

# The Domestic Labour Debate

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## Care, Gender, and Justice

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## The Domestic Labour Debate

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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses the domestic labour debate which arose in the late 1960s as an attempt by Marxist feminists to provide an account of the oppression of women in capitalist societies. The domestic labour debate is interesting because it consists of a collective, controversially discussed attempt to come up with a materialist analysis of women's unpaid labour, and because it provides a case study about the difficulty of developing a feminist analysis of any aspect of women's lives and condition within a male-biased theoretical framework. The chapter concludes that feminists could have used Marx's thoughts and ideas of work and exploitation to advance their cause.

*Keywords:* domestic labour debate, Marxist feminists, Marx, unpaid labour, exploitation of women

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oppression of women in capitalist society. This was to be achieved primarily through an analysis of women's unpaid work in their homes or domestic labour as it came to be called. This analysis was also to correct two biases in feminist and marxist theory respectively that marxist feminists were unhappy with: first, the focus by various liberal feminists in the experiential aspects of women's work at home such as its supposed repetitive, boring, mind-numbing, and alienating nature was to be corrected by a focus on the material aspects of housework,<sup>1</sup> and, secondly, the more or less exclusive focus of marxist theory on the sphere of production was to be complemented by a focus on the domestic sphere and the work performed within it.

The domestic labour debate is of interest for three reasons. First, it consists of a collective, very controversially discussed effort to come up with a materialist analysis of women's unpaid work, and since this is precisely what I intend to provide myself in this book, I cannot but take a close look at it. Secondly, although the debate itself may seem rather dated by now, it provides us with an interesting case-study about the general difficulty of developing a feminist analysis of any aspect of women's lives and situation within a male-biased theoretical framework. Thirdly, and related to the second point, the result of the debate was and remains scandalous and hence invites critical scrutiny: only one of the feminists that had participated in the debate dared to insist on the claim that women were exploited in performing (p.46) domestic work.<sup>2</sup> How could this happen, given not only that marxist feminists were in the best theoretical position to make such a claim, but also that there is strong evidence to support such a claim? Recall the summary of the findings of the UN Decade of Women which I presented in the introduction: women

constitute *half* the world's population,  
perform nearly *two-thirds* of its work hours,  
receive *one-tenth* of the world's income  
and own less than *one-hundredth* of the world's  
property.<sup>3</sup>

This statistic would seem to provide ample evidence that women are exploited, given that those who are exploited typically are burdened with more work than they have benefits to enjoy.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, however, after initial bold assertions of women's exploitation by some feminists, further and more sustained enquiries were nipped in the bud by the particular dynamics of the debate.

Arguably, there were at least three reasons for this peculiar silence on the question of women's exploitation in the domestic labour debate. First, there were conceptual reasons why the claim that women were exploited proved to be a difficult one to make. These reasons—as I shall argue, spurious ones—are at the very centre of the debate and will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Secondly, there are substantial reasons related to the variability of women's material lives and to difficulties in the measurement of their work burdens and material benefits. I shall discuss these reasons in Chapter 3. Thirdly, there were political reasons: the assertion of women's exploitation raised the further question of the identity of the exploiters. The identification of men as the exploiters of women was seen as too disruptive of working-class solidarity and the anti-capitalist struggle.<sup>5</sup> These (p.47) political reasons were not necessarily given explicitly, but were perceived by some feminists as the underlying and real agenda of the debate.<sup>6</sup> The politics of the domestic labour debate, however, in so far as they are not reflected in the discussion of conceptual and substantial points, are beyond the scope of my discussion.

In what follows, I shall first prepare the ground for the discussion of the domestic labour debate by looking at the history of marxist-leninist thought about women's work (section i), before I present the orthodox position within the debate and the typical form of argument used by its defenders (section ii). A more detailed analysis of two of the arguments put forth by defenders of the orthodox position allows me to criticize this position (section iii). I then introduce and evaluate the main contrasting position in the debate, the benefit position (sections iv and v), before drawing my conclusions with regard to what can be learnt from the debate, specifically with regard to the notion of exploitation (vi).

## (i) The marxist-leninist doctrine

The domestic labour debate did not start from scratch when marxists and feminists looked at women's work in the home. In fact, women's work had already been given attention by marxists and communists before the debate set off. Before this debate, however, the account of women's work and women's oppression which had originally been proposed by Engels and subsequently been elaborated by marxist-leninists had not been contested. In this section, I shall introduce and discuss this account, which I shall call the 'marxists-leninist doctrine'<sup>7</sup>

While Marx himself never addressed the oppression of women in his published works, Engels did in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.<sup>8</sup> Women were seen by Engels, as (p.48) by many after him, as oppressed in the home because they were isolated in individual units of production instead of participating in socialized production. Others, such as Bebel and Lenin, added that they were furthermore oppressed because the kind of work they were performing was backward, little rationalized by machines, and stultifyingly repetitive.<sup>9</sup> That this was the main line of their argument can be seen most clearly in the remedy that was thought adequate to end women's oppression: women had to leave the isolation of their private homes and to start participating in socialized production. Thus Engels writes in the *Origin of the Family*:

We can...see...that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labour over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends towards ending private domestic labour by changing it more and more into a public industry.<sup>10</sup>

Three points in this passage are noteworthy and typical of marxist-leninist doctrine. First, Engels does not envisage liberating women from their burden of domestic work altogether: he does not question that women would continue to be responsible for doing it.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, Engels thinks that the ultimate solution to (p.49) the problem of domestic labour is its gradual reduction through its integration into social production, hence he ultimately uses Marx's 'minimization through automation' solution to the problem that it continues to have to be performed.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, only housework, but not any form of care, is addressed in his account.

Lenin similarly claims about the liberation of women in the October Revolution that the most important step, apart from the achievement of legal equality for women, was 'the abolition of the private ownership of land and factories. This and this alone opens up the way towards a complete and actual emancipation of woman, her liberation from "household bondage" through transition from petty individual housekeeping to large-scale socialized domestic services.'<sup>13</sup> Lenin's account, although substantially the same as that of Engels, is more interesting in detail. Thus he refers to women's oppression as 'domestic slavery' or even 'double slavery' (including waged as well as domestic work) and to women as 'domestic slaves', a term which suggests that women are exploited since slavery is an exploitative form of social production.<sup>14</sup> Mostly, however, Lenin puts the term in inverted commas. There is only a short period in 1919—Lenin's honeymoon with the women's organizations?—when Lenin omits them.<sup>15</sup> Now the inverted commas might in fact be thought an adequate usage of the term since women—even in the nineteenth century with its marriage laws denying full legal personhood to women—could not literally be said to be slaves. However, although the description of workers as slaves in the frequently used term 'wage slaves' was even less adequate, this did not provoke marxist-leninists to use inverted commas in this characterization of workers. The inverted commas, then, must be taken to indicate that the term 'domestic slavery' is to be taken less literally than the term 'wage slavery': women's situation is only *as if* they were slaves, but it is not really slavery. Further evidence of the 'differential treatment' of women's oppression by marxist-leninists (p.50) is the fact that women were mostly described as 'oppressed' whilst wage workers, like (real) slaves, were

said to be exploited. Whilst the drudgery of women's work was criticized, no statement about their exploitation can be found in any of these early writings.<sup>16</sup>

The reason why women's situation should be changed, then, according to Lenin, is not because they are exploited, but because they are 'doubly oppressed': on the one hand, they are oppressed by capital, and on the other hand by the pettiness and drudgery of their work. In close parallel to Engels—and thus contributing further to the establishment of the 'marxist-leninist dogma' about women's oppression—Lenin stresses the need to emancipate women from domestic work because women 'remain in "household bondage", they continue to be "domestic slaves", for they are overburdened with the drudgery of the most squalid, back-breaking and stultifying toil in the kitchen and the family household'.<sup>17</sup> Lenin thus reasserts the focus on the backwardness of women's general situation and the petty form of production they are involved in as the most important specific aspect of women's oppression.

The refusal to see women as exploited rather than merely as oppressed is not explicit in these early writings and has to be inferred from the absence of any mentioning of exploitation or exploitative relations in the context of their discussion of women's oppression. It is rather surprising, however, that, although (p.51) both Engels and Lenin call for a reduction of women's work-load through the socialization of this work, neither seem to 'notice' that women might be exploited. This is even more surprising since the domestic work-load was rather heavy at the time and would have involved women in very long working days. While such early marxist thought leaves one in the dark as to why the concept of exploitation was not used to describe women's lives, the reasons for this peculiar silence are to be found in texts which defend what I shall call the 'orthodox position' in the domestic labour debate. I shall present this position in the next section.

## (ii) The orthodox position

The orthodox position within the domestic labour debate formed itself in response to claims by feminists, in some of the

very first papers contributing to it, that women are indeed exploited. Thus Benston, in a widely distributed and discussed paper originally published in 1969, challenges marxist theorists of capitalist exploitation by claiming that 'there is a material basis for women's status; we are not merely discriminated against, we are exploited. At present, our unpaid labour in the home is necessary if the entire [capitalist] system is to function.'<sup>18</sup> The force of such claims was immediately recognized. Morton, for example, comments in 1970 that Benston's account of women's oppression 'is significant...because it challenges the view that the only *economic* basis to the oppression of women is the super-exploitation of women in the labour market'.<sup>19</sup> The preferred target of defenders of the orthodox position in the debate, however, was Dalla Costa, who had claimed in her essay 'Women and the Subversion of the Community' that 'what began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women *as women*'.<sup>20</sup> Dalla Costa used not only 'exploitation', but also other concepts in her account of women's work at home which had hitherto only been used in accounts of waged work under capitalist relations of production:

(p.52) Domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value...<sup>21</sup>

...housework is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value.<sup>22</sup>

It was such new and, as far as the defenders of the orthodox position were concerned, 'illegitimate' usage by feminists of marxist terms that called them into the debate. Thus in direct reference to Dalla Costa, Secombe responds that

In maintaining that domestic labour is productive [Dalla Costa and James]<sup>23</sup> never make the distinction between a labour's general character, and its specific relation, and so they cannot employ a rigorous category like 'productive' at all.... They use the term 'productive' primarily to emphasize the indispensable nature of domestic labour to capitalist production, and to counteract the denial of domestic labour's role by past

generations of Marxists. This point is well taken, but it is surely not impossible to rectify this omission while *retaining some precision in the use of Marxist categories*<sup>24</sup>

Secombe also refuses Dalla Costa's characterization of women as exploited:

the housewife, in Marxist terms, is unexploited because surplus value is not extracted from her labour. To say this is not as James and Dalla Costa imply, to be soft on women's oppression. The housewife is intensely *oppressed* within the nuclear family under capitalism, but she is not *exploited*<sup>25</sup>

The question, therefore, is what precisely was at issue between these bold feminist assertions and the insistent rejection of these assertions by defenders of the orthodox position. Note that it is not evident how the feminist claims were to be understood. First, feminists could simply have used polemically and for their own purposes terms which were very evocative and had been used for the analysis of the oppression of workers and other oppressed (p.53) classes in history.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, however, their claims could have been intended either as creative (mis)usages of terms which implied a conceptual critique of the narrow usage to which these terms had been put hitherto or as a conceptual critique by themselves. Thirdly, feminists might simply have been mistaken in their understanding of marxist political economy and hence unaware of the fact that they were transgressing accepted usage. This last alternative, however, was relatively unlikely since all the participants in the debate were well versed in marxist theory. Defenders of the orthodox position typically responded to the feminist claims either as polemics or as misunderstandings or both,<sup>27</sup> seeing their own task mainly in reaffirming the 'correct' understanding of marxist political economy. They thus showed no appreciation of the fact that feminists might have challenged exactly that understanding, that is, of the possibility that the feminist claims implied a conceptual critique.<sup>28</sup> Hence feminist polemics as well as conceptual critique were ultimately

answered inadequately with a simple reassertion of what feminists had reacted against in the first place.

Accordingly, the typical form of argument in any of the defences of the orthodox position is of the following type:

A X refers to the following kinds of phenomena/entities according to Marx (or marxist theory); or: X is used in the following way; [= *the orthodox premiss*]

B Y lacks (some, or the crucial) properties of these phenomena/entities; or: does not fall within this usage;

C Therefore the claim that Y is X is wrong;

where X stands for any marxist term, and Y for domestic work or women's situation in the home. This type of argument—which I shall call the 'orthodox type of argument'—implies a straightforward reassertion of the orthodox usage of any concept since (p.54) this usage is what the whole argument is premised on. Thus given the assertion of this usage (A) and a statement of the crucial difference or lack of some crucial characteristic (B), the validity of any claim which uses a particular marxist concept 'creatively' in an account of women's work and situation at home can be rejected (C). If orthodox premisses were defended, they were invariably defended in direct reference to Marx's own writings, notably *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*.<sup>29</sup> Note that both of Seccombe's rebuttals take exactly this form: women are not exploited at home (C1) because no surplus value can be extracted from their work (B1); their work is not productive (C2) because it is performed privately, that is, not under capitalist relations of production (B2). Only the second of the corresponding orthodox premisses is spelled out by Seccombe, but both premisses need to be endorsed, of course, for the conclusions to follow. The premisses are:

A1 Only productive labour can be exploited, because only productive labour produces surplus value which is then appropriated by the capitalist.<sup>30</sup>

A2 Productive labour is that labour which is done under capitalist relations of production.<sup>31</sup>

These two premisses, in fact, are not only central to Seccombe's argument, they capture more generally the very foundations of the orthodox position.

The orthodox position can then be described as that position which posited certain central propositions of marxist political economy as premisses which, because they were taken from the 'master's own words'—that is, Marx's work—could not possibly be questioned. The most crucial of these propositions, first, is the claim that, in the capitalist mode of production, exploitation consists of the extraction of surplus value. Furthermore, and (p.55) secondly, only a certain kind of labour—that is, productive labour—can be exploited because only that kind could produce surplus value. (Productive labour, according to Marx, is that labour which is performed under capitalist relations of production, that is, which is set to work in order to produce more than its own worth.)<sup>32</sup> Thirdly, only labour which forms part of either capitalist production (by working for capital) or the market (via goods produced by it and sold on the market) is also abstract, social labour which is ruled by the law of value. (The law of value is the basic law 'governing' the capitalist economy.) On the basis of these premisses, domestic work could easily be shown to fall outside the remit of the conceptual and explanatory apparatus that was thus asserted.

The difficulty, then, for feminist participants in the debate—and the ground of the seeming unassailability of orthodox arguments—was that they agreed with defenders of the orthodox position roughly on the following characteristics of women's work at home:

1. Domestic labour is *work*.
2. The content of domestic labour has changed with the development of capitalism: some of the work which used to be done at home is now *socialized*, that is, part of capitalist or state production (clothing industry, food industry, the centralized provision of water and electricity, the provision of health and education services).
3. Domestic labour *produces and reproduces labour power*.
4. Domestic labour is *unpaid* (but the wife gets her means of subsistence at least partly from her husband's wage packet).

5. Domestic labour produces *use-values*—hence is socially useful work—but it does not produce use-values for the market.
6. Domestic labour is done *privately*, that is, not directly under capitalist relations of production.

While these characteristics of domestic labour were generally agreed on by all sides in the domestic labour debate, what was hotly disputed was their theoretical analysis and interpretation. Notice, however, that once feminists had agreed particularly to (p.56) the last three characteristics which locate domestic labour socially and indicate its relation—that is, its unrelatedness—to the capitalist economy, it followed immediately from the orthodox premisses that none of the concepts used to explain the capitalist economy and society could be used to explain domestic labour. More specifically, it followed that domestic labour was not exploitative.

The significance of domestic labour, as far as the orthodox position is concerned, is therefore that it takes place in a sphere which is completely separate from capitalist production. Although domestic labour is necessary for the reproduction of labour power under capitalism, it is done privately and therefore outside of capitalist production. Thus Adamson *et al.* emphasize, like Engels and Lenin had done before—that ‘domestic work is privatized, individual toil. It is concrete labour which lies outside the capitalist production process and therefore cannot produce value or surplus value.’<sup>33</sup> It was conceded by defenders of the orthodox position that ‘domestic labour remains vital for the reproduction of capital through the reproduction of labour power’,<sup>34</sup> although it was stressed that it is ‘an external necessity’.<sup>35</sup> It was also admitted, however, that domestic labour is ‘given gratis’.<sup>36</sup> Now the phrase ‘labour given gratis’—or ‘unpaid labour’—is often used by Marx to describe that part of the working day which is not remunerated by the capitalist,<sup>37</sup> hence that part of the working day in which a wage worker performs surplus labour and is exploited. But far from concluding that there may be a similarity between women and workers, defenders of the orthodox position simply insisted on the basis of their premisses that such notions could only be applied in the case of workers, but not in the case of

women, thus spelling out their rationale for refusing even to consider women's exploitation.

### (iii) Two orthodox arguments analysed

In this section, I shall analyse in more detail two arguments which were advanced by defenders of the orthodox position in (p.57) order to illustrate the logic of their arguments. This will allow me to expose the problems with the orthodox position. I shall conclude that feminists found themselves in a real bind with regard to orthodox arguments, but also indicate how they could have escaped that bind.

The first argument consists of an attempt by Smith to provide more substantial support for the claim that domestic labour cannot be analysed with the marxist categories which are used for the analysis of labour within the sphere of production mainly on the grounds that domestic labour is not part of social production. Smith argues his case against contrary suggestions made by Seccombe that domestic labour can be conceived of as part of social production and hence as 'social labour' since it forms an important part in the production and reproduction of labour power which is then sold on the market. Seccombe argues that the housewife's labour 'becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in labour power. The value she creates is realized as one part of the value labour power achieves as a commodity when it is sold.'<sup>38</sup> While Seccombe justifies his analysis by claiming that it is consistent with marxist theory as an 'application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour power itself—namely that all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the marketplace with other commodities',<sup>39</sup> Smith objects that his suggestions about how women's domestic labour is to be understood involve an illicit usage of central marxist concepts such as that of value and of social production.<sup>40</sup> As Smith swiftly points out, not *any* labour creates value, but only that labour which is 'performed within the social relations of commodity production [and] which takes the form of socially necessary, abstract and social labour'.<sup>41</sup> This looks again like just another example of the orthodox type of argument,

especially since Smith then goes on to argue that domestic labour under capitalism does not meet these criteria. Smith is, however, aware of the objection that he is just being dogmatic and is at pains to stress (p.58) that 'Seccombe's position is ultimately untenable—not as a consequence of Marx's definitions but as a consequence of the nature of commodity production'.<sup>42</sup> Smith, therefore, attempts to provide what he regards as a sustained argument to defend his orthodox claims. What is at issue between Smith and Seccombe, then, is whether domestic labour can be understood as part of social production—in marxist terminology, whether domestic labour is 'abstract and social labour'—the point being that if it could, the marxist conceptual and theoretical apparatus could then be used to analyse and explain it. Smith considers four respects in which domestic labour differs from labour which is clearly part of social production.

First, he points out that the allocation of labour under a capitalist commodity economy is regulated by the law of value—or the mechanism of the market—in that fluctuations in the price of commodities effect a reallocation of labour into different branches of production. Domestic labour, however, is not influenced by this regulating mechanism, since it is not real-located should the price of labour power start falling. It continues to be performed even when labour power cannot be sold at all, e.g. at times of high unemployment.<sup>43</sup> The production of labour power is hence not affected by its 'profitability', hence not by the market mechanism.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, Smith points out that, according to Marx, if labour is part of social labour under capitalism it is shaped by the fact that it produces commodities for the market: 'Abstract labour, the specific form of social labour under commodity production, develops to the extent that exchange becomes the social form of the production process, transforming the production process into commodity production.'<sup>45</sup> For labour to be social (= abstract) (p.59) labour, therefore, it is not enough for its products to enter the market, but the products have to be *produced for exchange*, and this typically implies that the producer is indifferent to his or her products. Domestic labour, however, is not performed indifferently, and is certainly not

performed with a view towards exchange of the produced commodity, i.e. labour power. (More specifically, and following on from Smith's argument, it is care which is performed for the benefit of the members of the family with a view to their welfare.) No wife and mother would see herself as producing commodities, nor could she be described as a self-interested 'producer of labour power' who would switch to producing some other commodity should she chance upon a slump in the labour market for which she produces.<sup>46</sup>

Thirdly, according to Smith, given that domestic labour is uninfluenced by the market mechanism, it cannot be measured at all. Not only are the boundaries between production, consumption, and leisure unclear in the home, but also domestic labour is not constrained by the competitive pressure of the market and hence does not tend toward a social average or minimum per unit of product.<sup>47</sup> Smith concludes, therefore, that because domestic labour takes place under such different social conditions, it is not commensurable with other labour. Hence it is not abstract labour, which is the 'substance of value':

Because domestic labour is performed in addition to labour performed in capitalist production, and so is performed independently of the regulation of labour through the value of its product, it is not equal and interchangeable with other concrete labours and so is not abstract (value creating) labour, the historical form of equal labour under commodity production.<sup>48</sup>

Domestic labour, therefore, is not abstract and hence cannot produce value.

Furthermore, and fourthly, since the market is the only way in which different kinds of labour can become part of social (p.60) production, domestic labour cannot be part of social production under capitalism.

Since, under commodity production, abstract labour is the only form in which private labour becomes social labour, domestic labour, despite its being materialized in a social use value, remains private. It is not because domestic labour is private that it cannot become abstract

labour; it is because it cannot become abstract labour that it remains private.<sup>49</sup>

Smith concedes that domestic labour could become part of social production if it was performed as part of a 'consciously regulated economy' and included into the social distribution of labour—as under socialism or communism. But under commodity production, which is the form production takes under capitalism and which is subject to the 'law of value', such an inclusion is not possible: domestic labour is performed independently of any regulation through the market and hence cannot be part of social production. Domestic labour under capitalism is therefore necessarily *external* to social production. Seccombe is therefore also mistaken, according to Smith, in thinking that the labour theory of value can be applied in an analysis of domestic labour.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than discuss Smith's arguments in detail, shall make several points about them. It will emerge from these points why a discussion of his arguments would be a distraction rather than useful. Thus note, first, that whilst he makes a detailed effort to defend his rejection of Seccombe's analysis, his detailed argument involves the following: a more detailed presentation of various interrelated aspects and conceptual claims of marxist political economy (A), a more detailed description of the essentially different social conditions under which domestic labour takes place (B), and the same conclusions as those of other defenders of the orthodox position, that is, that domestic labour is not what feminists and other 'creative' users of marxist concepts say it is, hence that their analysis is mistaken (C). His argument, therefore, is another example, albeit a more elaborate one, of the already presented orthodox type of argument.

Secondly, given the structure of this type of argument, once (p.61) the orthodox premisses are accepted, the conclusions seem to follow without further argument since, as I pointed out in the last section, whatever is descriptively asserted about domestic labour under (B) is generally unobjectionable, and indeed the characteristics of domestic labour expounded under (B) were usually not under dispute by the participants in the debate. The result of this particular structure of argument and, particularly, of the unobjectionable, descriptive nature of assertions under (B), is that discussion tends to focus away from domestic labour and instead on various central concepts

and tenets in marxist economics, i.e. on the orthodox premisses (A). Discussion, therefore, gets very easily deflected into a discussion of marxist economics at the expense of a discussion of domestic labour. This inherent tendency of the discussion to get side-tracked no doubt was one of the sources of frustration for feminists participating in the debate and wanting to analyse and explain women's domestic work.

Note furthermore, and thirdly, that a lot of feminists found themselves in a bind because of their conception of their own attempts at analysing domestic labour as being part and parcel of marxist economic and social theory.<sup>51</sup> Since the orthodox premisses tended to be defended in direct reference to Marx,<sup>52</sup> feminists seemed to be forced into detailed discussions of marxist economic theory in virtue of the particular structure of arguments in the domestic labour debate, despite the fact that their original interests lay elsewhere. Particularly with regard to the question of whether women were exploited, most feminists were in a bind: given that it seemed impossible to use the notion of exploitation for their own purposes, should they give up their 'hunch' that women were exploited by agreeing to orthodox arguments—thereby remaining 'good marxists'—or should they insist on women's exploitation, thus becoming 'renegades'? The pressure to accept orthodox premisses was immense, given their conception of their own work as marxist. Furthermore, if they wanted to defend their 'hunch', they would have to defend it on territory that was not necessarily their own and that they were not necessarily interested in, that is, economic theory. This (p.62) bind may explain why many feminists in the end just gave up and moved on to other questions since the debate clearly led them away from their initial interests.<sup>53</sup> It also explains the pressure on participants in the debate to give up claims that seemed undeniably mistaken in the light of orthodox rejoinders, but that had initially and intuitively seemed correct.<sup>54</sup>

Fourthly, however, there was an alternative and a way out of the bind: feminists could have rejected some or all of the orthodox premisses. Whilst this implied going against marxist political economy as it was understood by participants in the

debate, as well as to some extent going against Marx himself, it did not necessarily imply the giving up of a marxist or materialist approach altogether. In particular, one of the premisses of the debate was clearly wrong: whilst exploitation takes the form of the appropriation of surplus value under capitalist relations of production, the fact that domestic labour is not performed under capitalist relations of production does not establish that women are not exploited. It merely proves that women are not *capitalistically* exploited. Thus women could be exploited in other ways—not necessarily the same ways as those in which oppressed classes in other modes of production were exploited, but ways other than the extraction of surplus value.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly enough, only one participant in the debate took this line explicitly, also redefining herself as a ‘materialist’ rather than a ‘marxist’ feminist.<sup>56</sup> (p.63)

Furthermore, various aspects of Marx's economic theory were under dispute at any rate, such as his distinction between productive and unproductive labour (see the second orthodox premiss)<sup>57</sup> and the labour theory of value which was disputed by both marxist and neo-classical economists alike.<sup>58</sup> It was perfectly possible for feminists to disagree with orthodox premisses, then, but such disagreement involved a rejection of part or all of marxist economics as they were interpreted by defenders of the orthodox position, either on the grounds of theoretical inadequacy, or on the grounds of irrelevance to the analysis of women's work.<sup>59</sup>

Lastly, Smith's argument is not only interesting because it is a good example of how orthodox arguments worked, but also because he highlights some quite important characteristics of women's work, but fails to make much of them. The claims he makes about domestic labour are not only true—as pointed out above—but actually quite interesting, except that Smith is not motivated to pursue any of them. Thus it is true that women's work is performed regardless of whether workers are needed or not in the capitalist economy and that the motivation and quality of the work is quite different from that of the usual type of waged work: this should have interested feminists much more than it did, and on the basis of understanding these differences much better, they would also have been in a better position to question the usefulness of marxist theory. If

women's work has such a different logic from the work marxists discussed, why should they continue to presume marxist theory is in a position (p.64) to understand it?<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, Smith also points out the difficulty in measuring women's work—a difficulty which will occupy me in Chapter 3—as well as the possibility of it becoming part of a 'consciously regulated economy', i.e. part of socially distributed work, again a claim which by itself could have led to the type of questions I asked in Chapter 1. Instead, however, like all the other orthodox participants in the debate, Smith was ultimately more interested in marxist theory than in providing a satisfactory account of women's work, using a form of argument which made it close to impossible for feminists not to respond to the level of conceptual discussion at which he and others, through the orthodox form of argument, pitched the whole question.

I shall now discuss briefly a second argument put forth by holders of the orthodox position which is interesting because it illustrates the conceptual nonsense that defenders of the orthodox position were prepared to endorse. The slavery argument—as I shall call this argument—is yet another argument that domestic labour cannot be conceived of as part of social production under capitalism. The argument goes as follows. The only way domestic labour could be part of social production under capitalism would be its complete socialization. Since social production under capitalism consists of commodity production, this would imply that workers were produced as commodities and sold like any other commodity on the market by their producers. Such socialized production, however, would be a form of slavery, since workers would cease to be owners of their persons and of their labour power given that they would be sold as commodities. Capitalism, however, is a mode of production based on the workers' selling of their labour power, hence on the formal freedom of workers. Therefore, the complete socialization of domestic labour is impossible under capitalism.<sup>61</sup>

The argument hinges on highlighting, in reference to Marx, a central presupposition of the legal and political system under capitalism, i.e. the freedom and self-ownership of workers as

members of civil society, and the further assertion that the socialization of domestic labour is incompatible with this aspect of (p.65) the capitalist system. The mistake in the argument, however, lies precisely in the assertion of the incompatibility between these legal presuppositions of capitalism and the question whether domestic labour can be socialized. I shall argue that these two issues are completely independent of each other, and that this orthodox argument in fact points up the conceptual blinkers of defenders of the orthodox position.

Thus note, first, that there already exists 'socialized' provision by both state and private industry of the kind of work that women do in their homes. The beneficiaries of such work, however, in state or private institutions such as hospitals, prisons, crèches, children's homes, boarding schools, or old people's homes do not lose their freedom or self-ownership. There is no difference between privately or state run institutions at all with respect to their 'clients' freedom or self-ownership, and if their 'clients' do lose their freedom, they lose it on grounds other than a form of slavery instituted by them.<sup>62</sup> What these institutions show, therefore, is that it is possible to 'socialize' domestic labour but maintain the freedom and self-ownership of its beneficiaries at least in principle and in all legal respects. The slavery argument is therefore inconclusive.

Secondly, however, it is interesting to note the real reason why the idea of a Brave New World-like capitalist production and reproduction of human beings is repulsive and which does give a true ring to the slavery argument. What is wrong about this idea is not so much the fact that the work is organized according to capitalist principles, but rather the fact that in this image people are produced like any other commodity.<sup>63</sup> If the analogy with commodity production is taken literally, that is, if people are produced, reproduced, and sold by someone other than themselves, they cannot be self-owners, since they are owned by the person who produced them. The definition of a commodity as (p.66) an object which can be owned and exchanged, bought and sold, is directly opposite to our conception of persons as subjects who can own, buy, lend, and

sell, but who cannot be owned by others. Hence persons cannot be commodities according to our modern understanding of personhood.<sup>64</sup> This is the consideration which lends the slavery argument plausibility, but the ground of the plausibility is not the capitalist form of production, but the commodity form of production, since it is the status of a commodity as an object that can be owned which is incompatible with the status of a free person who owns herself. Note, furthermore, that if private domestic labour is conceived as petty commodity production,<sup>65</sup> the slavery argument applies to private domestic labour as much as to 'socialized' domestic labour.<sup>66</sup>

Thirdly, there is a further reason for the plausibility of the slavery argument, but one that did certainly not occur to any participant in the domestic labour debate at the time nor even to theorists very much later.<sup>67</sup> This reason is that the very conception of the work that women do in their homes as *production* and/or reproduction of labour power is in itself a crucially misleading representation of their work. It is, of course, true that women are in a very literal, biological sense the 'producers' of human beings, but this is not the sense which marxists usually refer to since pregnancy or giving birth is not usually counted as work.<sup>68</sup> The work women do in their homes to benefit others, by contrast—which is the work discussed in the domestic (p.67) labour debate—has very different features, and follows a very different logic, from work that can reasonably be described as production, especially as the production of objects.<sup>69</sup> I cannot argue this point here, but merely want to point out that the very language of 'production' seems inappropriate for describing women's work.<sup>70</sup>

The slavery argument, then, is not only inconclusive, it also points up the inadequacy of at least some of the marxist economic concepts in a theory of women's work: any of the concepts derived from the analysis of capitalist production as commodity production are clearly misleading, but arguably also those concepts linked to the marxist analysis of work as production. Defenders of the orthodox position, however, rather than admitting to the limitations of the conceptual

framework they were defending, and to the consequent possibility that women's work had to be analysed in new and 'creative' ways, used these concepts in order to come up with spurious arguments that supposedly proved that domestic labour could not possibly be what feminists said it was. The slavery argument therefore shows the absurdities that defenders of the orthodox position got into in order to defend what they thought was the correct usage of terms. In none of their arguments is the possible need for a reinterpretation of marxist concepts conceived of, let alone acknowledged or seriously discussed.

In conclusion, the orthodox position was deeply inhibitive of any new and creative usage of marxist concepts. It achieved this doubtful aim through constant reference to what it implied was the correct interpretation of Marx's texts through what I have called the 'orthodox type of argument'. Feminists were thus forced into a discussion of marxist economics instead of getting ahead with their analysis of women's work. In contrast to the orthodox position, those participants in the debate who held the 'benefit position' were more open to at least some reinterpretation of Marx's own work in order to make sense of women's unpaid work in the home. I shall present this position in the following section.

#### (p.68) (iv) The benefit position presented

The 'benefit position' unites several participants in the domestic labour debate who attempted to integrate the analysis of domestic labour into the analysis of the capitalist economy by conceiving of it as labour which benefits capital indirectly. This position, unlike the orthodox position, implied a reinterpretation of at least some marxist concepts and thus a rejection of at least some of the orthodox premisses that characterized the orthodox position. Defenders of this position argued that domestic labour was not completely external to the capitalist sphere of production and, more specifically, that it was linked to it through a transfer of surplus labour from the domestic sphere to the capitalist sphere. This link was mediate in that capitalists did not directly extract surplus labour from domestic workers as they did in exploiting wage workers. Domestic labour nevertheless benefited capitalists in that the

latter could appropriate more surplus value than they would have been able to had domestic work not been performed in the home. This asymmetric relation between capital and domestic workers was mostly conceived of as a form of unequal exchange mediated through the wage which capitalists paid (male) workers as heads of households. As I shall elaborate below, there were differences in the interpretation of this unequal exchange via the wage. Since all interpretations focused on the wage, and therefore on the concept of the value of labour power—which, according to Marx, is expressed in value terms in the worker's wage—I shall first introduce Marx's conception of the value of labour power before discussing these interpretations.

Marx's initial answer to the question of how the value of labour power is to be determined is that it is to be determined by its 'costs of production' like that of any other commodity.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, he asserts in *Capital*, vol. i, where he deals with this question most systematically, that

[t]he value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this specific article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average (p.69) social labour objectified in it....Given the existence the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a certain quantity of the means of subsistence. Therefore the labour-time necessary for the production of labour-power is the same as that necessary for the maintenance of its owner; in other words, the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner....His means of subsistence must...be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a working individual.<sup>72</sup>

This simple starting-point is somewhat complicated by the 'historical and moral element' that enters the calculation,<sup>73</sup> that is, facts about the particular historical period, the general development of the economy of the country and the political power of the working class and their corresponding 'habits and

expectations'.<sup>74</sup> A further 'complication' arises from the fact that workers are mortal, hence that their labour power has to be reproduced not only on a daily, but also on a generational basis:

The labour-power withdrawn from the market by wear and tear, and by death, must be continually replaced by, at the very least, an equal amount of fresh labour-power. Hence the sum of means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the worker's replacements [*Ersatzmänner*], i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its presence on the market.<sup>75</sup>

Marx does not consistently refer to the value of labour power as being determined by the costs of both daily and generational reproduction,<sup>76</sup> but it is probably safe to assume that Marx meant to imply the costs of generational reproduction whenever he discussed the reproduction of labour without including these costs explicitly. The 'reproduction' of *wives*—as contrasted with the reproduction of future generations of workers whom Marx implies (p.70) to be male<sup>77</sup>—is also only implied in the few formulations where Marx mentions that the value of labour power is determined 'not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family'.<sup>78</sup> Although there is a certain uncertainty, then, with regard to whose maintenance and/or reproduction is included in the calculation, Marx's basic idea is relatively simple: the value of labour power is determined by whatever it takes to produce and maintain it. There is, however, a crucial ambiguity in Marx's account of the determination of the value of labour power between two formulations:

1. The *labour time* formulation: the value of labour power is to be determined by the labour time necessary for the production and reproduction of labour power.
2. The *value* formulation: the value of labour power is to be determined by the value of a certain sum of means of subsistence.

These two formulations are equivalent only in so far as the labour time necessary for the reproduction of labour power coincides with the time necessary for the production of the means of subsistence which go into the reproduction of labour power. Marx himself seems to have assumed such a coincidence since he uses the two

formulations interchangeably, or derives one from the other, as in the following passage:

Suppose that this mass of commodities required for the average [daily reproduction] contains 6 hours of social labour, then every day half a day of average social labour is objectified in labour-power, or in other words half a day of labour is required for the daily production of labour-power.<sup>79</sup>

Assuming there is a particular 'basket of commodities' which goes into the daily subsistence of the worker (and his family?), this basket then determines the labour time necessary for the reproduction of labour power, since it is the labour time necessary to produce these commodities which determines their value and thus, by derivation, the value of labour power.

(p.71) Marx's ambiguous formulations in his discussion of the determination of the value of labour power provided a fertile ground for conflicting accounts in the domestic labour debate. Thus defenders of the orthodox position insisted on the exclusive validity of the value formulation of the value of labour power, which was usually interpreted as referring to the value of commodities needed for the consumption of the whole family rather than that of the individual worker.<sup>80</sup> The argument for the value formulation was, of course, that any other time spent towards the reproduction of labour power, such as domestic labour, was neither social nor abstract labour and hence could not be expressed in value terms nor, consequently, enter the determination of the value of labour power.<sup>81</sup>

Some holders of the benefit position used the labour time formulation and argued that domestic labour was part of the labour time necessary to reproduce labour power, hence that it did enter into the determination of the value of labour power as part of the above-mentioned 'moral and historical element' in its determination.<sup>82</sup> Harrison supports this move as follows:

In any real capitalist system...not all of the labourer's subsistence will be produced under the capitalist mode of production....housework is an important element in the subsistence of the worker and his dependents. In this situation the value of labour power is clearly not just the

labour time involved in the production of the part of the worker's subsistence produced within the capitalist sector. We must also take account of labour performed outside the capitalist sector which contributes to the worker's standard of living.<sup>83</sup>

By focusing on the labour necessary to reproduce labour power, holders of the benefit position thus argued that domestic labour was part of this labour and could be a source of surplus labour which benefited capital: 'female domestic labour within the family is a source of surplus labour for capital as well as wage (p.72) labour...the relative contributions of the different spheres of labour to capitalist profits will depend on the conditions of capitalist accumulation ruling at a particular time'.<sup>84</sup> More generally, therefore, capital benefited from more than one source within the capitalist mode of production: 'profits in the capitalist sector, being the difference between value added and the wage bill, are thus not equivalent to surplus value. They include both surplus labour performed within the capitalist sector (i.e. surplus value) and surplus labour performed within the housework sector'.<sup>85</sup> Holders of the benefit position disagreed, however, over the conception of the mechanism responsible for the transfer of surplus labour from the domestic sphere to capital, depending on how orthodox was their interpretation of the concept of the value of labour power. If we distinguish between the level of subsistence of workers—which is dependent on the means of subsistence available as well as on the unpaid work of the housewife—and the value of their labour power, the disagreement pertains to the question whether the two are seen to coincide or not. According to Harrison's account, they do coincide because the labour time spent by the housewife has to be counted as part of the labour time necessary to reproduce labour power. The fact that the labour of the housewife at home contributes significantly to the level of subsistence but is unpaid thus allows the capitalist to pay wages below the value of labour power. The labour done by the housewife which goes towards the reproduction of the husband's labour power thus benefits the capitalist indirectly through a reduction in the level of wages: 'the mechanism by which this transfer of surplus labour from housework to the capitalist sector takes place is the payment by the capitalist of *wages below the value of labour power*'.<sup>86</sup>

Gardiner, by contrast, argues that the subsistence level and the value of labour power do not coincide. The unpaid performance of domestic labour, according to her, keeps the value of labour power below the level of subsistence of workers, and thus allows the capitalist to pay wages below the actual level of subsistence:

the contribution which domestic labour makes to surplus value is one of keeping down [the value of labour power] to a level that is lower (p.73) than the actual subsistence level of the working class. For example it could be argued that it is cheaper for capital to pay a male worker a wage sufficient to maintain, at least partially, a wife who prepares meals for him, than to pay him a wage on which he could afford to eat regularly at restaurants.<sup>87</sup>

As a third version of the benefit position, Dalla Costa may be included here, although she is not concerned with the intricacies of argument about the determination of the value of labour power. Her version, as I have indicated above,<sup>88</sup> assumes the equivalence of surplus labour and surplus value regardless of the sphere in which surplus labour is performed. She therefore claims that capital benefits from the surplus value produced by housewives —‘housework is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value’<sup>89</sup>—and that therefore women are exploited as housewives in the domestic sphere.

According to these different versions of the benefit position, then, the domestic sphere is not completely separate from the capitalist sphere, but is linked to it through the capitalist's payment of a wage to the worker.<sup>90</sup> This link results in a form of unequal exchange, since it enables capitalists to accumulate more surplus value than they could have had unpaid domestic work not been performed. Domestic labour was thus seen to be similar to labour performed in the subsistence economies in the periphery of capitalist production: both forms of labour contributed to capitalist accumulation through unequal exchange.<sup>91</sup> (p.74) Hence the marxist concepts used in new ways in Harrison's and Gardiner's accounts were the concept of unequal exchange as well as, to some extent, that of the value of labour power. Holders of the benefit position furthermore took the beneficial effect of this unequal exchange for capitalism to be an explanation of the continued

existence of unpaid domestic labour, on which the exchange was based, and, by implication, an explanation of women's oppression in their homes.<sup>92</sup> I shall evaluate the benefit position in the next section.

## (v) The benefit position discussed

The benefit position, despite making some headway in so far as a detailed analysis of domestic labour is concerned, is nevertheless inherently weak and also problematic in several ways. First, and most importantly with respect to the 'dynamics' of argument in the domestic labour debate, it was inherently vulnerable to orthodox rejoinders and criticism. Thus Dalla Costa's version can easily be rejected on the grounds that domestic labour is not productive labour in the Marxian sense and hence cannot produce surplus value.<sup>93</sup> Harrison's version is equally vulnerable, since he reinterprets the concept of the value of labour power by claiming that domestic labour time is part of the labour time necessary for the reproduction of labour power and hence contributes to the value of labour power. Since this claim presupposes that domestic labour and the labour embodied in the means of subsistence which are bought from the wage are commensurable, it can be rejected on the grounds that domestic labour, in contrast to the labour which goes into the (social) production of the means of subsistence, is neither abstract nor social since it is not subject to the law of value.<sup>94</sup> Even Gardiner's version can be rejected on orthodox grounds. Although she makes more allowance for the orthodox position by taking over the orthodox account of the value of labour power as being determined by the socially necessary labour which goes into the production (p.75) of the means of subsistence, her account still involves an analysis of women's domestic labour as social labour: in order to determine the amount of surplus labour which women perform in the home and from which capitalists are said to benefit, domestic labour has to be quantifiable. But, of course, it is not, according to the orthodox position, since it is not abstract labour.<sup>95</sup>

Now these criticisms could easily have been dismissed as irrelevant at best or as an indication of the limitations of orthodox marxist theory at worst. In so far as the holders of

the benefit position considered themselves marxists and endorsed the marxist analysis of capitalism, however, they were in an unstable and inherently vulnerable position. In fact, it is probably such orthodox criticism which led the two main theorists, Gardiner and Harrison, to reassess their earlier claims in favour of more orthodox claims,<sup>96</sup> and this indicates just how vulnerable any theorist who saw herself as a marxist was to orthodox criticism. Resistance to such criticism therefore required either a more critical attitude towards marxist orthodoxy as such or at least a more critical attitude with regard to the question of the usefulness of marxist concepts to the analysis of women's work. Harrison, a marxist economist, is an example of the first alternative, since his analysis of domestic work was part of a critical discussion of 'unproductive' work (domestic work and work in the state sector) which culminated in the rejection of the marxist distinction between productive and unproductive labour.<sup>97</sup> Delphy, alone in this attitude for a long time, represents the second alternative, that is, the consciously critical break with marxist orthodoxy on feminist grounds.<sup>98</sup> Marxist feminists in general took a (p.76) long time to make that break: without explicitly addressing the possibility of a systematic clash between their marxist and feminist commitments, they were an easy target for orthodox arguments and easily won over.<sup>99</sup>

The second problem with the benefit position is that it has to make the highly questionable assumption that capitalists invariably pay family wages. Thus the claim that capitalism benefits from the domestic labour of women is only plausible if it is assumed that the 'value of labour power' includes the costs of reproduction not only of the workers themselves, but of their families. This assumption, however—although probably in line with Marx's own position<sup>100</sup>—is mistaken. It would be even more profitable for capitalists if they paid individual wages which provided only for the cost of reproduction of individual workers rather than for that of whole families.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, such payment of individual wages would force women to find work themselves since they could not subsist on the wage of their husbands and this, in turn, would further increase potential profits for capital: given more exploitable labour, it would potentially increase the

aggregate sum of profits, and it would also potentially increase the rate of exploitation and hence capitalist accumulation through increased downwards pressure on wages by an increased reserve army of labour.<sup>102</sup> Hence once the presumption of a family wage is revealed, the case of the benefit position collapses. The family wage, rather than hiding a benefit, in fact constitutes a cost to capital which, according to Molyneux, is the outcome of successful working-class struggle at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>103</sup> The institution of the family wage, then, is not in the least in the interest and to the benefit of capital, and the substance of the claims of the benefit position is plainly wrong.

The third problem with the benefit position relates to a second (p.77) functionalist claim: that is, that women's oppression is explained by the fact that their domestic labour is beneficial to capitalism. As many critics have pointed out, even if capitalism benefited from women's unpaid domestic work, this fact would nevertheless fail to explain why it is *women* who do this work rather than any member of the family, since the benefit from unpaid domestic work would accrue to capitalists regardless of who actually does it as long as it is unpaid.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, as Molyneux argues, there is nothing in this analysis to suggest that a more egalitarian distribution of domestic tasks between husbands and wives would be impossible or less 'beneficial' to capital. Hence the benefit position has certainly not shown that women's oppression is a necessary feature of capitalism.<sup>105</sup>

Fourthly, by focusing on the value of labour power as the link between women's domestic work and capital, the analysis of the benefit position tended to focus on that part of the domestic work which goes into the reproduction of the husband's labour power and thus excluded discussion of all other work that women do unpaid—not only child care,<sup>106</sup> but more generally any kind of care of members of the family or extended family that women provide. Given the approach of the benefit position, this is hardly surprising. While it may be argued that it is to the benefit of capital—although certainly not of individual capitalists who pay family wages—that women do all the unpaid work of child care and caring for the

sick at home, since they thereby produce future generations of exploitable workers or render the sick fit for further exploitation by capital, the functional argument fails completely with regard to other forms of care. Thus it is hard to imagine how capital would benefit from women's care for their elderly parents or parents-in-law, or for other long-term dependants such as disabled or terminally ill members of the family, since such care will not even potentially result in exploitable labour power. Once the range of work, especially caring work, that women do is taken into account, therefore, the benefit position looks not only weak, but also beside the point: as in the (p.78) slavery argument discussed above, the theorization of women's work is simply not adequate.

Finally, and most importantly, the benefit position shares with the orthodox position a preoccupation with relating the analysis of women's domestic work to the analysis of the capitalist mode of production, and thus more generally a rather uncritical endorsement of marxist theory. This uncritical attitude turned out to be deeply disabling to the feminist quest. Whilst holders of the benefit position made more creative usage of at least some marxist concepts than the defenders of the orthodox position, and thus were able to provide a more elaborate analysis of domestic labour instead of simply distracting from it,<sup>107</sup> they were nevertheless preoccupied with fitting their analysis into an already existing theory by looking at the link between domestic labour and capitalist accumulation. This focus obscured from view, and purged from the analysis, a discussion of the benefits that *men* might derive from women's unpaid labour,<sup>108</sup> and more generally an analysis of women's oppression by men.<sup>109</sup> It is worth reminding oneself, however, of the ironical fact that the domestic labour debate started off as the attempt to provide a marxist account not only of women's domestic labour, but also of women's oppression by men.

In conclusion, then, whilst the benefit position as compared to the orthodox position seemed at least to have made progress in providing a substantive analysis of women's work and its relation to the capitalist economy, its functionalist mode of argument was based on a false assumption, it failed to explain

certain features of women's domestic work such as the fact that it was women who did it in the first place, and it obscured from view not only a lot of the work women do in the home, but also the point that capital might not be the sole beneficiary—if at all—of their work. In the last section, I shall draw more general conclusions for feminist theory and argument as well as rescue the concept of exploitation from the grip of marxist orthodoxy.

## (p.79) (vi) Conclusion and outlook: the concept of exploitation reclaimed

The two main positions in the domestic labour debate that I have discussed in this chapter proved ultimately to be weak and a dead weight which positively obstructed real progress in the feminist analysis of women's unpaid work. If anything can be learnt from the domestic labour debate at all, it is how not to get paralysed, side-tracked, and bogged down by attempting to solve the wrong problems.<sup>110</sup> As I have argued throughout this chapter, the main problem for the feminists who participated in this debate was their own allegiance to marxist theory and their on the whole uncritical acceptance of this theoretical framework. Looking through the marxist lens darkly, what feminists saw were the wrong connections and theoretical economic problems which had nothing to do with women's domestic work, instead of women's work more clearly. What they needed, but on the whole failed, to do was to take a more irreverent and discerning look at marxist theory and marxist concepts themselves: to take what seemed useful and leave what seemed irrelevant or obstructive. Growing up and out from underneath marxist patriarchal wings turned out to be hard work itself.

What, then, can be learnt from the domestic labour debate? First and foremost, it seems to me, what can be learnt by feminists is a healthy dose of scepticism toward any theoretical and conceptual framework which is not explicitly developed with a view to describing and explaining women's social position. While marxist theory in particular may have seemed a better starting-point for feminists than other theories—given its focus on the analysis of various forms of exploitation and oppression—it turned out not only to be

fiercely guarded by those to whom any reinterpretation was anathema, but also to distract from questions that feminists needed to ask even if the theory was reinterpreted to some extent. Feminists thus needed to be discerning about what they could take over and use for their own (p.80) theoretical purposes. They needed to reject orthodoxy for orthodoxy's sake, and, more specifically, as I argued in the last sections, the use and/or interpretation of specific marxist concepts such as that of commodity production or even production as a model for women's work, the functionalist link of women's work to capitalist accumulation and the interpretation of exploitation as the extraction of surplus value. This, however, does not imply that other parts of marxist theory would not have been of use. I shall argue in the rest of this section that Marx's notion of exploitation is a case in point.

Interestingly enough, Marx's theory of exploitation lends itself much more easily to feminist purposes than the arguments of the domestic labour debate would make one believe. Thus note, to begin with, that Marx's concept of exploitation is necessarily general because it is applied to several modes of production in his historical materialism. Hence when Marx claims that all class-divided societies are based on the exploitation of the immediate producers he has to use this general concept of exploitation. In Marx's own words: 'What distinguishes the various economic formations of society—the distinction between for example a society based on slave-labour and a society based on wage-labour—is the form in which...surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker.'<sup>111</sup> The implication of this claim is that exploitation occurs whenever surplus labour is extracted (or 'extorted') from that class which produces whatever needs to be produced.<sup>112</sup> The general concept of exploitation, according to this quote—which is representative of most if not all of Marx's writing on exploitation—is therefore that of the *extraction of surplus labour*, whilst it is also asserted that the extraction of surplus labour can occur in various forms. More specifically, then, while exploitation takes the form of the extraction of surplus value from the workers in the capitalist mode of production, exploitation takes other forms in other modes of production.

Furthermore, Marx also thought that exploitation can occur in more than one form in a given society even if one mode of production—and therefore the one form of exploitation which corresponds to it—is clearly predominant. Marx was in no doubt that slavery in the Southern states of the USA implied the exploitation (p.81) of slaves,<sup>113</sup> which consisted of the extraction of surplus labour from them.<sup>114</sup> There is, therefore, no reason to think, even on the basis of Marx's own writings, that exploitation cannot take several forms under the capitalist mode of production. Now, as I pointed out in section i, Marx himself never claimed that women were exploited nor did any marxist after him and before the domestic labour debate. The case of slavery under the capitalist mode of production sets an interesting example, however, that feminists could and should have taken as their starting-point. It also contradicts directly one of the unstated premisses of the orthodox position, namely that all exploitation in a capitalist society takes place under capitalist relations of production and consists of the extraction of surplus value through wage labour<sup>115</sup> and the consequent claim that women's work is not exploited because it does not take place under capitalist relations of production. It could be replied, of course—and no doubt would have been replied by holders of the orthodox position had this point been made—that slaves, unlike women, take part in social production since they produce commodities for the market.<sup>116</sup> The point, however, is that Marx's treatment of the case of slavery could have been read as allowing for various forms of exploitation even in societies in which a particular mode of production with its particular form of exploitation was predominant. Or, even more simply, his concept of exploitation could have been used in an analysis of women's work. How much of marxist orthodoxy in addition to this claim, or in addition to Marx's notion of exploitation, feminists should have taken on board is a separate question and should be answered according to how useful such orthodoxy is for their own purposes. If it helps them articulate their 'hunch' that women are exploited in doing all the unpaid work they do, it is useful and can be taken on board. If it is obstructive, however, and prevents them from making any headway, as the imagined orthodox rejoinder clearly does, it should simply be ignored.

In conclusion, then, feminists could have used (some of) Marx's thought for their own purposes, and they could certainly have used the general concept of exploitation that can be found in his (p.82) work. It is thanks to the fierceness and relentlessness of orthodox rejoinders as well as to the generally uncritical marxist allegiances of the feminist participants in the domestic labour debate that only one of the participants—Delphy—ended up taking such an instrumental stance toward marxist theory.<sup>117</sup> I shall discuss her theory of women's exploitation as wives in the next chapter.

Notes:

(<sup>1</sup>) See the liberal feminist classic *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1985, originally published in 1963) and a later, but none the less typically liberal feminist argument by Richards (1980, ch. 6)

(<sup>2</sup>) Folbre is a US marxist feminist who insisted on pursuing an (economic) theory of women's exploitation (Folbre 1982), but she did not contribute to the original debate, which was restricted mostly to the UK. See nn. 47 and 54 below.

(<sup>3</sup>) Quoted after Pahl 1988: 349. For a discussion of what exactly this quote shows, see Ch. 3 sect. iii.

(<sup>4</sup>) I cannot discuss the notion of exploitation at this point. For the general underlying idea see Introduction, sect. ii, for a preliminary exposition of Marx's notion of exploitation sect. vi below, for a more detailed discussion of theories of exploitation Ch. 3 sect. ii, and for a discussion of the claim that women are exploited Ch. 3 *passim*.

(<sup>5</sup>) It was probably also too uncomfortable for male marxists to deal with.

(<sup>6</sup>) See e.g. Delphy 1984, *passim*; Gail Wilson, personal communication.

(<sup>7</sup>) For further details of this doctrine which I cannot address in this section, as well as for a discussion of how it was translated into policies in socialist countries, see Molyneux 1981 and Heitlinger 1979.

(<sup>8</sup>) Engels 1972. Engels claims in the 'Preface to the First Edition' that his work is based on extensive notes by Marx on the work of the anthropologist Morgan, whom Engels discusses at length in his work, that it is part of their materialist theory (Engels 1972: 71).

(<sup>9</sup>) We tend to forget that housework in the nineteenth century was physically very demanding since none of the modern conveniences such as central heating, electricity, and water supply, nor appliances such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners were available. Some of the physically hard labour in the household, however, used to be performed by men (Cowan 1983). Bebel was most fascinated by the possibility of economizing on domestic labour through appliances and through its socialization (Bebel 1971). For Lenin's views, see below.

(<sup>10</sup>) Engels 1972: 221; *Women and Communism* 1950: 12.

(<sup>11</sup>) See various critics of Engels on this point: Delmar 1976, Sayers 1987, Coole 1993. Engels shares this presumption with another famous male champion of women's liberation in the nineteenth century, J.S.Mill, in his *Subjection of women* (Mill 1985). Lenin is more adamant in wanting to transform all of women's domestic work into 'social production', but presumes equally that women will continue to do those types of work, that is, that it will literally remain 'women's' work (Lenin 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1965d; Lenin 1966). Kollontai, by contrast, imagines men and women in this branch of socialized production (Kollontai 1977).

(<sup>12</sup>) See Ch.1 sect. ii.

(<sup>13</sup>) Lenin 1965c: 162, and, in slightly different translation, *Women and Communism* 1950: 46.

(<sup>14</sup>) See Lenin 1963, 1965a, 1965c, 1965d; see sect. vi below.

(<sup>15</sup>) Lenin uses the inverted commas in a 1913 article on labour saving technology (Lenin 1963). He drops them in 'A Great Beginning' (Lenin 1965d), written in July 1919, and in an address to women's organizations in September 1919

(Lenin 1965a), but they reappear in his International Working Women's Day addresses in March 1920 and 1921 (Lenin 1965b, 1965c).

<sup>(16)</sup> Lenin's treatment of the whole question is arguably quite instrumental: his explicit aim was mainly to recruit women to support the Revolution, since he believed that the Revolution was only won when women's lives had been transformed, too, and this transformation could not be achieved without the co-operation of women themselves. To recognize that women were truly slaves, then, would potentially have been counter-productive, since it would have prompted the further question of 'whose slaves?'-and that question might have pitted women against their husbands instead of realigning them at their husbands' sides. In so far as Lenin attributed slavery (in quotation marks) to women, they were either said to be slaves to capitalism or private property (Lenin 1965a, 1965b), or they were called slaves because they were crushed by domestic work (Lenin 1965b, 1965c, 1965d). Either way men come out 'clean', free from allegations of being slave holders and able to expect women's co-operation and support (see also sect, v below). For more evidence of this basically instrumental view of women in marxist-leninist writings and policies see Molyneux 1981; for a description of bolshevik politics in the aftermath of the October Revolution see Farnsworth 1980, Porter 1980.

<sup>(17)</sup> Lenin 1965c: 161; *Women and Communism* 1950: 46

<sup>(18)</sup> Benston 1982: 128.

<sup>(19)</sup> Morton 1982: 135.

<sup>(20)</sup> Dalla Costa 1973: 23.

<sup>(21)</sup> Dalla Costa 1973: 33

<sup>(22)</sup> Ibid. 53 n. 12.

<sup>(23)</sup> James wrote a separate essay in the book which was published by Dalla Costa and James and which also contained Dalla Costa's essay 'Women and the Subversion of the

Community'. The work referred to by Seccombe is the latter, not a common work by both authors (see Dalla Costa and James 1973).

(<sup>24</sup>) Seccombe 1974: 11; my emphasis.

(<sup>25</sup>) Ibid. 11.

(<sup>26</sup>) This is certainly true with regard to the notion of exploitation (for a late example of such polemical usage see Delphy and Leonard 1992: 42 and my discussion of it in Ch. 3 sect. iv), but probably also true with regard to the notion of productive labour (see Seccombe 1974: 11).

(<sup>27</sup>) See e.g. Smith 1978: 200; see also Seccombe 1974: 11.

(<sup>28</sup>) Unfortunately, feminist contribution to the debate were on the whole not very explicit about the exact nature of their arguments, nor very sophisticated in defending their claims. Delphy (1984) and Delphy and Leonard (1992) are notable exceptions.

(<sup>29</sup>) The writings of any of the participants in the debate contained references to Marx, but those endorsing the orthodox position contained especially many: see Adamson *et al.* 1976, Bullock 1973, Carter 1975, Himmelweit and Mohun 1977, Howell 1975, Seccombe 1974, 1975, Smith 1978.

(<sup>30</sup>) I have not seen this premiss asserted explicitly in any of the contributions to the debate—maybe because it would have been too obvious a target for rejection, although it may also have been so deeply entrenched that it was simply taken for granted by all participants in the debate—but it is a major premiss of the whole debate. For an explicit assertion in the context of an economic discussion see Glyn 1979

(<sup>31</sup>) See Seccombe 1974: 10–11.

(<sup>32</sup>) See Gough 1972.

(<sup>33</sup>) Adamson *et al.* 1976: 8. Note that this is another example of the orthodox type of argument.

(<sup>34</sup>) Ibid. 11; see Himmelweit and Mohun 1977: 28.

(<sup>35</sup>) Smith 1978: 214; see also pp. 211, 212.

(<sup>36</sup>) Adamson *et al.* 1976: 11; see the same formulation by Howell 1975: 54. 37

(<sup>37</sup>) See Geras 1986: 15 n. 27.

(<sup>38</sup>) Seccombe 1974: 9.

(39) *Ibid.* 9.

(<sup>40</sup>) It might be thought that Seccombe cannot himself be a defender of the orthodox position, given this lapse, but inclusion of authors in this position is a matter of degree and general structure of argument, rather than absolutely clear-cut.

(<sup>41</sup>) Smith 1978: 201.

(<sup>42</sup>) Smith 1978: 201; see also his point against Adamson *et al.*'s 'dogmatic assertions', p. 203.

(<sup>43</sup>) Smith 1978: 204.

(<sup>44</sup>) In fact, as several contributors to the domestic labour debate have emphasized, the labour women do at home is flexible, and there is an inverse correlation between what can be afforded with a wage and the amount of labour that is done at home. As real wages fall, housewives can afford to buy much less and have to start buying fewer processed goods instead and make up for the difference in value added with their own labour: see Smith 1978: 205; Gardiner 1975: 57; Molyneux 1979: 11–12. Or they have to consider taking up paid work themselves in order to supplement their husband's wage (Smith 1978: 205).

(<sup>45</sup>) Smith 1978: 205–6.

(<sup>46</sup>) As I shall argue in Ch. 5 below, women's unpaid work is best understood as care rather than production (see also Ch. 1 sect. ii).

<sup>(47)</sup> Smith 1978: 208. Folbre (1982) argues in response to such arguments that commensurability is achieved for domestic labour on the basis of the need for households to survive which introduces a pressure towards efficiency comparable to that of competition in production for the market.

<sup>(48)</sup> Smith 1978: 207.

<sup>(49)</sup> Smith 1978: 209.

<sup>(50)</sup> Smith defends this last point at length in the rest of his paper, but since his argument does not add anything more of interest to my own discussion, i restrict myself to analysing those arguments that i have introduced so far.

<sup>(51)</sup> See e.g. the usage of the notion of the 'political economy' of housework in the title of two articles (Gardiner 1976, Harrison 1973*b*).

<sup>(52)</sup> Smith's article is a very good example of this tendency (Smith 1978).

<sup>(53)</sup> See Delphy and Leonard 1992: 70, for the observation of feminists' moving on, although they give different reasons for this.

<sup>(54)</sup> Folbre (1982) is a rare example of a feminist marxist economist who initially marxist economist who initially resisted marxist orthodoxy by suggesting a theory of women's exploitation on the basis of an argument that women's labour can be measured in value terms. (See nn. 2 and 47 above.) She seems to have given up any further work on it since then, however: in her most recent book, whilst focusing on women's unpaid work throughout, she refers to the domestic labour debate only implicitly in a footnote, ending by concluding that the labour theory of value needs to be rejected if it does not allow the usage of the concept of exploitation for women's unpaid labour in the home (Folbre 1994: 266 n. 46). In the rest of the book, she neither explicates nor defends her occasional usage of 'exploitation' in this sense. Late victory by the orthodox position?

<sup>(55)</sup> I shall argue in sect, vi below that feminists need not have rejected Marx's notion of exploitation—nor need they have given in to orthodox insistence on this point.

<sup>(56)</sup> See Delphy 1984. Delphy was predictably taken to task and accused by other marxist feminists of getting marxist theory completely or at least partly wrong (see Barrett and McIntosh 1979, Molyneux 1979). I shall discuss Delphy's theory of 'familial exploitation' in detail in Ch. 3.

<sup>(57)</sup> See Gough 1972, 1973, Harrison 1973*a*, Howell 1975.

<sup>(58)</sup> See Elson 1979 and Steedman 1981 for contributions by orthodox and neo-Ricardian marxists, Roemer 1982 for a new and more systematic presentation of the labour theory of value as well as a discussion of its limitations, and any standard economics textbook for the neo-classical critique of it.

<sup>(59)</sup> Feminists could simply have insisted that they were interested in social rather than economic analysis and that they would use marxist concepts as part of such an analysis by suitably redeploying them. Again, however, this move was difficult to make for the feminist participants in the domestic labour debate because they thought of themselves as marxist feminists and because, more importantly, such a move would have implied the rejection of a central part of marxist methodology in social theory: its economic reductionism. As marxist political economy was understood at the time, social explanations would invariably refer back to the laws by which the capitalist economy functioned, notably the 'law of value'. (See e.g. Himmelweit and Mohun 1977, Seccombe 1974, Smith 1978.)

<sup>(60)</sup> As I have started to argue and shall continue to argue below, women's work is best understood as care, not as production at all.

<sup>(61)</sup> See Carter 1975: 48; Himmelweit and Mohun 1977: 25.

<sup>(62)</sup> Patients in mental hospitals who are sectioned lose their freedom on the ground of diminished responsibility, inmates of prisons on the grounds of forfeiture of their rights, and children are not allowed all the adult freedoms on the grounds

of immaturity. None of these grounds changes their underlying moral status as free, self-owning persons, they only change their legal status temporarily.

(<sup>63</sup>) We might also be disturbed by the image of mass production, but capitalistically run institutions do not necessarily—nor even usually—imply more ‘mass processing’ than, say, state or charity run institutions.

(<sup>64</sup>) It has recently been argued that there are no good reasons why persons could not sell themselves into slavery (see Nozick 1974 and Philmore 1982), but such arguments are obviously highly controversial (see e.g. Pateman 1988, ch. 3). It seems to me that the subject-object dichotomy forms a central part of our conception of personhood, and it is people's instrumental relationship to objects which confirms them to themselves and others as subjects (see also *GR* 911).

(<sup>65</sup>) As it is by Seccombe 1974.

(<sup>66</sup>) It is interesting that none of the participants in the domestic labour debate seems to have realized this point—is this because it was difficult to imagine women as fully-fledged, self-owning subjects and producers who would sell their product, labour power (and thus their husbands and children), on the labour market rather than as servants of their husbands and children? And does this by itself not point not only to the fact that women were not taken seriously as self-owners who would own whatever they produced in private, but also to the fact that the language of production is inadequately used in a theory of women's work (see my following point)?

(<sup>67</sup>) See e.g. Walby 1990 for continued usage of the vocabulary of ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’ of labour power.

(<sup>68</sup>) I have not seen any references to women's ‘biological’ production of human beings in the domestic labour debate literature.

(<sup>69</sup>) As I pointed out above, Smith (1978) is more perceptive about this point than anybody else, but unfortunately only in the course of pursuing his orthodox conclusions.

<sup>(70)</sup> I shall return to this point in Ch. 4 sect, ii, where I introduce my own theory of women's work as care

<sup>(71)</sup> WLC 158-9.

<sup>(72)</sup> *Cap.* i. 274-5.

<sup>(73)</sup> *Ibid.* 275.

<sup>(74)</sup> *Ibid.*; see also p. 701.

<sup>(75)</sup> *Ibid.* 275.

<sup>(76)</sup> Marx proceeds in the paragraphs following this quote to demonstrate how the value of labour power is calculated, summing up his preceding discussion by saying that '[t]he value of labour-power can be resolved into the value of a definite quantity of the means of subsistence' (*Cap.* i. 276). Whose subsistence is not discussed any further. For the value of labour power said to be determined by the means of subsistence see *ibid.* 430; *Cap.* iii. 306, 1006. For the value of labour power said to be determined by the costs of both daily and generational reproduction, see *Cap.* i. 518 and WLC 158-9; see also *Cap.* i. 717-18

<sup>(77)</sup> See the quote above: the German original of 'worker's replacements' is 'Ersatzmänner' (substituting men) (*Cap.* i. 275).

<sup>(78)</sup> *Ibid.* 518.

<sup>(79)</sup> *Ibid.* 276.

<sup>(80)</sup> See Gardiner, Hirnmelweit, and Mackintosh 1975: 2, 7; Smith 1978: 216 n. 4.

<sup>(81)</sup> See Smith 1978, *passim*; Himmelweit and Mohun 1977: 23, 27-8; Gardiner, Himmelweit, and Mackintosh 1975: 7; see also sect. iii above.

<sup>(82)</sup> See Harrison 1973*b*: 41. I doubt that this interpretation of the 'moral and historical element' was in line with Marx's intentions, since Marx simply never took women's domestic

work seriously into account and explicitly referred to very different kinds of factors in this passage (see *Cap. i. 275*). Whilst this is a good example of a new and creative usage of marxist terminology, it is unfortunately also infelicitous.

(<sup>83</sup>) Harrison 1973*b*: 41-2; see also Gardiner 1975: 53.

(<sup>84</sup>) Gardiner 1976: 114.

(<sup>85</sup>) Harrison 1973*b*: 43-4.

(<sup>86</sup>) *Ibid.* 43.

(<sup>87</sup>) Gardiner 1976: 54; see also Gough and Harrison 1975: 4.

(<sup>88</sup>) See sect. ii above.

(<sup>89</sup>) Dalla Costa 1973: 53 n. 12.

(<sup>90</sup>) In fact, the domestic sphere was often analysed as a different mode of production, albeit one subordinate to the dominant, capitalist mode of production (see e.g. Gardiner 1976 and Harrison 1973*a*, 1973*b*). Whilst I cannot discuss the merits and demerits of this theoretical move, one aspect of it is worth noting: by conceiving of the domestic sphere as a separate mode of production, characterized by different relations of production, these theorists could resist the imposition by defenders of the orthodox position of the conceptual apparatus used to analyse the capitalist mode of production. Thus note Gardiner's insistence that, presuming a different mode and relations of production, 'forms of surplus labour other than surplus value have to be taken into account' (Gardiner 1976: 111). Gardiner, however, does not draw the further conclusion that, therefore, women may be exploited in a form other than through wage labour—nor does Harrison—but Delphy does (see Delphy 1984, Delphy and Leonard 1992, and Ch. 3 below).

(<sup>91</sup>) See Gardiner 1976 and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981 for explicit comparisons.

(<sup>92</sup>) See Molyneux 1979.

(<sup>93</sup>) See sect. ii above.

(<sup>94</sup>) See Himmelweit and Mohun 1977: 24 -5; Gardiner, Himmelweit, and Mackintosh 1975: 7; Smith 1978, *passim*; Coulson, Magas, and Wainwright 1975: 62 -3.

(<sup>95</sup>) See sect. iii above.

(<sup>96</sup>) Gardiner, Himmelweit, and Mackintosh 1975: 6; Gough and Harrison 1975: 4. Note that Gardiner's initial position is to be found in Gardiner 1975, 1976, although these were published either later than or at the same time as the co-authored paper reassessing this initial position.

(<sup>97</sup>) Harrison 1973*a*, 1973*b*, Gough 1972, and Gough and Harrison 1975. Harrison explicitly rejects orthodoxy when he says that '[t]o insist on retaining a concept [that of productive labour, D.B.] *solely* because it is in Marx's writings is to reduce Marxism from the status of a science to that of a dogma' (Harrison 1973*a*: 81). Note, however, that even Harrison revised his interpretation of the value of labour power towards a more orthodox position (see n. 96 above).

(<sup>98</sup>) See Delphy 1984, Delphy and Leonard 1992; Delphy 1984 is a collection of papers which were written mainly in the 1970s. See also the collection of papers entitled, significantly, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Sargent 1986), and the by now famous quote by one of its contributors that '[t]he marriage of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism' (Hartmann 1986: 2).

(<sup>99</sup>) North American feminists seemed, on the whole, to have made the break earlier and more successfully than European feminists, probably because they were less steeped in marxist orthodoxy, or less deferential to it, than their sisters in the Old World and the heartland of old style marxism: see Sargent 1986, which was originally published in 1981.

(<sup>100</sup>) See my presentation of Marx on the value of labour power in the previous section.

(<sup>101</sup>) See Bruegel 1978: 7.

<sup>(102)</sup> See *ibid.* 6; Mandel 1975: 393.

<sup>(103)</sup> Molyneux 1979: 10–12

<sup>(104)</sup> Bruegel 1978: 5; Barrett 1980.

<sup>(105)</sup> See Molyneux 1979: 21.

<sup>(106)</sup> See Molyneux 1979: 21. One of Harrison's papers is a typical, but at least explicit, case in point: whilst he admits at an early point of his analysis that he is 'in effect abstracting from the problem of reproduction *at this stage* by assuming the family has no children', the topic of childcare remains unaddressed throughout the rest of his long paper (Harrison 1973*b*: 43, my emphasis).

<sup>(107)</sup> See my criticism of the orthodox position in sect. iii above.

<sup>(108)</sup> Remarks about the benefit of women's work to men can be found in some contributions to the debate, but these remarks seem to have no weight in any of these writings (see e.g. Harrison 1973*b*, *passim*; Gardiner, Himmelweit, and Mackintosh 1975: 7). See also Molyneux (1979: 21–2) on this point.

<sup>(109)</sup> Again, the notable exception among all contributors to the debate is Delphy (see Delphy 1984, Delphy and Leonard 1992, and Ch. 3 below).

<sup>(110)</sup> I do not mean to underestimate the gain in terms of learning progress that can be had from such utter failures, but the actual discouragement engendered by such attempts should not be underestimated either—as I know from my own painful immersion into the domestic labour debate and marxist economics.

<sup>(111)</sup> *Cap.* i. 325; cf. p. 680.

<sup>(112)</sup> Marx's use of 'the worker' is generic in this quote, not singular.

<sup>(113)</sup> *Cap.* iii. 509, 940.

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(<sup>114</sup>) *Cap.* iii. 940.

(<sup>115</sup>) See sect. ii above.

(<sup>116</sup>) Strictly speaking, according to orthodox interpretation, only slaves working on the fields do, domestic slaves do not. Marx never made the distinction.

(<sup>117</sup>) It is interesting to note that holders of the benefit position, despite arguing that capital benefits from women's surplus labour in the home, never claimed that women were exploited in performing it, even though, by definition (of the general concept of exploitation), anybody who performs surplus labour is exploited! (See also n. 85 above.)



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