. Thus, Jean Francois Lyotard⁶ sees the emancipation promised by the Enlightenment as an illusion.

⁵ Maggie Humm, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 155.

⁶ Jean Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism" in *Postmodernism: A Reading*, Thomas Doherty, ed., (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 46.

Postmodernism as an Aversion Towards Grand Theories

A major consequence of the Enlightenment's enthronement of reason is that reason then became universal reason and the only standard of judgment. It is this universalisation of standards that postmodernism rejects. In the words of Fraser and Nicholson, central to the idea of postmodernism is the claim that modern conception must give way to a postmodern one in which criticism floats free of any universalistic theoretical ground.⁷ This rejection of universal standards, grand narratives and totalities, which often underlies all postmodernist thought, cuts across all disciplines such as architecture and literature. In philosophy, postmodernism challenges the idea that the task of philosophy is to look for general theories. Hence, there is an expressed need to abandon the idea that has dominated philosophy since the time of Plato. As explained by Richard Rorty,⁸ philosophy as done since the time of Plato rests on a mistake of looking for general theories of good, truth, beautiful, and so on. He opined that such theories are unlikely to be found, urging that we should not concentrate on such, and called into question all theories that tend towards universal thinking. Thus, postmodernism is waging a war against totality by placing emphasis on difference. Following François Lyotard,⁹ it designates a general condition of contemporary western civilization. It is a call to rethink our ways of thinking about the society. Instead of grand theories, our theories should focus on localism. The argument, according to postmodernists, is that grand theories deny the specificity of the local tradition hence the need to do away with them. Also, to say there is only one correct grand theory is to conceal the multiplicity of individual experiences.

The consequence of the aversion towards grand theories is that all grand narratives are classified as redundant and, as such, it becomes impossible for people to place credence in grand narratives. Such attempts

at overarching and unifying schemes simply cannot encompass the diversity and fragmentation of society today. Hence Lyotard¹⁰ sees the day(s) of grand narratives as over. Since metanarratives have been rejected, Lyotard opined that legitimization now becomes plural, local and immanent in contrast to the legitimization of grand narratives which are single, universal and transcendent.¹¹ For him, the postmodern condition is one in which "grand narratives of legitimization" are no longer credible. Hence he sees postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives.

Postmodernism as Completion of the Incomplete Project of Modernity

Central to this idea of postmodernism is the claim that the errors of modernity can be overcome. Hence, the project of modernity should not be abandoned. This idea of postmodernism does not see postmodernism as anti-modern movement due to its emphasis on the need to retrieve modernity by correcting its mistakes. One can say, following Barry Smart,¹² that postmodernism grows out of and is continuous with, modernism. Also, the two epochs can be seen as engaged in a long-running and ongoing set of relationships with postmodernism continually pointing out the limitations of modernism.

Contrary to the above claim, Jürgen Habermas¹³ opined that modernity made the mistake of fragmenting life so as to bring emancipation and progress. Such project, according to him, boomeranged and even led to the opposite of what it intended. Seen from the viewpoint of postmodernism, modernity was a cultural epoch and "episteme" founded on a humanistic belief that the world is one. This long-standing belief, which is embedded in realist art, representational politics and empirical science, is understood as claiming that a common denominator can be found for all systems of belief and value; that the world is a unified field

¹⁰ See Lyotard on the Postmodern Era in E.C. Cuff, W.W. Sharrock and D. W. Francis, eds, *Perspectives in Sociology* (London: Routledge 1998), p. 295.

¹¹ N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy", p. 418.

¹² Barry Smart, *Postmodernity* (London: Routledge), p. 5.

¹³ J. Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" in *Postmodernism: A Reading*, pp. 104-105.

⁷ N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism" in *Postmodernism: A Reading*, p. 416.

⁸ R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1982* (Great Britain: The Harvester press, 1982), p. xiii - xv.

⁹ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 13.

which can be explained by a single explanatory system. As this belief developed through increasingly secular and materialistic practices, it became less secure in its claim to universal applicability.¹⁴ Though the criticism against modernity is often claimed to be valid, for Habermas it is not a sufficient reason for abandoning modernity. He therefore proposed as solution the unity of life, that is, in order to overcome the problem of modernity, all the spheres of life that have been demarcated by modernity must be reconciled with everyday life. The reconciliation would take the form of interconnection between the different spheres and it would be based on communication such that it would be a consensus or agreement among the community of rational minds.

The Idea of Feminism

Feminism is usually broadly defined as an active desire to change women's position in the society.¹⁵ Linked to this is the view that feminism is a social movement for change in the position of women. Its privileged form is taken to be the political movement, the self-organization of women's politics. In this regard, groups that have tried to change the position of women or ideas about women have been granted the title feminist. A feminist can be defined as someone whose central concern and pre-occupation lie with the position of women and their persistent struggle for emancipation. According to Ray Strachey's definition, feminists share the same aims and the same general ideas, the same broad commitment to the great cause of female emancipation and a capacity to put this cause in the centre of their lives.

It is practically impossible to discuss feminism without discussing its objectives. Since women have been oppressed, however, their experiences correspondingly may have been altered by the instrument of oppression and women may therefore not possess the skills of communicating their experiences in ways that can be readily understood. Feminists therefore see part of their task as articulating women's reports

¹⁴ Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of philosophy*, p.587.

¹⁵ See Professor Olive in her *Faces of Feminism* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), p. 3

or enabling women to articulate these reports themselves.¹⁶ Closely connected with the above is the task of searching out or identifying the oppressive elements that have distorted women's experience, including the experiences of feminists' themselves. A feminist must do her best to search out these oppressive elements and analyze women's unique experiences.¹⁷

Central to the objectives of feminism is the emancipation of women from oppression, which is given expression in patriarchy. Feminists must have an awareness of women's oppression which is conceptualized as patriarchy. This term can be defined as a general organizational feature of society which was initiated by men, continues to be maintained by men and has men as its principal beneficiaries. The term arises out of the traditional belief that men are the heads of their families and their wives are subordinate to them and also out of the traditional claim that women do not exist in their own right but only in relation to men either as mother, daughter, wife or mistress. The Yoruba society for example is patriarchal in nature. This is evident in the fact that the military, industry, political offices, universities, science, technology, finance, in short all the corridors of power in the society are dominated and paraded by men. Traditionally, the father has complete ownership over his wife or wives and children including the power of physically abusing the woman. All these powers are granted by the institution of patriarchy.

The origin of patriarchy can be traced to religion. Both Christianity and Islam believe that women were created out of men. To this end, the Bible has it that the woman was made out of the ribs of the man.¹⁸ This is the origin of the subordination of women to men. This subordination is seen in every sphere of life. In the Quran, women cannot lead prayers. In fact, Islam preaches putting women in *purdah* (veil). This in effect reduces their ability to assert themselves because women in *purdah* can neither work nor go out of the house. Likewise, in the Bible women are not

¹⁶ A. Minas, *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men* (California: Wordsworth Publishing Company, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁷ A. Minas, *Gender Basics*, p.5

¹⁸ Genesis 2: 21-22, King James Version

allowed to speak in the Church as preachers and when the men are speaking women must be silent.

Ordinarily, some professions, such as the nursing profession, are seen to be feminine. This is so because of the emotional attachment of this profession. This is also peculiar to the work of the secretary because secretaries are subordinate to their bosses. One can conclude from these facts that patriarchy dominates every sphere of human life and it is this trend that feminists are strongly rejecting. Feminism is thus directed at social change with the objective of ending patriarchy, either in particular areas or in its entirety. For many women, this is the most important part of feminism, because they believe that the elimination of patriarchal structures is the ultimate reason for searching them out and developing theories about them.¹⁹

In addition to eliminating all patriarchal structures, feminism has as its aim the commitment to understanding women's own perceptions of their situations. Feminists insist that because women as a group have been neglected in the past, we should make special efforts to pay attention to, understand and respect women's reports of their experiences. This would enable them to take into cognizance the particular situation and different experiences of women rather than ascribing just a single experience to all women. Lastly, feminism also aims at correcting the impression people have about women as second class citizens and restoring women's self-image and their self-worth.

However, the larger project of feminism—its implications, perspectives, strategies, and possibilities—appeals in varying degrees to women of all cultures, ages, races, religions and classes. There is not only one feminism but rather several different versions of feminist thought. The tripartite division into liberal, radical and socialist feminism no longer accurately describes the great diversity of positions. One basis on which feminist perspectives can be distinguished is the degree to which they are described as essentialist or anti-essentialist. Essentialism is characterized by the argument that women are "born, not made", that "womanhood" is innate rather than socially constructed. Though few feminists deny the

¹⁹ A. Minas, *Gender Basics*, p. 6

sociocultural construction of gender yet feminist critics like Teresa de Lauretis argue that it is still possible to talk about the "essence" of woman.

It is the specific properties (e.g. a female-sexed body), qualities (a disposition to nurturance, a certain relation to the body etc), or necessary attributes (e.g. the experience of femaleness, of living in the world as female) that women have developed or have been bound to historically in their differently patriarchal sociocultural contexts which make them women not men.²⁰

Feminists vary, de Lauretis argues, in the emphasis they place on the various qualities, properties and attributes of sex and gender, as well as in the valuing of them. Nonetheless, she asserts that a modified essentialism is the very basis on which feminist thinking differs from non-feminist thinking, enabling all the different branches of feminist thought to be termed "feminist".

Thus, the essentialist feminist would claim that there are some roles which are essentially feminine and therefore cannot be ascribed to men. For example, Nancy Chodorow²¹ claims that there are some apparent observable psychic differences between men and women. In order to differentiate between the attributes of men and women, the essentialist feminist ascribes qualities like sympathy, compassion, kindness, caring for others, human concern and emotional responsiveness to women. While qualities like rationality, absence of emotion, strength of will etc are essentially ascribed to men.

Anti-essentialist feminists, on the other hand, argue that mothering and caring, which is regarded as a feminine role by nature, can in principle be undertaken by either sex. Hence, any authority that might be reserved for women in terms of caring and mothering is due to the sexual division

²⁰ T. de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, US and Britain" in *Differences* vol. 1, no 2(1989), pp. 5-6.

²¹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and The Sociology of Gender* (London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 3.

of labour that existed in history.²³ According to this group of feminists, people fail to make a distinction between sex roles and gender roles. Gender roles are classified by sex. This classification is social and not biological. For example, if child-rearing is classified as a female role, it is a female gender role, not a female sex role since child-rearing can be done by a male or a female. On the other hand, sex roles refer to an occupation or biological function for which a necessary qualification is to belong to one particular sex category. For example, pregnancy is a female sex role because only members of the female sex may bear children.²³

However, failure to make the above distinction has made this category of feminists to question the desirability of the specialized role given to women. They do not see the role of mothering and caring given to women as essentially their peculiar role. Rather, they would want men to share in them. Also, the so called female qualities of character, according to them, are not essentially part of the nature of women. Rather, they see them as being socially determined. In essence, it is the society, culture and tradition that ascribe such qualities to women. They are not necessarily part of their nature.

In the light of the ideas of postmodernism and feminism examined thus far, one would observe some relationship in terms of their differences and similarities. First, there is, at best, an uneasy relationship between postmodernism and feminism. Few feminists are willing to label themselves postmodernists and many postmodernists are profoundly skeptical of the feminist movement. This is partly due to the fact that there is not one "feminist" position but rather many "feminisms". A more fundamental reason for the uneasiness between postmodernism and feminism is what Susan Hekman sees as the profound ambiguity in the feminist heritage.²⁴ On the one hand, feminism, because it challenges the modernist/enlightenment dichotomies that inevitably place women in an

²³ Savina Lovibond, "Maternalistic Ethics: A Feminist Assessment" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 1, No. 4 (1994) p. 781.

²⁴ For this distinction, see "Principal Concepts Linked to the Notion of Gender" in UNICEF's *Gender Training Manual on Women's Equality and Empowerment*, Annex 3.

²⁵ Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of A Postmodern Feminism* (Oxford: Polity Press 1990), p. 2.

inferior position, is an intellectual ally of postmodernism. On the other hand, however, contemporary feminism is both historically and theoretically a modernist movement. The eighteenth and nineteenth century roots of the feminist movement lay in liberal humanism, a movement that is one of the primary objects of the postmodernist challenge. This movement aims at achieving equality with men by doing away with patriarchy which is an offshoot of religion, myth, and tradition. This aim is in line with the Enlightenment project of modernity which is to dethrone religion, myth and tradition in order to enthrone reason and give room to progress.

Thus, the Enlightenment promises emancipation from the traditional way of life. This promise happens to be in line with the aim of feminism which includes, among others, the emancipation from patriarchy and its institutions which is the traditional way of life. When viewed from this direction, it can be held that feminism inherits a legacy that is thoroughly modernist, a legacy rooted in the emancipatory impulse of liberal-humanism. Modernist values are very much a part of contemporary feminist positions. The consequence of this is that postmodernism as a critique of the emancipatory project of modernity would then not be in support of the emancipatory objective of feminism. If truly postmodernism is a critique of the emancipatory project of modernity the implication of this would be that postmodernism condones or tolerates traditional communal norms of gender subordination which feminists are trying to overcome. This point was explicitly made by Fredrick Jameson²⁵ when he described postmodernism as the end of ideology, art or social class, the crisis of feminism, social democracy, or welfare state. Taken together, all these perhaps constitute what is called postmodernism. A look at postmodernism and feminism from this point of view suggests an uneasy relationship between both.

Furthermore, some elements of universality are still present in feminism. This is in the form of essentialism. It is a known fact that women in general are cut out by nature to perform certain biological

²⁵ F. Jameson, "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in *Postmodernism: A Reading*, p. 62.

functions which necessarily belong to them alone. For example they alone can become pregnant and bear children. Men by nature are excluded from such role. This nature has a universal underpinning as it cuts across culture. Thus, the grand narratives, (universality) which the postmodernist opposes can still be found in feminism.

Some have even argued that feminism as a social movement adopts various metanarratives in its theorizing.²⁶ Also historical categories like gender identity, sexuality, reproduction and mothering were employed. All these are elements of universality. Little wonder then that feminists often attempt a reply to this claim by explaining that contemporary feminism has contributed to the postmodern undermining of Enlightenment certainties by invoking "women's different experiences" to challenge the "grand narratives" of western history. Feminism, as we have seen, has also "heavily valorized" women's own narratives, women's stories of their own experience.²⁷

It can be inferred from the above that there are areas where feminism and postmodernism agree. This can be seen in the rejection of certain dichotomous categories which are persistent in modern philosophy. Feminists have argued that rationalism, particularly in Kant's sense, de-emphasizes virtues which can be called female, while those that can be called male are emphasized. In the moral sphere, the moral rationalist conception of a good man is the absence of the qualities of character such as sympathy, compassion, caring for others, kindness, human concern and emotional responsiveness.²⁸ This conception, for the feminist, is not only sexist but perpetuates the common enlightenment dichotomy which places women in an inferior position. Postmodernism is challenging, among other things, fundamental dichotomies such as rational/irrational and subject/object. Feminists tend to reject Kant's moral theory because it entrenches certain dichotomies. This is so because qualities such as rationality, universal principle of duty and absence of emotion, according

²⁶ N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy", pp. 426-428.

²⁷ Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory" in *Sigas*, 12 no. 4 (Summer 1987), pp. 621-43.

²⁸ See L. A. Blum "Kant's and Hegel's Moral Rationalism: A Feminist Perspective" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (June 1982), pp. 288-294.

to Blum, are more suitable to men.²⁹ These are directly opposed to qualities such as docility, charm, modesty and complaisance which reflect a social reality in which women are subordinate to men. They see the idea of rationality as a distinguishing mark of modernity. For them, this idea is an attempt by men to relegate women to a subordinate role.

Given the fact that feminism has some things in common with modernism, the question now is: can we have a postmodernist feminism? Put in another way, what are the chances of having a postmodernist feminism?

The Possibility of a Postmodern Feminism

There seems to be a prospect of having a postmodernist feminism. This is so because the term "postmodernism" is often used to describe the whole of contemporary culture and since its concern is with contemporary culture, this could be linked with contemporary women in their cultural setting and practices, such that special attention would be given to different experiences in different cultures. Talking about what a postmodern feminist theory might look like, Fraser and Nicholson³⁰ suggest that it must be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different periods and societies and to the sub-groups within them. It would be comparative, not universalizing. Instead of a subject of history and unitary notions of women and feminine gender identity, it would speak of plural, complex, constructed social identities, where, race, class, age and so on would also be significant. It would also present itself as pragmatic and fallible, more like a tapestry composed of threads of many hues than one woven from a single color. They add that it would aid political practices which can no longer rely on a theoretically constructed subject but must build a "patchwork of overlapping alliances".

Here, the focus would be the relativity of experience, rather than looking for a feminism that would explain and account for the entire feminist goal across culture. A postmodernist feminism in essence, will

²⁹ L. A. Blum "Kant's and Hegel's Moral Rationalism", p. 291

³⁰ N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy", pp. 248-429.

recognize the diversity of women's needs and experiences. It will amount to the fact that no single solution, on issues like child care, social security and housing can be adequate for all. Thus, the underlying premise of this practice is that while some women share some common interests and face some common enemies, such commonalities are by no means universal; rather they are interlaced with differences, even conflicts.³¹

However, some feminists have argued that enlightenment discourses of emancipation have functioned as much to oppress as to liberate women. Contemporary feminists have analyzed the ways in which "universal" principles—a feature of the enlightenment tradition—were always contradicted by the Enlightenment's construction of a public/private split which consigned women to the "private" realm of embodiment and domesticity in order to demarcate a public realm of reason and subjective sovereignty as essentially abstract, disinterested and above all male.³² It is in the light of this that postmodernism is challenging, among other things, fundamental dichotomies of enlightenment thought; dichotomies such as rational/irrational subject/object and public/private. It is questioning the homocentricity of the Enlightenment knowledge and even the status of "man" himself. If all the "feminisms" have anything in common it is a challenge to the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in western thought. It is this dichotomy the postmodernist are attacking. Feminists identify enlightenment dualisms and the privileging of the male that is the consequence of these dualisms. As a result of this, they accept the postmodern argument that these dualisms must be dissolved.

The crucial question in discussions about the prospect of postmodernist feminism is whether it is possible to preserve the emancipatory ideals of modernity, which seems necessary to the very endeavor of feminism. Since part of the project of modernity coincides with the major goal of feminism, it is of the opinion that postmodernist feminism need not totally reject the project of modernity. Rather, a cue

³¹ N. Fraser and L. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy", p. 429.

³² Patricia Waugh "Postmodernism and Feminism" in Stevi Jackson et al., *Contemporary Feminist Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 180.

should be taken from Habermas that there should be unity of life and this can be done by correcting the formal abstraction of reason which modernity proposed, such that the different spheres of human life (reason emotion and the will) would be brought together in a way that each sphere would not lose its distinctness.

Postmodernism criticized modernity for the abstract formality of reason, the effect of the abstraction being that reality is robbed off its content when reason is enthroned at the expense of the emotion and the will. But if we are to go by Habermas' suggestion, instead of rejecting reason, we should unite reason, emotion and the will with each sphere retaining its distinctness. Thus, the disembodiment which modernity was criticized of would be overcome. The effect of this is that the rationality being regarded as a male virtue will be on the same level with emotionality of women, such that one would not be regarded as superior and the other inferior or subordinate to it. Postmodernist feminism would then be a position that would recognize rationality and emotionality and each sphere would operate on equal basis. In this way there would be no apathy towards reason or emotion from either quarter.

Thus far, this essay has attempted to trace the convergences between contemporary feminist thought and postmodernism. The two movements are by no means identical. They spring from different theoretical and political sources and, at present regard each other with suspicion. The similarities between the two movements, however, are striking. Feminism and postmodernism are the only contemporary theories that present a truly radical critique of the Enlightenment legacy of modernism. No other approach on the contemporary intellectual scene offers a way of displacing and transforming the masculinist legacy of modernity.³³ This fact alone creates a bond between the two approaches.

³³ Susan Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge*, p. 189.