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James M. Redfield: The Locrian Maidens

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Introduction

On Introduction

Every work of history appears to require an introduction. The oldest known to me is that of Hecataeus:

Hecataeus of Miletus has the following story to tell. I have written this as I believe it to be true. But the stories of the Greeks are numerous and (to me at least) obviously ridiculous. (1 *FGH* 1)

The stories Hecataeus is about to tell are of the type we call mythical; nevertheless he appears here as the grandfather of history, not so much in his promise to tell a true story (a promise that is also made by myth) but in his passion to replace all other stories. It seems that a narrative becomes historical in its effort to correct the errors of previous narratives. No history is ever the first. The present work also is revisionist in that it aims to recover lost aspects of our classical past, with the hope that this recovery may expand our understanding of ourselves. As such a work is adversarial to whatever fixed opinions have up to now limited our understanding, I come before my audience with some apprehension. Let me explain.

We call fifth- and fourth-century Greece “classical” because we believe, with some reason, that we all come from there, that these people originated the civilization we call “Western.” We also believe that the West invented modernism, now becoming the world civilization. Therefore we also believe that the classical West experienced a kind of “first modernism,” which in some respects set the pattern for the post-Enlightenment modernism still in process. Of course all these beliefs also deserve effective revisionist criticism. Here, however, I intend something different; I accept (at least for the sake of argument) this notion of the classical, I take it as somewhat true that the Greek city-state was the social system within which the West originated, and I seek to extend our notion of the human possibilities of that system. We tend to talk of these possibilities in terms of Athens, or of Athens in contrast to Sparta; I here propose Epizephyrian Locri as a third type, a different way of being Greek. What gives this inquiry a justification beyond the antiquarianism of local history is the possibility that the Locrians may show us something about the Greeks that we had missed, and therefore something that we lost as we became Western.

The difference that made the Locrians different was (as we shall see) more than anything else something about their women. This has therefore become a book about women in the Greek city-state and thus begins my apprehension. After slavery, the Greek repression and political disenfranchisement of women have become in our time the most disreputable thing about the Greeks. Here I intend, however, neither to defend nor to denounce this fact, but to differentiate its meaning. I shall be describing a society, that of the *polis*, which everywhere foregrounded sex differences and turned them to social uses. Also (in the ethnographic tradition) I believe that it is not possible to describe a society accurately without a certain sympathy with its values, even when they conflict with other values that I hold. The ancients, so far as we can tell, rejoiced in sex differences, whereas we tend to see them as an unfortunate fact, something as far as possible to be overcome by technology and social practice. Our time has discovered that sex differences appear in culture only as they are socially constructed into those collective representations we call “gender”; for some reason it tends in our time also to be assumed that anything socially constructed is somehow illegitimate and oppressive.

Difference, the manner in which persons and groups define themselves in contrast to some defining “other,” has become in our time a leading historical topic, and gender has become the leading instance of difference. By historicizing these differences we can then distance ourselves from tradition: No longer do we have to take it for granted that men and women must have radically different life chances, since we now know that those differences are not dictated by nature but are culturally and historically conditioned. From this point of view our classic tradition is one source of what is wrong with us, worth study only in order to disenthral ourselves from it. But it seems to me that we need also to remember that a fact can be evaluated only in terms of values (including ours) that are themselves culturally and historically conditioned, that we, like the ancients, are the creators of our cultural world, and that we, like the ancients, created culture not to oppress us but to sustain us (even if it contains much oppression). The uneasiness produced by certain facts about this classic past we have otherwise been taught to admire may usefully lead us to reevaluate the past, but also to reevaluate our own values. In the interest of that project I proceed to a rather lengthy unhistorical introduction. I am going to say something about our own society and its values, and then I am going to imagine an alternative society that those values might invent.

Human Nature

The Enlightenment discovered human nature—not for the first time, certainly, but perhaps for the first time as an alternative to history. The revolutionary project of the Enlightenment was our liberation from history in the name of nature: As privileges and prejudices were swept away, the Rights of Englishmen—or even Saxon Liberties—would be replaced by those Natural Rights supposed to be self-evident; reason would sweep away monopolies, preferential arrangements, the whole historic amalgam in order to give play to individual choice in the service of natural desire—thus naturally producing the adjustment of the economy to human nature. Society would not be imposed on persons but would arise from their natural tendency to sociability. Such a society would for the first time be founded not on traditional relations but on individual needs, conceived as the ultimate human reality.

This Enlightenment project required a reevaluation of difference, a reevaluation that can be conveniently discussed in terms of the old sociological contrast between ascribed status and achieved status. Persons have ascribed status according to the categories into which they are born; nobility is ascribed status, as is caste, as is race. Achieved status, by contrast, comes to people in terms of what they do. Inherited wealth confers ascribed status; one achieves status by making money. To be sent to the right sort of school confers ascribed status; one achieves status by doing well enough there to get into the right sort of college. The ideology of ascribed status claims that persons are born with readily distinguishable natures; the ideology of achieved status asserts that the true nature of persons, their talents or absence thereof, are revealed only as they diversely come to success or failure.

The project of the Enlightenment was that careers be open to the talents; the result was to be what Jefferson called a natural aristocracy. Those who achieved status were then to be really superior. Our term for this “real” superiority is *merit*. The problems proposed by this term are not my topic here; suffice it to observe, first, that we are not at all clear what we mean by merit, so we tend to ascribe it to those who do in fact come out on top (a circularity that puts the system beyond criticism); second, that equal opportunity, even when it exists, does not produce equality but rather generates inequality according to a specific set of rules (a natural aristocracy is a type of aristocracy); and, finally, that, however meritocratic the society, merit is continually being redefined by those who have already succeeded in such a way that most of the time their own children will be judged meritorious. These there-

fore succeed partly owing to a favorable inheritance (they belong to the families that control the resources and make the rules); their achieved status is thus a mystification of ascribed status. Furthermore, a society in which this was not true would be a repellent and dysfunctional society in which people did not care about their children. Thus a natural (or at least very general) human tendency produces the mystification of historically contingent advantages in order to disguise them as natural superiority.

All this is only to suggest that the founding fathers did not after all find the way to a society freed from historically contingent inequities, and that our society, like all societies, falls short of its own expectations of itself. It is this fact about ourselves that suggests that we still have something to learn from the others, including our own past.

In pursuit of this project I here draw attention to an ambiguity in the term *human nature* that our post-Enlightenment ideology brings to the surface. Human nature seems to mean two different things. In the first place our nature is to be cultural; we are the creatures with reason or with the power of speech, or capable of symbolic predication (the terms differ, but the difference indicated is the same), and we recognize this quality in one another, thus finding a basis for communication, exchange, and compassion. I call this our philosophical nature. In terms of this distinctive quality of ours we can claim inalienable and self-evident rights: Nature, surely, makes nothing without a purpose, and since we have capacities we are entitled to explore them to fulfillment. Since we have the ability to deliberate we are entitled to define our own interest and pursue it. Since we can form a society we are entitled freely to participate in shaping the society we inhabit. Furthermore merit is to be defined in terms of these natural capacities; the reasonable, the sensible, the wise, the sympathetic are the really superior. A level playing field is one that we permit no other factors to influence.

Our biological nature, by contrast, is my name for those features of humanity that are characteristic of us as a type of animal, that are both culture-universal and specific (not necessarily unique) to us. It includes things such as upright posture and the opposable thumb, infantile dependency and the general shape of the life-cycle, the five senses, the necessity of dreams, the capacity for shame, and also those underlying structures that, according to neo-Cartesian linguistics, are common to all languages. These things are “of the body” but they are also of the mind; they are “hardwired” and, as they everywhere underlie the varieties of culture, they are normally taken for granted. But we could certainly in principle encounter rational beings with none of these things. Probably only at that moment would we begin to discover just

how many of them there are. I remember reading somewhere that the mocking noise, “nyah nya-nyah nya-nyah nyah” is found everywhere irrespective of diffusion, and is therefore hardwired in the brain. Also those things that while far from universal, are independently invented in different places—things such as the wheel, the value of gold, the divine right of kings—are aspects of our biological nature; they are things that come naturally to our species and that another rational species might find impossible or incomprehensible.

Our philosophical nature is a philosophical idea and can historically be traced back to the origins of philosophy in the Pythagorean schools, which divided body from soul so completely that it was thought a human soul could inhabit a body of a different species. Our biological nature is more characteristic of the poets (and Aristotle among the philosophers); it sees our higher faculties—reason, sentiment, and the like—as functions of the body, and therefore sees the body as implicated in our intellectual and emotional life. A tall person sees the world differently from a short one (not that all tall persons are the same, but height is a factor); a man thinks differently from a woman.

Of all the aspects of our biological nature, the most significant is the division of the species into two sexes. By this I mean both that the overwhelming majority of human beings are obviously either male or female, and also that sexual difference, which in combination with infantile dependency gives each of us an “original” relation to a mother and/or mother-substitute, is the primary building block of social structure. The first difference we experience as we become socialized is the difference between mother and everyone else, and all societies find that mothers are normally female. This being the case, it is also true that the first gendered classification presented to most children is sameness with and difference from the mother.

All of this is “natural,” which does not mean that it has to be immutable. From the point of view of technology, nature, including human nature, consists of those things that we do not yet know how to alter. And in fact we already have or are on the verge of having a technology that could change all this: Cloning techniques are about to make it possible to fertilize one woman from the cells of another. All the offspring of such unions would be female, and we could imagine a world in which this was the only form of conception, and the Y chromosome, considered a genetic defect, had been eliminated. Paradoxically enough, this would be the Final Solution of the Woman Question.

This fantasy is rich in science-fictional possibilities; careless pregnancy, for instance, would disappear; each conception would be the result of a planned technical and fairly expensive procedure, and childbirth would be definitively uncoupled from sexual enjoyment (which

latter in any case might lose much of its importance). Let us assume that the incest taboo would be extended to cover self-fertilization, true cloning; this would secure each child two parents, only one of whom would be the birth mother. The resulting kinship system would be interesting, possibly generating sentences such as: "I have no cross-siblings, since my father couldn't carry a child." More generally, all social positions would be occupied, and since they would all be occupied by women, sex would have no social relevance. On the other hand motherhood would not disappear, and we could imagine important differences between those who chose to bear children and those who did not, and reasonably expect social expectations about the social correlatives of this choice: sex would disappear, but gender might not. Perhaps it is true, as David Gutmann has suggested, that children are protected by a transfer of the mother's aggression to the father, a transfer that helps her not to abuse her children, mother and child then being sheltered by male aggression turned outward in the service of the family. Such a differentiation might still be needed, and "mothers" and "fathers" would then be thought of as different kinds of people with different life-chances and appropriately different standing. It is only that "motherhood" would become a career open to the talents.

There is more to gender than this, and quite possibly less; the elimination of sex difference would surely bring into play the law of unintended (which is to say unpredicted) consequences. Here I am making only the point that it would be a further step in the great adventure of modernism, which involves among other things the substitution of achieved status for ascribed status, the shift, in the language of Sir Henry Maine, from status to contract. Most of us now feel that to ascribe a status to a human being in virtue of his or her sex is an injustice. This attitude of ours was completely unknown less than two hundred years ago. Would we now be ready (assuming that the costs could be met) to eliminate the possibility of such injustice by forever eliminating males? And if not, why not? Would such a society be a human society? It would unquestionably be composed of human beings.

"The principle of community," said Aristotle, "is difference." Society functions because it has a structure, and it is structured by an internal differentiation of functions. The question is: Should this differentiation be prior to social action, or its consequence? Achieved-status societies, which take the second choice, are experienced as dynamic, characterized by mobility and innovation; changes in status are possible and those who are disadvantaged are constantly seeking to join the advantaged. Such societies are suffused with hope and disappointment. Ascribed status, asserting that the social order is "natural," assures that certain social functions will be served by assigning them to some and at

the same time denying them to others. The most perfected version of this solution is the Hindu caste system. Since (and this is the tragic reality of social structure) social difference always involves inequality, such prior assignment advantages one category to the disadvantage of others. At the same time, ascribed status shelters certain differentiations from competition and thus can promote continuity and peace. Max Weber remarked that the point of hereditary monarchy is to assure that the highest position in the state is already filled and is therefore out of reach. Ascribed-status societies, which put most positions out of the reach of most people, are relatively inert, characterized by custom and a sense of resignation. Since competition is minimized there are few losers. A society that ascribes gender (labeled as sex) at birth asks us to resign ourselves to our gender.

Sex and Gender

Gender, the social construction of sex, is the way we use sex-difference to ascribe status—mostly indirectly, by ascribing qualities. Men are (we are told) combative, women peaceable; men are rational, women emotional; men are progressive, women conservative; men are disciplined and demanding, women are nurturant and flexible; women stay inside and make a home while men go out and make history. Not that this particular set of oppositions is culturally universal—probably Hopi men are as peaceable as their women, and Japanese women no more conservative than their men—but every culture has made some important distinctions in their expectations of men and women. Women (unquestionably) make babies whereas men (we are generally told) make the rules. Many cultures associate fertility and the land with the female, while the juridical authority of males (except in our own post-Enlightenment society) is as near a culture-universal as makes no difference. In all these ways gender, as the accepted order of things, provides an a priori description of the person, leaving the developing individual with further choices of conformity (the manly boy and the womanly girl), deviance (the sissy and the tomboy), or transgression (cross-dressing and homosexuality). Sex is a bundle of facts; gender is a system of values. The social construction of sex into gender turns fact into value by giving anatomical information normative force.

In the single-sex society I have imagined, sex would disappear; everyone would be simply human. Gender would continue to be possible, however, and it might well be found necessary to invent it—just as single sex-societies, for example prisons or boarding schools, tend to create “female” and “male” categories within their membership. An-

cient pederasty did something similar within the all-male political society in its contrast between the male lover and the womanlike beloved. In other words, we already know about gender in the absence of sex.

In fact the categorization might well be more rigid, just as we can expect a higher standard of discipline from a volunteer army than from an army of conscripts, and greater patriotism from the naturalized citizen than from the native. Similarly we might imagine that the “mothers” in a society of women would be held to a higher standard of nurturance than in ours; they would have chosen their role in full knowledge of the consequences. Perhaps a few maternally gifted women would be selected to have very large families, releasing the others to other life tasks; those selected would become a kind of elite corps of the nurturant—perhaps also scorned as “breeders.”

This imaginary society, however, would have lost part of our genetic inheritance; whatever traits are carried on the Y chromosome would have become extinct. From the point of view of social allocation, such an extinction represents the loss of a talent pool. If males are on average better at anything, there will be fewer persons available to play the roles where this gift is useful. Quite possibly, however, this would be no loss, or perhaps the loss would be a price worth paying for the elimination of a difference that has been throughout history the source of so much tension.

More socially significant than the loss of male qualities, however, would be the loss of the difference itself. All the binary sorting that occurs at birth would cease; as this source of tension disappeared, others would arise. The struggle for personal identity, which now takes place in compliance with or resistance to a socially dictated sexual identity, would become yet more open-ended. And since, as we have observed, all social positions would still be occupied, the differences that generate social distance between positions would still have to be arrived at somehow. Since sex did not exist, it would be necessary, in a way, to invent it. All this suggests that so far from it being (natural) sex that makes (cultural) gender necessary, it is rather gender that makes sex culturally useful. Society siezes upon sex difference in the interest of structure.

Society, which is a structure, is hungry for difference, and therefore amplifies and distorts natural differences in the process of making them structurally significant. Of all natural differences, sex is culturally the most important. Our imaginary monosex society, however, has reminded us that from the point of view of nature males are the nearly unnecessary sex. Their role in the formation of the next generation is fleeting and could well be unacknowledged—except that their relation with children is acculturated (as it always is) through social institutions of tribe and family. Marriage, indeed, has been seen as an institution

that enables women to secure the help of men in raising their young, although it might as well be seen as an institution that enables males to claim title to children and thereby have descendants. In any case it is clear that the cultural order seeks to overcome the uncertain relation of one generation of males to the next.

Males, in fact, are defined by their natural incapacity: Not all women, it is true, have babies, but no men do. Quite possibly it is to compensate for this inadequacy that males everywhere assert that what men do is important, what women do relatively unimportant. In any case the males have time on their hands and the energies thus spared are released to other purposes. Being largely useless in nature, males become the cultural sex par excellence. Thus originates the familiar analogy (“Ortner’s Rule”) that will resonate through these pages: male:female::culture:nature (Ortner 1974). Quite possibly the most important cultural use of sex is to code the culture/nature difference.

In a monosex society the most significant absence might be the absence of the difference itself. “The principle of community is difference” not only because a distribution of functions encourages exchange but also because differing stocks of information encourage communication. When the men build themselves a world of artificial ideals, then it is the job of the women to bring them down to earth; when the women are fierce in defense of their own brood, it is the job of the men to take the long view and interpret family interest in terms of universally defensible rules. Each of us in dealing with the opposite sex is required to deal with the world as mirrored to us by an opposition. Differences mediated are more powerful than either pole simply; this is the social application of the principle that what does not kill you makes you stronger. Perhaps this is the deepest motivation for the development of sex into gender: By an amplification of difference the society sets itself the strenuous challenge of mediation. Sex difference stretches and educates us; we find that society asks us both to assert the values of our own sex and to appreciate those of the other. The tension of opposites, the Heracleitan bow, may be a universal cosmic principle, and here it comes home to us. Since a fertile couple consists of both sexes and in most societies a couple is a basic social unit, this mediation is part of our most intimate experience. Perhaps the best reason for the elaboration of sex into gender is that by increasing the distance between the sexes it also strengthens the bond between those persons who successfully mediate this difference.

Furthermore, it is the elaboration of sex into gender that makes possible the mediation. Sex is a fact, whereas gender is a concept; facts do not go away unless altered by the application of technology, but concepts are freely manipulable. The woman who sets out to be one of the

boys, the man in touch with his feminine side, these people are making effective use of generic concepts. Furthermore, categorical contrasts can be elaborated both metaphorically and analogically. In Greek the sun is male, the moon female, a point not unconnected with the fact that the sun is all-seeing, whereas the moon is associated with witchcraft and arcane influences. Rivers are male, they make the land fertile; springs are female and nymph-haunted. These elaborations can also be manipulated; they are liable to dialectical inversion. Female Greek earth gives rise to the mythical first kings, snake-tailed and bearded; from the sky falls the fertilizing dew, which is also a triad of maidens. The master analogy, male:female::culture:nature, is equally apt to dialectic. Culture is natural to us; nature as we understand it is a cultural product. As women are on the side of nature they are associated with process, whereas men are associated with structure; women thereby become agents of culturally transformative processes, they are mistresses of life and death, of weddings and funerals, and as such the more cultural sex. Males, by contrast, may be seen as more animalistic, less costumed and nuanced, and thereby closer to nature. The juridical authority of which they are so proud may come to be seen even by themselves as rigid and ill-adapted to reality, needing to be mercifully tempered by the woman's touch. Cultural categories, in fact, need not constrain us since they can always be used against themselves to open new possibilities. And it is by transforming existing categorizations that we work our way into the unfamiliar. In fact I have expanded on these generic categories at possibly quite unnecessary length—there is certainly little here that is original—because throughout the inquiry that follows they will be reformed, transformed and inverted, and continually recur.

Citizens and Women

Politically significant differences are those used to legitimate authority. In the first urbanization of the Bronze Age, in the Near Eastern and Chinese cities of palace and temple, these differences were largely ascribed and inherited; the resulting society was a relatively stable hierarchy. There was some mobility in the system as elite cadres recruited talented (male) members from below—a process eventually rationalized in ancient China through the examination system. This mobility, however, left the fundamental hierarchy in place; ministers served the king, and kings were gods or at the least had the mandate of heaven.

In that second urbanization which began around the Mediterranean in the Iron Age, in the urbanization of the Phoenicians, the Greeks,

and the Etruscans, the hierarchical model began to be replaced by a second model, founded on the idea of citizenship, which is the idea that the highest place in the community is occupied by a group of peers. These persons then allocated authority among themselves primarily by organizing competition for office and other kinds of status—competition motivated by what the Greeks call *philotimia*. In this way achieved status became the leading principle of political structure. Authority was no longer seen as inherent in the person, but rather as belonging to the office; offices could be won and lost. To the victor—in political conflict, but also in athletics and in the arts—belonged the spoils of power and influence. Authority was thereby demystified; it was not a given within a cosmic order but rather the result of a transparently secular process. This was the well-known “contest system” of the Greeks. Certain forms of ascribed status endured: Ritual privileges could be inherited, and heroic ancestry counted for something. Ideally, however, all citizens began equal and became unequal through competition. Obviously some were richer than others, but wealth was not seen as conferring status directly; rather, like talent and luck, it was an advantage in the competition for status.

The political revolutions of the post-Enlightenment nation-states claimed a kinship on this point with the ancient cities; this is one of the things we mean when we call the second urbanism a “first modernism.” The Enlightenment found in the Roman republic, and to a lesser degree in Greek city-states, an exemplum of demystified authority. Authority had been legitimated in those cities, as in the then-emerging modern world, by victories in free competition between citizens formally equal before the law. Thus the classical past was used as a model for our achieved-status society.

Citizenship itself, however, was in the classical city an ascribed status, acquired (except in newly organized cities) almost exclusively by inheritance; furthermore it was almost everywhere heritable exclusively by and through the father. No doubt this was merely the persistence of that dominance of males which had been equally characteristic of the first urbanization. (The oldest cities sometimes had female monarchs, but ministers of state were exclusively male.) Gender remained a political principle.

In our post-Enlightenment polity citizenship is seen as a condition proper to all, even though it can be enjoyed only by those with the luck to belong to a free community; it is the exercise of the inalienable rights implied by our philosophical nature. Nevertheless until very recent times, in conformity with the classical model, those rights could be exercised only by males. This anomaly gave rise to the Woman Question. It should not have been the same for the Greeks, since for them

citizenship in its essence was proper only to certain sorts of people: freeborn Greek males. They therefore should have had no ideological problem about the exclusion of slaves and women.

Nevertheless the establishment of cities of free men seems very early to have given rise to the idea of the city of free women—most obviously in the ritual level, in the widespread ritual of the Thesmophoria, when the wives of the citizens withdrew for some days to form their own temporary polity, with women holding fictive offices named from those of the real city. This ritual representation is echoed in the literary imaginings of both Aristophanes and Plato. It seems that the Woman Question was already adumbrated in this first modernism. Of course Greeks, like all their predecessors, oppressed their women; their historic contribution to the oppression of women, however, seems to have been their bad conscience about it. Probably this happened because one aspect or precondition of an achieved-status society was a relatively low level of personal authority, and this cultural feature appeared in the household as well as the state. The Greek father was assuredly in principle the absolute ruler of his little domain, but in practice most seem to have held the kind of authority we see in the Homeric Zeus: continually contested and uncertainly effective. Sex difference, in fact, appears among the Greeks as an example of what we shall be call “normal danger,” a difference that continually asserts itself in conflict and stands to be again mediated.

Why, then, did Greek men persist in maintaining sex difference as a social and political principle? Why did they not admit women to the polity as their equals? Perhaps because for them our biological nature had something normative about it. Surely our philosophical nature, which is more an aspiration than an actuality (we are not really all that rational, compassionate, etc.), is normative: Our special capacities confer upon our species certain species-universal rights and obligations. Our biological nature, however, is in its turn more than a set of limitations, of unsolved technical problems; it is also the kind of creature that we are, and there is indeed some health in an aspiration to fulfill one’s creatureliness. A society in which everyone was the same sex would, from this point of view, not be a human society; it would lack an organizing principle that (unlike such parvenus as race and class) is far older than society itself, a principle that we share with most of the animals and even some of the plants. From this point of view, a society that has not coped in some way with the division of the species into two sexes has not coped with the problem of being human. The Greeks coped, somewhat shamefacedly, by relegating women to private life and saving the public sphere for males.

From the time of Hesiod onward women appear in Greek literature

as a Problem—a problem that was partially solved in various ways by various constitutional and social arrangements. At Athens women were nearly annihilated in terms of public life—at least in theory; in practice they took a measure of revenge. At Sparta they were both liberated and excluded and, I shall argue, became vehicles for the repressed elements of that repressive regime. Their position at Locri is the central puzzle of this book; to anticipate a very long argument, I conclude that as vehicles for the transmission of status they were in that polity awarded a unique degree of respect (which need not imply liberty or even real appreciation), and that the exchange of women through marriage both maintained the social order and prefigured to the Locrians the joys of the world to come. The mediation of the difference between male and female therefore became a model for the mediation of the difference between life and death. It will be many chapters yet, however, before we are in a position to examine the arguments tending toward this conclusion.

This is a book that attempts its work on at least three different levels. In the first place, it attempts to identify a Locrian strand in the Greeks—and therefore in us. Second, it is a prolonged reflection on the social uses of sex and gender. Lastly, it attempts a mode of thought about society, founded on the proposition that the cultural life of society consists of the establishment and mediation of difference, and that mediation is dialectical.

Of all socially significant differences, sex is most deeply inscribed in the cosmic order. “Male and female created He them”; he did not create us rich and poor, slave and free, or even clever and slow. Male and female we are (nearly all the time) born; the question is what we are to make of this. The Greeks took it for granted that sex difference is essential in us and needs to be respected in the social order. Perhaps we in all our enlightenment still have something to learn from them in this, more particularly from the Locrian solution to the tensions and dilemmas thus created. Difference always carries with it inequality of power; that, perhaps, is the sociological version of original sin. But difference also makes possible complementarity and cooperation—providing that the parties are able to overcome their competitive will to power. When this happens, the difference of the parts becomes, in principle, the basis for the happiness of the whole. Perhaps we should think on this. After all, sex differences do still exist, and we still have to find some way to live with them. Possibly putting them to use is not the worst of all solutions, particularly if the uses are dialectical, which is to say, resourcefully ambivalent.