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Whose Freud?

The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture

Edited by Peter Brooks and Alex Woloch

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that "politics is destiny" that is implicit in Freud's comment; and finally focusing on the quite different appearances of the phrase in two essays from 1912 and 1924. Through this careful attention to the language and context of the statement, Moi shows that the common interpretation of the phrase misses how Freud has reconfigured the meaning of destiny. The redefinition is crucial: rather than suggesting a simplified hermeneutic of biological determination, Freud anticipates the interpretive strategies of someone like Beauvoir, in which biology "is the inescapable background of our choices and actions" and in which the relation between the body and subjectivity is complicated and necessary but not predetermined.

Is Anatomy Destiny? Freud and Biological Determinism

Toril Moi

This volume invites us to consider the place of psychoanalysis in contemporary culture. In modern feminism debates pitting cultural against biological causation have played an important role. Such debates have also arisen in relation to research in biotechnology, neurobiology, sociobiology, and ethnomethodology. I think it could be shown that Freud thinks of the body in terms that undermine the opposition between natural causation and cultural meanings that have been with us since Kant first distinguished between the realms of necessity and freedom. If this is right, then Freud does have a philosophically original contribution to make to contemporary debates about the relation between body and mind, nature and nurture, genetic inheritance and social construction. I want to take a first step toward this larger argument by raising a question that has been important to feminists: is Freud a biological determinist?

Biological determinists believe that social norms are or ought to be grounded on biological facts. They also believe that no amount of social change will change the fundamental biological nature of human beings. As the late nineteenth-century determinists Patrick Geddes

and J. Arthur Thomson put it: "What was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament."[1] Many biological determinists believe that biological facts express themselves in the social roles prevalent in their own society and that any change would lead to a disastrous incapacity to reproduce. This was the view of W. K. Brooks, a professor of biology at Johns Hopkins University in the 1880s: "The positions which women already occupy in society and the duties which they perform are, in the main, what they should be if our view is correct; and any attempt to improve the condition of women by ignoring or obliterating the intellectual differences between them and men must result in disaster to the race."[2]

Freud's views on women have often been taken to be consonant with this. Given that Freud studied medicine at a time when determinism was widespread and started his scientific career in the late 1870s with research on the physiology of eels, it would hardly be surprising were we to find traces of it in his work. Read against this historical background, Freud's famous phrase "anatomy is destiny" appears to clinch the case. If he can say such a thing, he must be a biological determinist. No single sentence of Freud's has been more troublesome to feminists. Sooner or later, anyone who believes that Freud was not in fact a biological determinist will have to explain why this sentence does not undermine their claim. Usually this is done by writing it off as a casual witticism, not compatible with Freud's more thoughtful comments on the body. I don't think that argument is good enough. After all, Freud was sufficiently content with the formulation to use it twice, twelve years apart. The phrase "anatomy is Destiny" appears in 1912, in "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," and again in 1924, in "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex." Unless there is evidence to the contrary, the assumption must be that Freud actually meant what he said. The question to be answered is: what exactly *did* Freud mean when he claimed that anatomy is destiny?[3]

THE MEANING OF DESTINY

What Freud actually wrote was not, of course, "anatomy is destiny" but rather "die Anatomie ist das Schicksal."[4] There are some differences between the German *Schicksal* and the English *destiny*. *Schicksal* can be translated either as *fate* or as *destiny*. In English, *destiny* is linked to words like *destination:* the idea is that a certain outcome is bound to occur, regardless of human attempts to intervene. Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother, whatever his own wishes and inclinations might be. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *destiny* means "predetermined events; what is destined to happen to person, country, etc.; power that foreordains, invincible necessity." The difference between destiny and fate is that whereas fate more often is negative, associated with death and destruction, destiny can be quite positive. One can have a magnificent destiny but hardly a magnificent fate. Both words nevertheless carry connotations of preordination and inevitability.

The German word *Schicksal* is more imbued with metaphysical gloom than the English word *destiny*. In her extensive analysis of the cultural meanings of different words for fate and destiny in various European languages, Anna Wierzbicka writes that *Schicksal* has a "pessimistic orientation," that it has connotations of something "inevitable, superhuman and awesome," and that it "suggest[s] a mysterious and other-worldly power." In contrast, the English *destiny* has a less awesome and more upbeat ring, and the English *fate* comes across as more unambiguously fatal than *Schicksal*.[5]

In 1915 Freud gave the word *Schicksal* great prominence by putting it in the title of his important essay "Triebe und Triebschicksale," which literally means "Drives and the Destinies of Drives."[6] It is striking to note that he chose to put the word in the plural, thereby making it obvious that he did not intend to write a paper about "the one inexorable fate" or "the inevitable and unescapable outcome" of drives. Translating the title as "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," James Strachey, the editor of *The Standard Edition,* shows himself to be sensitive to Freud's main point, which is to show that drives are subjected to transformation by three different "polarities," each functioning more or less independently of the other two.[7] Whatever happens to the drive—the outcome of the different and varying pressure of these factors—is what Freud calls its *Schicksal*. To translate this as "destiny," Strachey recognizes, would be to provoke quite the wrong associations in English-speaking readers.[8]

In *Freud and Man's Soul,* his scorching critique of the translation of *The Standard Edition,* Bruno Bettelheim, who considers that both "Instinct" and "Vicissitudes" utterly fail to convey Freud's thought, comments: "It is true that both 'fate' and 'destiny' carry the implication of inevitability, which neither the German *Schicksale* nor the English 'vicissitudes' does. And Freud certainly did not mean that there is any inevitability inherent in the changes our inner drives are subject to. But if the translators rejected 'fate' because of its implication of immutability, they could have used 'change' or 'mutability' instead. They could, for example, have translated the title as 'Drives and Their Mutability.'"[9] The very fact that Bettelheim can propose to translate *Schicksale* as *mutability* shows that the range of meanings clustering around the word in Freud's work hardly

add up to conclusive evidence of determinism or a belief in predestination. The meaning of the phrase "anatomy is destiny," however, cannot be settled simply by examining dictionary definitions or by looking at how Freud uses the word *Schicksal* in other contexts. The question now is what meaning the sentence acquires in the two contexts where Freud actually uses it.

ATROPOS, THE INEXORABLE

I have said that *Schicksal* can be translated either as destiny or as fate. In its most traditional, mythological sense, "fate" is linked to the three fates (in Greek the *moira*), the three goddesses of destiny. Fate has thus come to mean the "impersonal power by which events are determined." Freud himself mentions the three fates in his essay "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), where he suggests that the three caskets that occur in so many fairy tales stand for, among other things, the three fates. Hesiod represents them as three old women spinning the thread of life: Klotho ("the spinner") held the distaff, Lachesis ("the apportioner") drew off the thread, and Atropos ("the inflexible") cut it short. Freud focuses on the third sister, the goddess of death, whom he calls "Atropos, the inexorable."[10]

The mythological meaning of destiny or fate foregrounded by Freud himself is death. We are all inexorably subject to death because we have human bodies. The fact that all human beings without exception are destined to die has enormous consequences for every human practice and every social institution, as well as for our own lived experience. Yet nobody seems to believe that to say so constitutes politically unacceptable biological determinism or that it is evidence of an attempt to situate human existence outside history or discourse. My point here is simple: It is often assumed that when Freud says that "anatomy is destiny" he must mean that certain features of our anatomy lead to an inexorable fate, that whatever the individual subject does, he or she cannot escape the predestined outcome dictated by anatomy. It is also usually assumed that any thought along these lines is bound to be evidence of biological determinism and sexism. Yet if Freud were saying that the fact of having a human body destines us to death, this would at once be a true description of a biological fact and a statement devoid of politically controversial implications. In this context, the word *destiny* does refer to Kant's necessity, to the iron law of natural cause and effect, yet *this* natural necessity does not abolish freedom. Or rather: the meaning we usually give to the word *freedom* is not such that it is undermined or voided by the fact of death. (Simone de Beauvoir, to mention one feminist explicitly opposed to biological determinism, would go even further: for her, death is the very condition of human freedom.)[11]

"TO VARY A SAYING OF NAPOLEON'S"

When Freud writes "anatomy is destiny," the idea that the human body destines us to death may linger in the air. Yet this is most likely not the meaning he had uppermost in his mind when he wrote the sentence. In the two passages I am considering here, "anatomy" refers to the specific configuration or structure of the human body, not just the body in its widest, biological generality. Let me return to Freud's texts. The most striking thing about the saying is the fact that in both passages, in 1924 as well as in 1912, Freud introduces it as a self-conscious twist on a "well-known" saying of Napoleon's:

> One might say here, varying a well-known saying by the great Napoleon: "Anatomy is destiny." [1912]

> "Anatomy is Destiny," to vary a saying of Napoleon's. [1924]

The fact that neither Freud nor James Strachey, the meticulous editor of *The Standard Edition* of Freud's works in English, supply a reference to what Napoleon actually said suggests that at the time the saying must have been well known in the German- and the English-speaking world. This is hardly the case today.[12]

Freud, an avid reader of the German classics, is referring to a conversation that took place between Napoleon and Goethe in Weimar in September 1808. According to Goethe's account in his *Autobiographische Einzelheiten,* the subject of the conversation was literature and theater: "Then he got to the destiny plays [*Schickstalsstücke*], of which he disapproved. They had belonged to a dark age. 'What does one want destiny for now?' he said. 'Politics is destiny.'"[13] Then Freud writes "anatomy is destiny," he explicitly intends us to recall Napoleon's "politics is destiny."[14] Napoleon, the most powerful man in the world at the time, scoffs at destiny. Power is destiny, he says. But this puts the meaning of destiny under pressure. For the victorious armies of Napoleon invading Europe irrevocably shaped the lives of millions, and many of those who starved and died in the Napoleonic wars must have thought that such suffering was their fate. Yet Napoleon's armies were neither the agents of divine intervention nor the ineluctable effects of the laws of nature. Napoleon, the self-made man par excel-

lence, is not saying that he, too, is the mere plaything of politics. He makes politics. If anything, Napoleon sounds a positively Nietzschean theme here: in a world dominated by power, we either grasp the opportunity to forge our own destiny or succumb to the slave morality of Christianity. What some weak souls experience as the blow of fate is actually the work of other, more energetic personalities.

Gustave Flaubert captures the irony implicit in Napoleon's point of view perfectly in his account of the last words of the broken Charles Bovary: "No, I am no longer angry with you," he says to Rodolphe, Emma's first lover. The passage continues:

> He even added a grand phrase, the first he had ever uttered:
> "It was the fault of fate!"
> Rodolphe, who had directed this fate, found him very meek for a man in his situation, comic even and a little despicable.[15]

What the dying Charles Bovary in his pathetic last words takes to be fate, Rodolphe knows to be the work of human agency. Flaubert's irony recalls Napoleon's: to invoke fate is to be terminally deluded. Yet Napoleon is not saying that destiny does not exist, he is saying that it is politics. What makes Napoleon's *grand mot* so difficult is that it makes the meaning of *destiny* opaque. Napoleon challenges us to consider what *destiny* might mean in a world where the mythological meaning (the oracles, prophecies, oaths, and curses of the melodramatic Schicksalsstücke) no longer make sense. Freud's grand phrase resonates with the complexity and irony of Napoleon's original saying. A slightly tongue-in-cheek invocation of Napoleon's "politics is destiny," Freud's "anatomy is destiny" invites us to think about what *destiny* might mean in a modern, demythologized world. Just as Napoleon did not mean to say that politics belongs to a sphere unreachable by human agency, Freud probably did not mean to say that the *Diktats* of anatomy inexorably override human agency and choice.

1912: ANATOMY AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

Turning now to the contexts in which Freud's "anatomy is destiny" occurs, the first and most striking thing to be noted is that in 1912 he uses it to back up a claim about sexuality in general, whereas in 1924 the same phrase is invoked to make a point about sexual difference. Here is the phrase from 1912 quoted in its

context (I apologize for quoting at such length, but if we are to grasp Freud's thought here we have to read his words carefully):

> The excremental is all too intimately and inseparably bound up with the sexual; the position of the genitals—*inter urinas et faeces*—remains the decisive and unchanging factor. *One might say here, varying a well-known saying of the great Napoleon: "Anatomy is destiny."* The genitals themselves have not taken part in the development of the human body in the direction of beauty: they have remained animal, and thus love, too, has remained in essence just as animal as it ever was. The instincts of love are hard to educate; education of them achieves now too much, now too little. What civilization aims at making out of them seems unattainable except at the price of a sensible loss of pleasure; the persistence of the impulses that could not be made use of can be detected in sexual activity in the form of non-satisfaction.
>
> Thus we may perhaps be forced to become reconciled to the idea that it is quite impossible to adjust the claims of the sexual instincts to the demands of civilization; that in consequence of its cultural development renunciation and suffering, as well as the danger of extinction in the remotest future, cannot be avoided by the human race. This gloomy prognosis rests, it is true, on the single conjecture that the non-satisfaction that goes with civilization is the necessary consequence of certain peculiarities which the sexual instinct has assumed under the pressure of culture. The very incapacity of the sexual instinct to yield complete satisfaction as soon as it submits to the first demands of civilization becomes the source, however, of the noblest cultural achievements which are brought into being by ever more extensive sublimation of its instinctual components. For what motive would men have for putting sexual instinctual forces to other uses if, by any distribution of those forces, they could obtain fully satisfying pleasure?[16]

These paragraphs are written in order to back up a claim just made in the previous paragraph. At stake here is nothing less than one of Freud's most famous and important claims about sexuality: "It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction" (188–89). This sentence, much loved by deconstructionists and other postmodern readers of Freud, is central to the psychoanalytic understanding of sexuality. Freud is here sounding a warning to all those who wish to believe that it is possible simply to "liberate" human sexuality from the shackles of repression. Sexuality is not a strong libidinous stream forced to deviate from its original, inborn, and healthy course by the repressive forces of civilization. Rather, Freud is saying, there is no such thing as pure or unthwarted human sexuality. Even in

the most benign social setting, conflict and displacement will be inherent in all forms of human sexual expression. None of this means that all human beings are likely to be equally sexually conflicted, or sexually conflicted in exactly the same way, in this or in any other society.

In the part of the essay just preceding the quoted passage, Freud gives two reasons for the peculiarly self-thwarting nature of sexuality. First, he explains, there is the fact that any adult object choice is "never any longer the original object but only a surrogate for it" (189). (The original love object is the mother or the father.) This, he adds, often leads to the choice of "an endless series of substitutive objects none of which . . . brings full satisfaction" (189). Second, there is the fact that the sexual drive has had to repress a number of its original components. The most important of these is the coprophiliac aspects of the drive. A coprophiliac, we may recall, is someone who exhibits an undue interest in feces and defecation. Although we quickly learn to repress our coprophilic tendencies, they still lurk in a more or less remote corner of our psyche. This sets up a conflict: our civilized superego tells us to love what is clean, pure, and beautiful, whereas our lower instincts still take an interest in the ugly, the dark, and the dirty. This, Freud stresses, is an effect of our anatomy: "The excremental is all too intimately bound up with the sexual; the position of the genitals—*inter urinas et faeces*—remains the decisive and unchanging factor. One might say here, varying a well-known saying of the great Napoleon: 'Anatomy is destiny'" (189).

On the evidence of the quoted passages, it would seem that if anatomy is destiny, it is destiny in a peculiar way: what anatomy—the fact that the genitals are located where they are—seems to guarantee, without fail, is psychic conflict. Yet Freud is explicit that it is human civilization, the fact that every known human society socializes its children, that makes such psychic conflict inevitable. Freud always stressed that because the human baby is born prematurely (he means: born in a state of helplessness, before it can manage on its own), it is destined to interact with others.[17] Or in other words: our biology destines us to become social beings. Freud's thought here is strikingly similar to that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who declares, "Man is a historical idea, and not a natural species." Merleau-Ponty is not trying to deny that the body is natural; rather, his point is that it is our nature to be historical beings, just as Freud seems to be saying that it is our nature to be social creatures.[18]

This passage makes it clear that anatomy only becomes destiny in the necessary and inevitable process of bringing up children. (The word translated as "education" in the English text is *Erziehung*, which means upbringing in a wide

sense, not just formal education.) It should be clear, moreover, that Freud is not suggesting that all human beings will experience sexuality in the same way or have the same sexual conflicts and problems. After all, Dora, Little Hans, and the Rat Man, three patients whose case studies were published by Freud well before 1912, had spectacularly different symptoms. The passage shows that anatomy is only one element that contributes to our psychic conflicts. Insofar as we all share the same bodily structure, however, it may be said to constitute something like the inescapable background of our choices and acts.[19]

The meaning of Freud's "anatomy is destiny" seems to be that our anatomy and our biological needs will make psychic conflict inevitable. Just as we all have to die, we will all suffer from psychic conflicts. For Freud, there is no such thing as conflict-free, unambivalent human sexuality or a homogenous, unconflicted human psyche. This is hardly a theory that denies human freedom and agency or overlooks the difference between human beings. Freud believes neither that all psychic conflicts will be of the same kind or have the same degree of severity, nor that it is impossible to free oneself from the more severe effects of psychic conflict through psychoanalytic therapy and life-changing experiences.[20] Neither the specific kind of psychic conflicts that will arise nor the meaning and importance they will acquire in any given person's life can be inferred from human anatomy.

In 1912 "anatomy is destiny" means that the fact of having a human body is bound to have conflictual consequences for the human psyche. To say this is not at all the same thing as to say that biological facts ought to ground social norms. On my reading of their works, radical antideterminists such as Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty believe much the same thing. What Freud reveals here is not his biological determinism but rather his deep-rooted pessimism about the possibility of human happiness.

1924: THE FEMINIST DEMAND

In Freud's essay "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), the phrase "anatomy is destiny" is placed in a very different context. The question is no longer about human sexuality in general but about sexual difference. Freud has just explained how little boys commonly overcome the Oedipus complex. Again I am obliged to quote at length:

> The process which has been described refers, as has been expressly said, to male children only. How does the corresponding development take place in little girls?
>
> At this point our material—for some imcomprehensible reason—becomes far

more obscure and full of gaps. The female sex, too, develops an Oedipus complex, a super-ego and a latency period. May we also attribute a phallic organization and a castration complex to it? The answer is in the affirmative; but these things cannot be the same as they are in boys. Here the feminist demand for equal rights for the sexes does not take us far, for the morphological distinction is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development. *"Anatomy is Destiny," to vary a saying of Napoleon's.* The little girl's clitoris behaves just like a penis to begin with; but, when she makes a comparison with a playfellow of the other sex, she perceives that she has "come off badly" and she feels this as a wrong done to her and as a ground for inferiority. For a while still she consoles herself with the expectation that later on, when she grows older, she will acquire just as big an appendage as the boy's. Here the masculinity complex of women branches off. A female child, however, does not understand her lack of a penis as being a sex character; she explains it by assuming that at some earlier date she had possessed an equally large organ and had then lost it by castration. She seems not to extend this inference from herself to other, adult females, but, entirely on the lines of the phallic phase, to regard them as possessing large and complete—that is to say, male—genitals. The essential difference thus comes about that the girl accepts castration as an accomplished fact, whereas the boy fears the possibility of its occurrence.

The fear of castration being thus excluded in the little girl, a powerful motive also drops out for the setting-up of a super-ego and for the breaking-off of the infantile genital organization. In her, far more than in the boy, these changes seem to be the result of upbringing and of intimidation from outside which threatens her with a loss of love.

From a feminist perspective, this passage is packed with many of Freud's most dubious ideas. Here we find the image of woman as the dark continent, as an obscure and fragmented site where psychological exploration loses its way, and the belief that women regularly suffer from a "masculinity complex" just because they do not have a penis. Here, too, is the conviction that the founding trauma for little girls is the experience of *seeing* the penis of their little brothers or playmates and that little girls know themselves to be castrated. It is difficult to imagine a more incriminating context for Freud's (in)famous claim about anatomy.

In this short essay I cannot discuss the extremely complex subject of what Freud's theory of femininity actually is and what questions he thinks it answers. What I can show, however, is that whatever the trouble with Freud's understanding of women may be, the source of the problem does not necessarily have anything to do with the phrase "anatomy is destiny." Let me put this more clearly: even if we assume that Freud is wrong about penis envy, and about little girls' reactions to their brother's penis, this doesn't prove that Freud is wrong to assume that bodily sexual differences will produce psychological differences. He may be mistaken both about what these differences actually are and how they come about without being wrong in his underlying assumption that as a result of biological and anatomical sexual difference, *some* psychological sexual differences will arise. And none of this means that he will *have to* take a normative view of sexual difference. Even if we think that Freud does end up making normative and normalizing declarations about what a woman should be like (and I shall leave open the question of whether he does or not), this is not a compulsory consequence of the belief that in general, anatomical differences will give rise to psychological or psychosexual differences. The two questions I am going to focus on here, then, are fairly narrow: I want to ask whether this general assumption must be unacceptable to feminists and whether it makes Freud a biological determinist.

It may look as if I am dragging feminism into the argument here. Why not just subsume the question of Freud's compatibility with feminism under that of biological determinism? After all, contemporary feminists detest biological determinism, so if Freud is a biological determinist, further arguments will be moot. But here I am only following the letter of Freud's text. Let us look once more at the words that lead up to the crucial phrase: "but these things cannot be the same as they are in boys. Here the feminist demand for equal rights for the sexes does not take us far, for the morphological distinction is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development. 'Anatomy is Destiny,' to vary a saying of Napoleon's." What is it that pushes Freud to mention equal rights for the sexes in the very sentence where he sets out a theory of sexual difference? Why does he feel the need ironically to dismiss the "feminist demand" as irrelevant to his theory? And if he thinks it is irrelevant, why bring the feminist demand into this at all?

I shall consider two possible answers. Perhaps Freud chose to address the issue of feminism because he wanted to fend off accusations of social conservatism. He may have imagined that his theory of sexual difference would be unpopular with women, who would accuse him of being a reactionary antifeminist. This would have been an uneasy position for Freud, who always encouraged women to train as doctors and analysts and who was liberal and radical on many social issues, particularly those concerning sexuality and sexual practices. Against such a background, the reference to the feminists' demands may be read as Freud's attempt to stress that his theory has no relevance for feminist politics at all.

On this reading, Freud's sentence ("here the feminist demand for equal rights for the sexes does not take us far") means that the feminist demand has *no bearing* on what Freud has to say about biological and psychological sexual differ-

ences. But would the reverse also be true? Would he also gladly concede that claims about biological sexual difference have no bearing on the feminist demand for equal social rights? Feminists could then proceed with their political agitation regardless of what Freud has to say about sexual difference. Compressed and unclear as it is, Freud's reference to feminism could then be read as an attempt to *deny that biological facts ground social norms.* Such a denial is the sine qua non for effective opposition to biological determinism, and it is a position shared by the great majority of feminist theorists today.

But let us consider the alternative. What if Freud does intend to dismiss the feminist demand as impossibly unrealistic? His casual juxtaposition of the feminist demand for equal rights with his own theory of sexual difference certainly makes it look as if the misguided feminists must be denying the obvious. Does Freud think that the "feminist demand" is based on a fundamental misrecognition? That if only feminists would realize that men and women are not physically identical, they would give up their demands for equality? The major problem with this reading is that it sounds silly. Could Freud really have believed that feminists had not noticed that men have penises and women do not? Or that too much feminism would turn women into men? The term "equal rights for the sexes" clearly situates the feminist demand on the social level. The German phrase "Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter" also makes it clear that Freud is speaking of equal *status* or *rights,* and not about bodies.[22] Most likely, Freud was simply trying to be witty. Yet, as he would be the first to acknowledge, it is often in our lame attempts at jokes that we reveal our most important unconscious investments.

Whether Freud was trying to be funny or not, his remark is extraordinarily revealing. What is at stake here, again, is the question of the relationship between a claim about social and political rights and a claim about physiological and psychological differences. As mentioned before, biological determinists believe that biology grounds social norms and that sooner or later biological differences will express themselves in the form of social differences. But as soon as we deny that there is a necessary relationship between human biology and social organization, we can cheerfully accept that there are biological differences between men and women without believing that this gives us grounds for organizing society in an unjust and unegalitarian way. This was Simone de Beauvoir's view in *The Second Sex:* "In truth a society is not a species. . . . Its ways and customs cannot be deduced from biology, for individuals are never abandoned to their nature; rather they obey that second nature which is custom, in which the desires and fears that express their ontological attitude are reflected. . . . To repeat once more: physiology cannot ground any values; rather the facts of biology take on the values that the existent bestows upon them."[23]

"Here the feminist demand for equal rights does not take us far." There is a slight but unmistakable animosity in Freud's tone here. The attempted witty aside dissolves into aggression. If we assume for a moment that my most antideterminist reading of the passage is right and that Freud is saying that our views on social justice are irrelevant to our understanding of biological sexual differences and, conversely, that biological sexual differences cannot ground our views on how to organize society, he is certainly not a biological determinist. Yet none of this would make him a feminist. Sexists may well be opposed to biological determinism: all they need to do is to claim that the gender ideology they wish to promote is the inevitable result of social construction or, alternatively, of God's plan for mankind. The animosity in his tone gives me the impression that Freud wishes to castigate the feminists of his day for underestimating the psychological importance of biological sexual differences. He may also believe that the logic of the feminists' arguments lays them open to the accusation that they do want women to be like men. Although we may disagree with such an assessment of feminism in the 1920s, we should realize that this is a critique of "equality feminism" that remains extremely common in contemporary feminist theory. Few theorists, for example, have been so frequently accused by other feminists of being "male-identified" and of wanting women to be like men as Simone de Beauvoir, always invoked as the prime example of "equality feminism."[24]

I want to explain here why I think it is conceptually confusing and politically misleading to oppose a "feminism of equality" to a "feminism of difference," first because it is possible that Freud himself bases his offhand remark about feminism on this very confusion, and because contemporary feminist responses to Freud tend to be influenced by this opposition. Usually, "equality feminism" is defined as a feminism committed to the struggle for social equality between the sexes. Very often, however, the word *social* is left out of the definition. Thus Luce Irigaray, famous for her psychoanalytically based "difference feminism," writes that her own feminism "has gone beyond simply a quest for equality between the sexes."[25] She then accuses certain unnamed equality feminists of genocide, on the grounds that they want to eradicate sexual difference. On Irigaray's account, then, if equality feminists had their way, they would be responsible for greater crimes against humanity than the Nazis:

> To demand equality as women is, it seems to me, a mistaken expression of a real objective. The demand to be equal presupposes a point of comparison. To whom or to

what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a salary? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves?

. . .Women's exploitation is based upon sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference. Certain modern tendencies, certain feminists of our time, make strident demands for sex to be neutralized. This neutralization, if it were possible, would mean the end of the human species. The human species is divided into *two genders* which ensure its production and reproduction. To wish to get rid of sexual difference is to call for a genocide more radical than any form of destruction there has ever been in History. What is important, on the other hand, is to define the values of belonging to a gender, valid for each of the two genders. It is vital that a culture of the sexual, as yet nonexistent, be elaborated, with each sex being respected.[26]

Irigaray's wildly exaggerated account brings out the fatal consequences of assuming that there is a real opposition between a feminism of equality and one of difference. She takes for granted that the word *equality* either must be meaningless ("equal to what?") or must mean biological and psychosexual "neutralization" of both sexes. That people using the word might want a fair and just organization of society so as to ensure that no one sex is unfairly favored over another seems to her unthinkable. That such a social organization will have to take biological facts such as female pregnancy into account is obvious. There is no equal right to education, for instance, unless it is equally possible for teenage fathers and teenage mothers to go to school. The right to maternity leave for anyone who is pregnant and gives birth (and so far, this still means women) is unproblematically accepted as part of equality feminism throughout Europe. Only on the most abstract concept of equality would it be possible to think of maternity leave as logically incompatible with the demand for social equality for women.[27]

There is some conceptual confusion here. As Rita Felski has reminded us, the opposite of difference is identity (or sameness), and the opposite of equality is inequality.[28] No concept of social equality that I know of requires the relevant parties to be identical. Yet this thought forms the basis for Luce Irigaray's unbridled polemics against equality feminism: against her own vision of a rich culture of sexual difference she posits a childless and sexless culture of identical androgynes. According to her picture one would have to be mad to wish for anything like equality between the sexes. The mythological opposition between a feminism of equality and a feminism of difference is based on an unjustified slippage between different concepts so that *equality* is taken to mean identity and *difference* is taken to be an absolute social value rather than a relational term.

Yet, someone is likely to ask, are there not real differences between the kind of feminism espoused by Simone de Beauvoir and that embraced by Luce Irigaray? How do we account for those? There are real differences between the two thinkers, but they are not well explained by positing an opposition between *equality* and *difference*. First of all, it is quite absurd to believe, as Irigaray pretends to do, that so-called equality feminists never discovered sexual difference or, that having discovered it, they then spend the rest of their lives wishing that women were men. I don't know any feminist who denies that sexual differences exist, and I doubt that Freud knew any either. Conflicts in feminist theory arise over the origin and value of current sexual differences, not over their existence. The conflict between so-called equality and difference feminists have to do with their different social visions and values, not with their understanding of biological facts. As Simone de Beauvoir teaches us: our politics is justified by our values, and our values are not given in nature. As long as we deny that biology grounds social norms, no genetic or biological discovery will prevent us from founding society on such values as freedom, equality, and solidarity, if that is what we wish to do. The difficult question of how concretely to implement such values in a way that upholds rather than undermines them cannot be solved by reference to an abstract principle, be it one of difference or equality.

The real difference between Beauvoir and Irigaray is not that one accepts psychosexual and biological sexual difference and the other does not. Beauvoir refuses to define *woman* once and for all. In so doing she refuses to engage in what Nancy Bauer has called "untethered metaphysics."[29] She is also highly critical of efforts to generalize (and thereby reify) any concept of "femininity." Since her most fundamental social and individual value is freedom, Beauvoir's feminism should rightly be referred to as a "feminism of freedom." Irigaray, by contrast, does not hesitate to define woman (as the sex which is not one, excluded from the symbolic order by the specular logic of phallogocentric patriarchy) and is quite convinced that it is necessary to found a culture permeated by sexual difference such as she herself theorizes it. For her, *difference* is a social and individual value, not simply a relational term.[30]

We now have two options: either Freud thinks that the demand for social equality between men and women conflicts with a properly psychoanalytic understanding of sexual difference, or he believes that the two have no direct bearing on each other. If the former is the case, Irigaray would be his true inheritor. If the latter is the case, he might think of bodily sexual difference as something like a situation (I elaborate briefly on this concept below), and he would have more in common with Beauvoir than with Irigaray. I am reluctant to settle this question here. Not because I think there is anything wrong with clear answers, but because only a more extensive investigation of Freud's texts about feminin-

ity and sexual difference would provide sufficient evidence to resolve the question. Resolving it would mean either coming down on one side or the other or being able to specify exactly why the question of the relations among biological sexual difference, psychological sexual difference, and social norms remain deeply ambiguous in Freud's texts.

1924: THE MORPHOLOGICAL DISTINCTION

I turn now to the second aspect of the sentence that occupies us here: "for the morphological distinction is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development. 'Anatomy is Destiny,' to vary a saying of Napoleon's," Freud writes. The different genital configuration will express itself in psychic differences, he claims. Once the question of what this has to do with equal rights is left aside, both Beauvoir and Irigaray would agree with this view, which in itself is neither particularly new nor particularly controversial in feminist theory. The question is whether Freud believes that certain psychic differences will occur with *necessity* in *all* women and men. Another question is whether he believes that the psychological differences produced by "morphology" also constitute some kind of *socially normative* femininity. The alternative would be to consider Freud's reference to "destiny" as an effort to consider the genital and other sexual differences between male and female bodies as a *situation* or a *background* on which further differences may or may not develop. This would be in keeping with his use of the word in the 1912 text.

This view would claim support from the fact that both at the end of this passage and in "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), Freud stresses that it is the little girl's discovery of the Other, and the gaze of the Other on the little girl, that sets in motion the whole process of sexual differentiation that occurs in society.[31] In his case study "On the Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), he writes that homosexuality is the outcome of the interaction of many elements:

> The mystery of homosexuality is . . . by no means so simple as it is commonly depicted in popular expositions. . . . It is instead a question of three sets of characteristics, namely—
>
> Physical sexual characters
> (physical hermaphroditism)
>
> Mental sexual characters
> (masculine or feminine attitude)
>
> Kind of object-choice

> which, up to a certain point, vary independently of one another, and are met with in different individuals in manifold permutations.[32]

Here Freud sounds positively postmodern. Sex and gender (physical and mental sexual characters) may vary relatively independently of each other, and sexual object-choice may vary relatively independently of sex and gender. It is difficult to see how anyone capable of writing this passage could be a biological determinist. On this evidence, it looks, rather, as if Freud thinks of the sexually different body as constantly interacting with its environment, and particularly with other people whose reactions to us are, among other things, determined by our sex (or, to be precise, by the sex they think we are). In short, there are good reasons to believe that Freud never thought that biological sexual differences with necessity caused any specific psychosexual result. Freud may be using the word *destiny* in much the same way in 1924 and in 1912.

In the most famous passage of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir says something similar, and she is no biological determinist:

> One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman [*femme*]. No biological, psychological, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female [*la femelle humaine*] acquires in society; it is civilization as a whole that develops this product, intermediate between male and eunuch, which one calls feminine [*féminin*]. Only the mediation of another [*autrui*] can establish an individual as an *Other*. In so far as he exists for himself, the child would not be able to understand himself as sexually differentiated. In girls as in boys the body is first of all the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that accomplishes the comprehension of the world: it is through the eyes, the hands, and not through the sexual parts that children apprehend the universe.[33]

For Beauvoir, the body is our medium for having a world in the first place. We perceive the world through the body, and when the world reacts to our body in a more or less ideologically oppressive way, we react to the world. Our subjectivity is constituted through such ongoing, open-ended interaction between ourselves and the world. We constantly make something of what the world makes of us. This view considers the body—and not only the sexual different body but the sick body, the athletic body, the aging body, the black body, the white body, and so on—of fundamental importance. It is perhaps the fundamental ingredient in the makeup of our subjectivity. Yet subjectivity can never be reduced to some bodily feature or other.

Unlike Freud, Beauvoir explicitly denies that any fate (*destin*) determines what a woman is to be like. She stresses the similarities between the bodies of little girls and little boys, but she never denies that sexual differences exist or that they play a role in society. Otherwise, the newborn female (*la femelle humaine*)

would simply not become a woman (*une femme*). For Beauvoir as for Freud (and Lacan, whom Beauvoir quotes in the next few pages), sexual difference is at once produced by anatomical and biological factors and by the intervention of other people (the Other), who cannot help but be the bearers of specific social values.

The major difference between Beauvoir and Freud is not to be found in their general understanding of the relationship between the body and subjectivity. They both think it is contingent—that is, not necessary, but not arbitrary either—and they both stress the fundamental role played by others, by the agents of society or "civilization." The difference is that Beauvoir is far more aware of the historically relative nature of any given set of social norms than Freud. Although sexual difference will always be with us, Beauvoir sees no reason to assume that the female sexual specificity will always be perceived as more salient, more profound, more far-reaching, more socially significant than male sexual specificity.

Freud, on the contrary, has a tendency to think of male sexuality as fairly easy to investigate and to cast female sexual difference as an unsolvable mystery, the bedrock on which both the analytic process and psychosexual research eventually founder.[34] Freud's gloomy view of femininity could not be more different from Beauvoir's political optimism, her vision of a world in which there no longer would be any social norms regulating the correct presentations of "femininity" (or "masculinity," for that matter). Toward the end of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes: "Once again, in order to explain her limitations it is woman's situation that must be invoked and not a mysterious essence; thus the future remains largely open. . . . The free woman is just being born."[35] Freud could not have written this. That sexual difference was taken to be mainly a question of women's difference in Freud's time is beyond dispute. Freud failed to see the historical relativity of this perception. In 1924, as at other times, he is guilty not of biological determinism but of a failure of political vision.

Joyce McDougall writes that psychoanalysis is a form of thought that attempts to understand the psychological consequences of three universal traumas: the fact that there are Others, the fact of sexual difference, and the fact of death.[36] Freud might have said that it is our destiny to have to find a way to coexist with others, to have to take up a position in relation to sexual difference, and to face death. To say so is not evidence of biological or any other kind of determinism.

Notes

I thank Peter Brooks for inviting me to participate in the conference "Whose Freud?" This chapter is a substantially revised and expanded version of the presentation I gave there. I also thank David Paletz and Hazel Rowley for commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter.

1. Geddes and Thomson, *Evolution of Sex*, 267. I discuss biological determinism in general and the work of Geddes and Thomson and W. K. Brooks in particular in "What Is a Woman? Sex, Gender and the Body in Feminist Theory," in my book *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays*.
2. Brooks, *Law of Heredity*, 263.
3. A fuller investigation of the status of the body in Freudian theory would have to consider many more texts by Freud. Of immediate relevance are: "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), the case study entitled "Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" (1920), *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), and the unpublished "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), as well as all the texts dealing with femininity.
4. Freud, "Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens," 209.
5. Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition*, 80, 84. Her book makes a fascinating attempt to convey the different feel of apparently similar words in different languages, but I find her analysis of the English *fate* and *destiny* less subtle than the rest. According to her, *destiny* cannot mean something bad and inevitable, and therefore the more pessimistic meanings of *Schicksal* should never be translated as *destiny* (93). She also believes that in the usage of the twentieth century, at least, the English words *destiny* and *fate* are free of metaphysical implications (93) and that they have empiricist or positivistic overtones (93–94). I thank Robert A. Paul for sending me a copy of Wierzbicka's chapter.
6. I thank Judith Butler for reminding me of this important example of Freud's use of the word *Schicksal*.
7. This is how Freud describes his findings in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes": "We may sum up by saying that the essential feature in the vicissitudes undergone by instincts [*die Triebschicksale*] lies in *the subjection of the instinctual impulses to the influences of the three great polarities that dominate mental life*. Of these three polarities we might describe that of activity–passivity as the *biological*, that of ego–external world as the *real*, and finally that of pleasure–unpleasure as the *economic* polarity" (140, emphasis in original). Freud here sees biology, understood as activity–passivity (in itself hardly a common understanding of biology), as only one among several factors working on the drives. It is difficult to see how this could be evidence of biological determinism.
8. The debate about whether *instinct* is a good translation of *Trieb* belongs in another context. See Bruno Bettelheim's *Freud and Man's Soul*, 103–7, for a scorching critique of *instinct* and a convincing defense of *drive*. It is interesting to note that even the first English translation of the paper, done in 1925 by C. M. Baines, also used the title "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes."
9. Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul*, 105.
10. Freud, "Theme of the Three Caskets," 296.
11. Beauvoir's novel *All Men Are Mortal* (*Tous les hommes sont mortels*, 1945) portrays an immortal man slowly succumbing to debilitating depression because his immortality deprives his projects of all meaning.
12. Before writing this essay I had no idea what Napoleon said, nor did any of the friends and colleagues I asked about it. My efficient and creative research assistant, Christian Thorne, found the reference for me. To my surprise he reported that it was easy: all that

was required was to look "anatomy is destiny" up in a dictionary of quotations. The dictionary provides the page reference to Goethe's text. If it is this easy to find out what Freud's reference is, why hasn't it been more widely discussed by psychoanalytic and feminist critics concerned with Freud's phrase?

13. Goethe, *Autobiographische Einzelheiten,* 546 (my translation). The destiny plays (*die Schicksalsstücke*) were Gothic melodramas, popular at the end of the eighteenth century.
14. Here it has to be acknowledged that since Goethe and Napoleon must have been speaking French together, what Napoleon in all probability actually said was "la politique est le destin." But this can have no bearing on the question of what Freud meant, since he is quoting Goethe's German text. Nothing indicates that Freud particularly wanted his readers to think of the French language in this context.
15. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* 104 (my translation).
16. Freud, "Debasement," 189–90 (emphasis added); hereafter cited in text.
17. Freud also thought that infantile helplessness was the psychical origin of religious idea; see *The Future of an Illusion* (1927).
18. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 170. Beauvoir stresses the similarity between Freud and Merleau-Ponty precisely by quoting Freud's important sentence: "'Anatomy is destiny,' said Freud and this phrase is echoed by that of Merleau-Ponty: 'The body is generality'" (*Second Sex,* 46). I discuss Merleau-Ponty's view in relation to that of Simone de Beauvoir in my essay "What Is a Woman?"
19. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir develops the idea of the sexed body as a background (she also, more famously, considers it a situation). See my "What Is a Woman?" for a discussion of the body as a situation, and "I Am a Woman" (in the same volume) for a discussion of the body as background.
20. Between 1911 and 1914, Freud wrote intensively on the technique of psychoanalytic therapy. Some of his best-known papers on analytic practice, including his first sustained discussions of transference, date from this period (see the section "Papers on Technique," in *S.E.* 12).
21. Freud, "Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," 177–78.
22. "Die feministische Forderung nach Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter trägt hier nicht weit, der morphologische Unterschied muß sich in Verschiedenheiten der psychischen Entwicklung aüssern" (*Studienausgabe* 5: 249). I note that Bettelheim's critique of the *Standard Edition*'s translation of "Unterschied" as "distinction," quoted in note 31 below, also applies here.
23. Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 36. The translation is modified from the original; see *Le deuxième sexe,* 1: 76. Translation modified.
24. "Beauvoir's final message is that sexual difference should be eradicated and women must become like men," Tina Chanter writes in a book devoted to Luce Irigaray (*Ethics of Eros,* 76).
25. Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous,* 11.
26. Ibid., 12.
27. Such an abstract concept of equality is quite common in the United States, where the right to maternity leave is still taken by some to constitute differential treatment. One example may be found in the conservative feminist Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's book *Feminism Without Illusions,* where she argues that equality feminists are guilty of a logical mistake when they demand equal rights *and* the right to maternity leave.
28. Felski, "Doxa of Difference," 15.
29. Bauer, "Recounting Women," 53.
30. The subtitle of *Je, tu, nous,* after all, is *Toward a Culture of Difference.* This book provides some revealing glimpses of Irigaray's concrete social and legal vision.
31. Bruno Bettelheim is unhappy with the English title of this essay. In German the essay is called "Einige psychische Folgen des anatomischen Geschlechtsunterschieds." Bettelheim writes: "Freud discusses the consequences of the anatomical *differences* between the sexes . . . but the translators speak instead of a *distinction.* . . . *Webster's* discriminates between 'difference' and 'distinction' as follows: 'different, applied to things which are not alike, implies individuality (three *different* doctors) or contrast; distinct, as applied to two or more things, stresses that each has a different identity and is unmistakably separate from the others.' If 'difference' indeed stresses contrast and individuality in what is basically likeness (as the example of three different doctors implies), then it is preferable to 'distinction' in the context of this essay and its title" (*Freud and Man's Soul,* 97).
32. Freud, "On the Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality," 170.
33. Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 267. The translation is much amended from the original; see *Le deuxième sexe,* 2: 13.
34. In his very late essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), Freud writes that *the repudiation of femininity* is a biological fact and the "bedrock" on which the analytic process founders: "We often have the impression that with the wish for a penis and the masculine protest we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock. The repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact, a part of the great riddle of sex" (252). This is an extremely obscure passage. In what sense is the "repudiation of femininity" a biological fact? I quote it here simply to show how difficult it is to reach a clear understanding of Freud's theory of femininity.
35. Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 714–15.
36. In *The Many Faces of Eros,* McDougall writes: "The child's discovery of the difference between the sexes is matched in traumatic quality by the earlier discovery of otherness and the later revelation of the inevitability of death. Some individuals never resolve any of these universal traumas, and all of us deny them to some degree in the deeper recesses of our minds—where we are blessedly free to be omnipotent, bisexual, and immortal!" (xv).

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Bridging the Gap Between Two Scenes

Hubert Damisch

Several years ago I participated in a colloquium on the uses of psychoanalysis and Freudian models at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière in Paris: the place where Freud attended the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot's lessons in 1885–86.[1] I lectured on what I called "The Image in the Picture," speaking about Freud's comments in the *Studies on Hysteria* on how, during the cure, images would return to the patient's mind through the process of description and, by the same token, soon disappear, as if they had been talked away. An interesting problem, and a puzzling one, for the historian of art: for how are we to deal with images, with works of art, if the process of describing and interpreting them, of putting them into words, may cause them to disappear as images to be seen, by being cast away in the mold of discourse?

After the lecture one of the organizers, the French analyst Daniel Widlöcher, asked me, "How is it that, as an art historian, you've become so interested in Freud and his writings?" On the spur of the moment, without thinking (I rarely think of myself as an "art historian"), I casually replied that practicing art history may well have been a way for me to approach Freud and get access to his thought. To my great em-