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Freedom and dependency from a feminist perspective

- A comparison between Nina Björk, Martha C. Nussbaum
and Simone de Beauvoir

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Abstract

This paper will deal with the complex interaction between our individual freedom (independence) and our deep need of other people (dependency). Western women often say that non-Western women are not free as a consequence of tradition and culture. It is rarer that we question our own so called freedom. My main purpose is to take a closer look at the relationship between independence and neediness in order to see why this relationship is problematic but also what good it might bring. This paper is an analysis of three prominent feminists' arguments regarding this matter. I have turned to Nina Björk, Martha C. Nussbaum and Simone de Beauvoir in order to find answers to my questions. My results are a reflection of the complications but also the possibilities that this interaction creates. Feminist theory is occupied with this question as well and my choice to consult the above mentioned feminists is no coincidence. Their some what opaque position is a trend within feminist theory which today lacks a coherent reference point as far as women and women's rights are concerned.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of contents	3
Abbreviations	5
1 Introduction	6
1.1 Purpose and research questions	7
1.2 Methodology.....	8
1.3 Delimitations	9
1.4 Theoretical background.....	9
2 Nina Björk: A critique of liberalism	13
2.1 A critique.....	13
2.2 Liberal ancestors.....	14
2.3 The price to pay: Beauvoir & Benedictsson.....	16
3 Martha C. Nussbaum: A defence of liberalism	21
3.1 A defence.....	21
3.2 Liberal ancestors.....	23
3.3 The gifts of relations: Neediness & Emotions.....	26
4 Analysis.....	31
4.1 How to define women.....	31
4.2 The tension between freedom and neediness	34
4.2.1 The price to pay.....	34
4.2.2 ‘The ethic of care’	36
4.2.3 Femininity versus individuality	37
4.3 Can we combine our freedom with our neediness in a balanced way?	38

5	Closure	41
5.1	Conclusions & Discussion	41
6	References	44
6.1	Literature	44
6.2	Other sources	45

Abbreviations

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
UN United Nations

1 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 has now existed for sixty years. This document stipulates our human rights and through this women were granted their formal rights once and for all. This was an event which many hoped would be helpful for women in their fight against discrimination and for equality. Sixty years later we can conclude that women are still discriminated and they face injustices in the form of violence and abuse solely because they are women. The UN Declaration proved to be an insufficient device, women needed some extra protection. CEDAW was presented in 1979 but women still face the same problems; they are still abused, raped, discriminated, murdered, beaten and mutilated.

Human rights are founded on liberal values. This we find evidence of already in the first article of the declaration which states: “All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights [...]”. The emphasis is on the individual and her freedom. These two concepts are at the heart of the liberal ideology that emerged, accompanied by capitalism, in the 18th century. The creation of feminism took place at the same time and feminism was influenced by liberalism; women wanted to have the same rights as men. Today feminism is criticized for adopting the liberal spirit without considering if these two are compatible enough to help women promote their agenda. Even though liberalism aspired to grant men and women the same freedom and value it has been suggested that liberalism has failed to live up to its own promise, with other words, liberalism has failed women and neglected their needs.

Some feminists claim that liberalism focuses on the rational self-sufficient individual and they also claim that this self-made individual is male, indicating that women were never a part of the liberal equation. This has to do with the liberal distinction between the private and public sphere. The private sphere has been overlooked which means that the oppression of women in the private sphere has remained invisible. Other feminists have criticized liberalism for denying emotions and neediness in order to promote the rational self-sufficient individual by branding relationships as something harmful. Today some feminists would like to replace this liberal approach with a more care-based approach (Marxist or socialist) while other feminists would like to revise and keep the liberal approach. Alison Jaggar and Barbara L. Marshall are among those that favour a Marxist or socialist approach whereas Martha C.

Nussbaum and Onora O'Neill are champions of a liberal approach.

Feminism faces the following problems today: how to define women and how to fix the gap between theory and praxis. These two aspects are particularly problematic since feminists are not in agreement as far as these are concerned. Some feminists will not even use the word women because they believe that women are a social construction and they say that women do not exist. Others say "women" since women are not a monolithic group. How do we define women and why do we need a categorization to begin with? Feminists struggle with these questions since they make it hard when we actually want to help women. How can we help women who suffer from discrimination and suppression if we do not give them an identity? This is a crucial question for feminists as they define women in different ways. Are women a social construction, an object, a rational being, an embodied subject or perhaps a transcendent being? Feminists can not seem to agree and therefore feminism is a divided field with many different camps.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

In this paper I would like to take a closer look at the relationship between our freedom (independence) and our deep need of other people (dependency) from a feminist perspective. In order to do so I will look at the work of three feminists; Nina Björk, Martha C. Nussbaum and Simone de Beauvoir, as their work deal specifically with this relationship. Their arguments will help me answer my main question: *Can we be free and dependent at the same time?* This question can be related to Beauvoir's pivotal question; how can we find independence in the midst of dependency? It seems like our individual freedom has a tendency to collide with our dependency. This collision might jeopardize our chances of freedom (independency) or, as some will argue, our relations to other human beings (dependency).

The attendant questions that will follow are then: Why is there a tension between our independence and our deep need of others? Why is this relationship problematic for women especially? Is our dependency and deep need of others something negative? Can we combine our deep need for other people with the expectations from society to act like an independent unattached autonomous being?

My hypothesis is, in accordance with Björk's main argument, that we are not free, we

have a deep need of other people and we are primarily relational beings. But I would also like to investigate, inspired by Beauvoir and Nussbaum, if our dependency must be all negative, and if in fact we can be free and dependent at the same time. I will not only focus on the dilemma regarding our individual freedom and our need for other people, attention will also be given to my three feminists and their feminist position.

1.2 Methodology

I have turned to these feminists, who are intellectuals, because they offer valuable perspectives regarding the relationship between independence and dependency, with special focus on women. They all write about freedom and neediness but they hold varying positions and they offer different responses and arguments. This paper is divided into five parts. Part one is an introduction. Part two is devoted to Björk's arguments (a critique of liberalism); part three is devoted to Nussbaum's arguments (a defence of liberalism). These arguments will be analyzed and compared in part four which also contains arguments delivered by Beauvoir (freedom and dependency from an existentialistic perspective) as a contrast. Finally we have the conclusions and discussion in part five.

I question the usage of women with quotation marks which is frequently employed by feminists today. Toril Moi has stated that feminist theory thereby suffers from a "theoretical malaise".¹ When I refer to women in this paper I will not say "women" as it signals abstraction and that is not in line with either of my chosen feminists' work. However, I am aware of the problems that this categorization evokes. I am in no way claiming that women are a monolithic group and I acknowledge the diversity of experience. In the end I favour a position that grants women their uniqueness but also the acknowledgement of things they have in common. Postmodernists often find identity repressive. Vintges finds this problematic since identity politics are highly relevant when speaking of women rights and she asks: "Can there really be no politics of the 'recognition of identities' distinct from a 'politics of redistribution?'"² Just like Vintges I hold the position that this distinction is not only possible but also a necessity.

¹ Moi, Toril (II). *I am not a woman writer': About women, literature and feminist theory*. 2008; 9. p 264

² Vintges, Karen. *Must we burn Foucault? Ethics as art of living: Simone de Beauvoir and Michael Foucault*. 2004; 34. p 176

1.3 Delimitations

My goal is not to account for all the work of Björk, Nussbaum or Beauvoir. This paper will only deal with the arguments that I deem to be relevant as far as the relationship between independence and dependency is concerned. Furthermore, this paper is not an aspiration to display feminist theory and all its imperfections. However, it will contain a brief presentation of feminist theory as a background.

1.4 Theoretical background

Feminism is an ideological political movement that emerged in the 18th century. Feminism entails a belief that men and women should be equal; socially, financially and politically. The movement grew strong due to the French Revolution. The term feminism was first coined in France in the 1880s and even today the term lacks a coherent definition. There are three different waves of feminism. The first wave took place in the 18th century, the second wave began in the 1960s and it overlaps with the third wave that emerged in the 1990s.

Feminism extended to feminist theory which means that feminism extended to a theoretical and philosophical ground. Feminist theory is occupied with the nature of inequality between men and women with special interest in gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Feminist theory is a melange of diverse contributions from various disciplines, among others sociology, anthropology, women and gender studies and philosophy.

Feminism is not coherent. Beasley defines feminism as: "... a kind of empty shell into which may be poured any number of different concerns, details and explanations".³ There are many different kinds of feminist viewpoints. It all began with Mill and his wife Harriet (Liberal feminism) and Marx/Engels (Marxist feminism). The following viewpoints are present today: Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Socialist feminism, Radical feminism, Psychoanalytic feminists, Post-modern/Poststructuralist feminists and feminists concerned with race and ethnicity⁴. Feminists often adhere to more than one category.

³ Beasley, Chris. *What is feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*. Sage Productions 1999. p 28

⁴ Beasley. 1999. p 48

Feminism rests on two analytical terms: sex/gender and the patriarchy.⁵ Sex is biological whereas gender refers to “the ideological and material relations that exist between groups of people called ‘men’ and people called ‘women’.”⁶ Feminists who emphasize gender instead of biology do so since they believe that gender has the greatest impact with regard to the interaction between men and women. The concept of gender was first introduced in the 1980s and one of its most ardent proponents is Judith Butler. There is this major split between the feminism that emphasizes biology (essentialism) and the feminism that emphasizes gender (nominalism). The former is based on the assumption that men and women are by nature different and that these differences should be praised and emphasized. The second group consists of feminists who believe that there are no biologically given differences; instead they believe that it is the environment that creates gender. This constructivist approach can be related to Simone de Beauvoir’s statement: “*One is not born a woman, one becomes one*”,⁷ and it is perhaps one of the most significant contributions to feminism and feminist theory.

So, there is the latent critique that feminist theory, even the constructivist approach, has a focus on men and women as fixed categories. Additionally, there is also this widespread critique against individualism and liberalism. Fox-Genovese, who belongs to this group, carries matter to an extreme by stating: “...it is primarily in my conviction that feminism, in all its guises, is itself the daughter of that (male) individualism which so many feminists are attacking”.⁸ That is to say, Fox-Genovese claims that women’s experience and nature have been filtered through the premises of individualism. Women have been ‘colonized’ by the ideology of individuality, modern feminism included. Fox-Genovese states: “Few feminist scholars have extended the critique to ask if any self - male or female - exists entirely free of history”.⁹

Nina Björk who earlier promoted a Butlerian approach has now turned to biology in order to make her case. Björk’s critique is aimed both at liberalism and feminism since she believes that both have neglected the human body as primarily a *biological* body. She also responds to Genovese’s request by claiming that no man or woman is free from history,

⁵ Mulinari, Diana (et al.). *Mer än bara män och kvinnor. Feministiska perspektiv på genus*. Lund 2003. p 21

⁶ Steans, Jill. *Gender and international relations*. UK 2006. p 8

⁷ Beauvoir, Simone de. *Det andra könet*. Stockholm 2004. p 325 (my italics)

⁸ Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Feminism without illusions. A critique of individualism*. 1991. p 243

⁹ Fox-Genovese. 1991. p 243

ideology or biology. Björk is not the first one who seeks to intertwine the biological body with political theory, which she also acknowledges. Alison Jaggar wrote *Feminist politics and human nature* in 1983 and many influential feminists refer to this work as “one of the most influential works of feminist political theory”.¹⁰ Jaggar, in her capacity as professor of philosophy and women studies, favours a socialist approach while rejecting liberalism. Björk has also turned to the work of by Terry Eagleton and Sebastian Timpanaro. Björk seeks to intertwine their theoretical work with the arguments made by Locke and Mill by extending Jaggar’s critique in order to define the relationship between freedom and dependency.

Martha C. Nussbaum, a liberal, turns to the liberal ancestors (just like Björk) since they wrote about freedom and dependency long before we did. One of John Stuart Mill’s early contributions for an example was that he addressed women’s situation in a political manner. To note is that Mill wrote about these aspects already in the 19th century. And even more interesting, and often forgotten, is that his wife Harriet wrote about these issues before Mill did. Mill himself has confessed to be under the influence of his wife’s contributions. Mill was preceded by Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges among others and there were more radical voices. Mill stood out because he was a male liberal that uttered these claims regarding women’s rights. Mill also made a clear distinction between the biological and social differences between the two sexes, which had not been done since Platon’s time. He emphasized that we can never really know what the differences are for sure.¹¹ Björk has set the tone nationally whereas Nussbaum brings us to the international arena of feminism and feminist theory. Nussbaum tries to establish, in her opinion, a wholesome balance between freedom and dependency. Her contribution will be a consolidation of liberalism and social philosophy with radical influences.

In many ways Beauvoir laid the foundation of both today’s feminism and feminist theory. Instead of offering a new theory I believe that we must take a step back. I agree with Moi that Beauvoir’s “pioneering insights” can help “the current political and theoretical dead ends”, that is, feminism needs Beauvoir.¹² A majority of feminist work today deals, in one way or another, with Beauvoir’s contributions. She is frequently quoted and mentioned.

¹⁰ Nussbaum, Martha C. (I) *Sex and Social justice*. 1999. p 56

¹¹ Mansén, Elisabeth. *Det passionerade förnuftet*, preface in Mill’s (et al) *Förtrycket av kvinnorna & Kvinnors befrielse*. Smedjebacken 1995. pp 7-8

¹² Moi, Toril (I). *Simone de Beauvoir. The making of an intellectual woman*. US 2008. p 204

Beauvoir was coloured by her age of time, which is also the case with Björk and Nussbaum, and this makes their contributions even more interesting and striking since they speak from first hand experience. They have faced society as female intellectuals. Their experiences they share with us through their writing.

2 Nina Björk: A critique of liberalism

This section will deal with Björk's standpoint regarding the liberal concept of freedom. Björk rejects the liberal individualism and here this rejection will be illustrated by focusing on how women have responded to the liberal dream of the self-made woman.

2.1 A critique

“The night between 22 and 23 July 1888 Benedictsson takes her life by cutting her throat with a razor”.¹³ This statement is the last sentence in Björk's *Free Spirits (Fria Själur)*. This death is symbolic since it embodies and exemplifies Björk's own standpoint concerning the intrinsic malevolent character of liberal individualism. Björk portrays this Swedish author's life in the light of the notion about “the sovereign individual”. Benedictsson was born in 1850 and Björk contextualizes her life by situating it in a time where two principles stood in opposition: 1) a modified gender ideology based on the complementary relationship between men and women, and 2) a modern individualism supported by recent liberal economical and political developments.¹⁴

To criticize the individuality entailed in liberalism is a widespread enterprise undertaken by feminists. Björk desists from discussing liberalism's true nature, instead she highlights the fact that one notion; individualism, reoccurs when debating the core of liberalism.¹⁵ Björk defines three types of critique aimed at the liberal outlook: the communitarian, the feminist and the socialist critique. One pivotal aspect according to Björk, who has been influenced by the above mentioned critique, is that feminist criticism of liberalism in particular seems to be preoccupied with the distribution of sex and the adjacent implications, at the expense of the implications of the *human* body.¹⁶ Björk declares this to be of great importance since she believes that the solution is a *human essentialism*. This is fundamental in the sense that it

¹³ Björk, Nina (I). *Fria själar. Ideologi hos Mill, Locke och Benedictsson*. Smedjebacken 2008. p 263

¹⁴ Björk (I).2008. p 124

¹⁵ Björk (I).2008. p 19

¹⁶ Björk (I). 2008. pp 24-25

precedes biology and the construction of men and women. Björk aspires to evoke a renaissance for the importance of the human body as a foundation in political thinking. She wishes to dismantle the ideal dream of the free human being by inducing a materialistic alternative. Björk tries to combine the biological body with political theory just like Jaggar. Björk utilizes Jaggar's work only as a place of sojourn, favouring instead the work of Sebastian Timpanaro and Terry Eagleton in order to proceed with her agenda. Björk follows Jaggar in her argument that individual self-sufficiency is an inadequate point of departure for political thinking since: "Human dependence and human mutuality are...conditioned by our biology [...]."¹⁷ The ensuing theoretical implications (if adopting human biology) would alter the liberal agenda all together since the rational single individual no longer can exist. Björk dismantles this chimera by introducing two "banal" facts with "tremendous" consequences: "1) humans have a body that dies if it's not given food and water; and 2) humans are born with such an underdeveloped body that they can not survive if they don't begin to develop relationships with other people immediately".¹⁸ First Björk laments that feminists to a great extent have disregarded humans first of all as dependent and relational beings (a dependency based on the external environment of humans, their biological corporeality and on their fellow-beings). She additionally aims her attention towards John Locke's *Two treatises of Government*, as well as John Stuart Mill's *On liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*. Her purpose is to establish how the independent human being first was created. Björk notes a lack of congruity which will be illustrated below.

2.2 Liberal ancestors

Björk commences her analysis by asking if Benedictsson really succeeded in evading the structural oppression of women. She additionally investigates how the individual interacts with structure. Björk gives an account of the fact that Benedictsson is considered by many a symbol of the strong individual who fulfils herself and thereby also fulfils the liberal dream. The dream of a free woman, according to Björk, is nothing but a remote dream.¹⁹ Benedictsson listened to the liberal cry, trying to equate herself with her performance. By

¹⁷ Björk (I). 2008. p 23

¹⁸ Björk (I). 2008. p 265

¹⁹ Björk (I). 2008. p 133

doing so she had to view everyone as enemies which led to solitude.²⁰ Her suicide was a result of: “the belief in the ideal of the free and true human, the ideal of a human who doesn’t allow itself to be governed by sex or birth, the belief that this ideal cannot be realized in any other way by one’s own individual efforts”.²¹

Björk first turns to John Locke in order to display how the ‘free’ individual was created. Locke’s standpoint and emphasis on the separate individual and her individual performance has become an inherent feature in the liberal creed. The following associations emerge: human being – performance - private property. In order to maintain this chain every person’s own active role becomes tremendously important, moreover, certain aspects must be disparaged, these negated associations are: nature - the given (material conditions) - collectivism.²² Locke hosted the opinion that every human being is born free and equal but economic equality must be exempted. This inequality concerning the financial system is all natural since it is established in the state of nature. Locke also finds this to be normative.²³ Next Locke’s second major theme; the (voluntary) contract, is also addressed by Björk. Human beings are equal and can thereby enter contracts due to their possession of property in the form of their bodies and their ability to work.²⁴ Björk notes that the transition from the state of nature towards the political society, as a consequence of the contract, leads to a body that is merely a financial body. Even though the contract is considered to be voluntary no questions are asked regarding why we ‘choose’ to enter a contract. The material body remains devaluated in order to assist Locke’s freedom and equality incarnated in his voluntary contract. Björk opposes this. She takes food as an example, stating that every body needs food. Our bodily needs are unconditional, we must obtain food and we are required to enter a contract with people who offer a link to food whether we like it or not. Björk’s main problem with Locke is that he offers a theory of liberty and equality simultaneously as he legitimates a practise of inequality. Both women and servants are considered to be “essentially free and equal beings” since they have entered contracts on voluntary basis, Björk denounces this voluntariness.

²⁰ Björk (I). 2008. p 219

²¹ Björk (I). 2008. p 275

²² Björk (I). 2008. pp 65-66

²³ Björk (I). 2008. p 70

²⁴ Björk (I). 2008. p 75

Björk also deals with how John Stuart Mill promotes the independent human being, an ideal (liberal) subject. She is self-made and sovereign. Mill was, just like Locke, a classical liberal who emphasised the importance of freedom. He believed in “a radical human independence”.²⁵ Human dependence is according to Mill something negative since other people (and relationships) are: 1) a threat to the individual’s prospects to develop freely, or 2) rivals. Mill accentuates the active choice and reason. Mill and Locke both aim at keeping the material body away from the political arena.²⁶ This is based on the assumption that the intellectual knowledge is all that matters, not the commonly shared need for food and water.²⁷

“Mill’s feminist failure”, as Björk puts it, is that he displays a negative view of women’s subjectivity. This critique, delivered by Björk, differs from other feminist critique which is often aimed at Mill’s attempt to keep a gendered based division of labour (private versus public). Mill wanted women to access the possibility to create themselves since every individual, man or woman is exceptional.²⁸ Despite this promising outlook Mill moves on to, according to Björk, reproaching *women* for their subordination, which is not to say that Mill explicitly states that oppression is justifiable in any way. In relation to Mill’s view on women Björk addresses what she refers to as Mill’s “feminist ideological work” which she claims has become a permanent feature. This is derived from Mill’s following associations; women - subordination – compliancy – self-denial – altruism – feelings, and; men - self control - reason – freedom. Björk argues that Mill wants women to liberate themselves from ‘the ethic of care’ (an expression Björk borrows from Joan C. Tronto). This liberation from dependency will enable women to become legitimate political subjects. Women are ill-legitimate political subjects until they have adopted the liberal spirit and rejected ‘the ethic of care’. This means that women are asked to think twice before taking care of other people or to feel compassion.

2.3 The price to pay: Beauvoir & Benedictsson

Björk highlights the antagonism between femininity and individuality. When a woman enters the public sphere she is torn between male virtues (determination, control, self-will,

²⁵ Björk (I). 2008. p 88

²⁶ Björk (I). 2008. p 101

²⁷ Björk (I). 2008. pp 95, 119

²⁸ Björk (I). 2008. p 107

discipline) and the expectation that she must nurture her womanliness.²⁹ Björk clarifies this battle by claiming that women pay a higher price than men do if they try to partake in the public sphere and thereby also by rejecting residing norms. She mentioned this ambiguity in her second book (*Sireners sång*) where modernity and gender is the main theme. She writes about modernity as a historical epoch coloured by secularization, science, enlightenment, capitalism and reason. The modern man is rational with grand aspirations whereas the modern woman is excluded from any modern project. Women have been ostracized but not left without a role since she in fact has filled two functions in society. Women have constituted either a promise or a threat.³⁰ The first woman, the promise of what has been lost, is a woman that symbolizes the things that have been sacrificed along with the adoption of modernity, like love, spirituality and spontaneity. The other woman, the threat, is a woman “who like a siren seductively sings back the working man to the mother’s land [...]”. This woman is dangerous since she might stop men from being rational. However, like Björk strives to demonstrate, women have along been present although never rightfully acknowledged.

Notwithstanding Björk’s choice to portray Benedictsson’s life there is in her prior work a brief attempt to portray another woman’s life in the light of the price to pay for full participation in a male dominated society. In *Under det rosa täcket* we find an entire chapter devoted to the controversial feminist Simone de Beauvoir. This section bears the title: “Why does Simone de Beauvoir cry”? Here Björk, with the aid of Moi’s work among others, focuses on the ideological and feminist conflicts emanating from Beauvoir’s life story. Björk sums up her discussion by stating that ‘independence’ does not automatically mean neither happiness nor freedom, in allusion to Beauvoir’s own statement: ‘I have spent half my life in tears’.³¹ These tears carry meaning and they can also be depicted in Björk’s reading of Benedictsson’s life span which also was marked by tears, loneliness and despair. There are many differences between these two lives. Björk chose Benedictsson because she stands for something quite different, even though Björk herself does not connect the two cases. Beauvoir managed to escape some of society’s expectations whereas Benedictsson failed altogether. Both of them,

²⁹ Björk, Nina. *Sireners sång. Tankar kring modernitet, och kön*. Falun 1999. pp 224-225

³⁰ Björk. 1999. p 13

³¹ Björk, Nina (II) *Under det rosa täcket. Om kvinnlighetens vara och feministiska strategier*. Danmark 2008. pp 194, 230

aspiring to be viewed as authors, not as women, fell victim to passion and this was an aggravating circumstance when trying to evade society's expectations.

If we return to Björk's elaboration of how this expectation from society, which is saying that women must act in a certain "feminine" way, she does so by using a metaphor in the form of a fruit. This fruit consists of both an essence (a pip) and a pulp, implicating both a psychological position as well as a physical expression. The fruit is in fact symbolizing a woman. Björk tries to show how the fruit (a woman) is bound to take its traditional shape imposed by society. Beauvoir did not want to take on society's expectations regarding femininity. Björk finds that Beauvoir kept the essence (the pip) but managed to resist the traditional fruit by creating an alternative pulp. Like Björk states: "She evades femininity - and she keeps it".³² And despite the fact that Beauvoir was unable to separate gender from sex she was not all together a victim of complete conformity since she could "stretch the limits a little bit".³³ Björk is under the influence of the Butlerian approach when writing this book and is therefore, despite the fact that she speaks of an essence, less prone to speak of essentialism, but this is a predicament of what is to come from Björk (an essentialism which is elaborated in *Fria Själar*). Björk concludes that in order to break away from the given women must pay a higher price and they can not want the same things as men without being in the possession of an "enormous will".³⁴ This will, or desire, of freedom has led women to make a distinction between body and soul (woman/body, man/soul). Björk notes how Beauvoir, just like Benedictsson, saw her body, her desires and her love as a threat. Relationships and dependency threatened their aspiration to pursue rationality, they have no choice but to escape their bodies since they are "occupied by culture".³⁵ Beauvoir came to realize, to her own disappointment, when entering relationships with men, that she could not control her bodily desires with her will. To be viewed as a woman, an object, evoked anxiety and a desire to escape her own femininity since for her it would reduce her to being "the Other" instead of a subject. Benedictsson too felt abhorrence for feelings and relationships but she eventually realized that "her feelings would not really obey her".³⁶ Beauvoir and Benedictsson were

³² Björk (II) 2008 . p 201

³³ Björk (II) 2008. p 213

³⁴ Björk (II) 2008. p 208

³⁵ Björk (II) 2008. p 210

³⁶ Björk (II) 2008. p 182

determined to stay in control while struggling with, not only their desire to be with their lovers, but also their desire to be acknowledged as writers by them. They believed that they could master their feelings by turning to work, both turned to writing as a salvation. They lived with the awareness that self-discipline was required in order to find freedom.

Beauvoir found a middle path where she sacrificed love for her authorship and this paved the way for many tears but also much success and happiness. This is why Björk can use Beauvoir only as an example of how a woman in order to exist as a person/subject, not as an object/woman, must give up her given role as a woman. Like Beauvoir herself said: 'I have abandoned myself by abandoning you' (here she referred to her love Algren).³⁷ Hristova makes a claim that Beauvoir gave up the love of her life as a consequence of her neediness, she needed the security that Jean-Paul Sartre stood for. Beauvoir chose to make this sacrifice because she dreamed of free choice and independence as indictments with a human character, not with a male character.³⁸ In some way we might say that she managed to live her dream. Björk's lack of lasting interest in Beauvoir's life could depend on the fact that Beauvoir ultimately proved to be strong enough to live with her self-made choices.

Benedictsson's unhappiness seems similar to Beauvoir's unhappiness but it took a different turn and shows an alternative prospect. Björk claims that the self-made woman can be deleterious if you are not a strong individual with an enormous will and self-determination. Can anyone really deny their relational need? Björk is inclined to say no. When Benedictsson realized that a gender determined ideology existed, diminished by Brandes who was her role model and lover, she made a pact with herself in order to escape it. She isolated herself in order to find the truth, to be true to herself. This ideology she refers to is in fact *the others*. Her fellow-beings posed a threat since they might interpret her as a woman and not as a person. It is primarily the relationship between man and woman that Benedictsson finds menacing, women she simply despises.³⁹ Björk quotes Butler and relates performativity to the case of Benedictsson. Butler has stated that for a human being in the making it is necessary to be acknowledged by the other, implicating that an infant must be labelled as helpless in order to be taken care of. The subject will therefore be formed in subordination. This subordination

³⁷ Beauvoir, Simone de, as quoted in Hristova's *Mellan passion och trohet*. Dagens Nyheter 2008, November 28, p 6

³⁸ Björk (II) 2008. p 224

³⁹ Björk (I) 2008. p 188

will be maintained through their entire lives since subjects, according to Butler, 'seek the sign of their own existence outside themselves'.⁴⁰ Benedictsson, according to Björk, symbolizes the harsh reality of an individual that attempts to escape a structural oppression or the others. She failed because, when trying to live the liberal dream as a modern individual, she had to exterminate her female materiality and her relations. This means that Benedictsson wished for something impossible: a self without a body.⁴¹ Benedictsson tried to bury herself in work in order to escape herself and others and by doing so she did not escape ideology, she solely went from a gender ideology to the liberal ideology.⁴² The liberal promise says: "You can if only you want to".⁴³ Performance is everything, it defines who you are. If you fail it is because you have not tried hard enough, and you can not blame society or structural injustices. Furthermore, to politicize as a woman is a sign of personal weakness. Benedictsson adopted this stance, dreaming of freedom, at the expense of her happiness. When she realizes that her freedom is imaginary and that she too needs other people she wishes not only to be a man, no, she also wishes to be dead. She takes her life since she could not live up to the ideal that all human beings are free and unaffected by rang or sex. She is a part of a drama where no subject, male or female, is free or disconnected from history or ideology. However their lack of freedom on the other hand differs since power relations constitute hierarchical positions.⁴⁴ Liberalism and individualism disregard the material reality, the biological given. Benedictsson paid with her life, living in a society, where the chains of patriarchy had been replaced by the chains of capitalism. This society screamed: "the woman is not an individual",⁴⁵ at least if we are to believe Björk.

⁴⁰ Björk (I) 2008. pp 194-195

⁴¹ Björk (I) 2008. pp 208, 210, 212

⁴² Björk (I) 2008. p 214

⁴³ Björk (I) 2008. p 221

⁴⁴ Björk (I) 2008. p 200

⁴⁵ Björk (I) 2008. p 262

3 Martha C. Nussbaum: A defence of liberalism

This section is devoted to Nussbaum who seeks to combine our freedom with our neediness. Nussbaum defends liberal individualism by stressing both the flaws and the strengths. Both the positive and negative implications for women will be accounted for here.

3.1 A defence

Nussbaum, like Björk, investigates a feminist's piece of work (*To the lighthouse* by Virginia Wolf) in order to illustrate, not a problem, but a solution to the problem depicted by feminists like Björk. Where they see an inherent contradiction Nussbaum is inclined to take an optimistic juxtaposition, seeking solutions by opening doors that have been shut by others. We need not to discard the liberal path, though some adjustments are desirable so that the flaws of the liberal vision can be mitigated. Nussbaum wishes to extend the liberal promise so that it can reach its full potential as: "a vision of a beautiful, rich and difficult world, in which a community of persons regard one and other as free and equal but also as finite and *needy*-and thereof strive to arrange their relationships on terms of justice and liberty".⁴⁶ She encourages women to demand, with radical means, to be seen as human rather than as someone's subject. A political type of liberalism is exactly what Nussbaum ordains as an antidote for the, as she calls it, "emotion-reason contrast". Our need for other people may in fact be a salvation or a remedy, moreover, Nussbaum rejects the idea that liberalism encourages women to deny their emotions and need for others (referred to as the 'ethic of care' by Björk).⁴⁷ In fact emotions "lie at the heart of the ethical life" and are far from dispensable. Our society's legacy, coloured by an immense injustice, breeds not a need of repudiation, rather it breeds a need to embrace emotions by combining radical feminist

⁴⁶ Nussbaum (I).1999. p 80 (my emphasis).

⁴⁷ Nussbaum (I) 1999. p 76

critique with the possibilities of trust and understanding. Nussbaum is inspired by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mac Kinnon.⁴⁸

Nussbaum tackles the problem concerning women's emancipation and autonomy by stressing the fruitfulness of a liberal approach. As she proceeds with her defence she responds to an earlier delivered critique aimed at liberalism, with specific attention given the feminist critique. First off a caution is in order since liberalism is referred to in a general way without any consideration shown to the fact that 'liberalism' is a family of positions, not a single position.⁴⁹ Nussbaum stipulates the following separate positions: Kantian liberalism, classical Utilitarian liberalism and Utilitarianism (dominant in neoclassical economics). Nussbaum's choice to consult thinkers like John Rawls, John Stuart Mill, as well as Rousseau, Hume and Smith is given since they offer a "core of common commitments".

Feminists have claimed that liberalism is inadequate as far as feminist politics are concerned. Just like Björk, Nussbaum quotes Jaggar in order to illustrate this critique. Jaggar has stated that: 'the liberal conception of human nature and political philosophy cannot constitute the philosophical foundation for an adequate theory of women's liberation'.⁵⁰ Jaggar's position implies that liberalism regards human individuals as essentially self-sufficient entities (the liberal assumption of 'political solipsism'). This Nussbaum eagerly tries to dismantle by deconstructing Jaggar's own statements. Nussbaum admits that some charges delivered by feminists are valid while others are not. She claims that: "the liberal individualism does not entail egoism or a preference for the type of person who has no *deep need* of others". Nussbaum wishes to show that liberal individualism is not related and intertwined with egoism and normative self-sufficiency. An ambiguity arises, according to Nussbaum, when Jaggar, while implying psychological egoism and normative ethical egoism, Jaggar also states that the political theories (the Utilitarian and the Rawlsian) strive to satisfy everyone's interests.⁵¹ Moreover, when criticizing economic Utilitarianism for underrating sympathy and commitments as motives, Jaggar finds this to be not universal in the liberal tradition since Rawls, Mill and Kant consider human beings to be both egoistic and non-

⁴⁸ Nussbaum (I) 1999. p 14

⁴⁹ Nussbaum (I) 1999. p 57

⁵⁰ Jaggar, Alison, as quoted in Nussbaum's *Sex and social justice*. p 56

⁵¹ Nussbaum (I) 1999. p 59

egoistic. Nussbaum concludes that the same men, apart from Kant, “have an *evidently* social and *other-inclusive* psychology”.⁵²

Women have been seen as means to the ends of others and therefore the liberal position is very useful since it promotes that “the goal of politics should be the amelioration of lives taken one by one and seen as separate ends, rather than the amelioration of the organic whole or the totality.”⁵³ Nussbaum’s goal is to defend liberalism as a political philosophy, stating that it in fact can atone for prior defaults. Feminists, critical of liberalism, deem this atonement to be impossible, favouring instead the adoption of a completely different political philosophy that would be a more care-based political theory.⁵⁴

Nussbaum reassess the liberal promise, critical of certain aspects, and carves out a liberal feminism that need not to involve a rejection and she makes this suggestion with arguments derived from the founders of liberalism. Just like Björk she brings us back in time in order to deal with contemporary dilemmas. She is far from naive, fully aware of the many times precarious situation women often find themselves in, yet, she is full of confidence when she encourages women to embrace the liberal spirit while simultaneously offering them the tools to do so.

3.2 Liberal ancestors

Nussbaum who has dealt a great deal with the work of liberal ancestors is inspired by several sources. Their influences have marked her work. Nussbaum employs her knowledge in order to defend liberalism as an ideology that values emotions and relationships. There are a number of persons that contribute to Nussbaum’s defence. Nussbaum believes that if we take a closer look we can gain a better insight into a liberalism that is much more nuanced than Björk is willing to admit.

Feminists have delivered three salient charges, each and one implying that the liberal tradition as a philosophy is problematic. Has the tradition failed to meet the needs of women? Some feminists would say yes since liberalism is: 1) too ‘individualistic’, 2) based on ideals of equality that are too abstract and formal, and 3) too preoccupied with reason, neglecting

⁵² Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 60 (my emphasis)

⁵³ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 10

⁵⁴ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 59

emotions and care in moral and political life. Even though Björk's critique is not directly accounted for here, Nussbaum indirectly gives counter-arguments to this critique as well as she goes along with her defence of liberalism. The first aspect has already been contested by Nussbaum, who stated that the essential emphasis of liberalism is on respect for others as individuals. The second aspect she wishes to amend by delivering a capability approach that in fact is a liberal approach that does take biology into account (which will be discussed later on). For now the third charge is of great interest. Nussbaum, who has a strong interest in emotions, states that there are many strong objections to this assertion. Before we turn our attention to Nussbaum's enthusiastic aspiration to shape a society that posterity can inherit and benefit from, her remarks regarding the liberal antecedents will be accounted for.

Ancestors like the Stoics disapproved of emotions. But it is not a view that is widely shared in the liberal tradition according to Nussbaum who demonstrates that Aristotle, Rousseau and Smith considered emotions to involve both thought and imagination and that sympathy is central for rationality and for humanity as such. Nussbaum also borrows from Aristotle the conception of human functionality and capability since it is important to liberal political theory. These contributions have influenced her in the creation of her alternative approach (liberalism combined with a social philosophy). Freedom and dignity are rudimentary when addressing women's rights and therefore Nussbaum consults Kant and Rawls where Aristotle shows deficiencies. Aristotle and Rawls represent a fundamental liberal idea; "an idea of the citizen as a free dignified human, and a maker of choices". This means that liberalism makes the individual the basic unit for political thought and it rejects any form of metaphysics that can deny "the reality of our separateness and our substantial character."⁵⁵ These arguments Nussbaum uses in order to explain why liberalism is not about abstraction (metaphysics) since it deals with embodied humans (makers).

Nussbaum advocates a Kantian liberalism, and rejects the utilitarian tradition; however, Mill and his wife Harriet are also kept as prominent influences. Nussbaum states that *The subjection of women* is a "wonderful work" and that it in fact is not a utilitarian work. However, Nussbaum notes that Mill did not give sufficient attention to the perpetuation of separate spheres (private versus public) and how this reinforced subordination of women. Nussbaum notes that the connotations; men – citizenship – rational - autonomy, did stand in

⁵⁵ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 63

contrast to woman - family love/care, at that time.⁵⁶ In order to defend Mill Nussbaum highlights that Mill did in fact argue that we must interfere with family (through legal reforms) since it is not “always characterized by a harmony of interests”.⁵⁷ Mill, unlike other liberals, saw this failure to assume organic unity and harmony not as a failure intrinsic to liberalism itself since the problem stems from a lack of individualism. Men are granted a position that enables them to subordinate others by acting like “kings” even in the private domain. Mill was worried that while males receive full autonomy and freedom they do not indulge in altruism, leading to further subordination of women, in his own words: ‘ the generality of men cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal’.⁵⁸ Nussbaum manages to demonstrate that Mill was simply responding to his time, which might pardon him for not stressing the wonders of women’s qualities. Nussbaum additionally claims that Mill, in his *Autobiography*, mourned “rationality starved of emotional attachment and imaginative stimulation”.⁵⁹ This could be interpreted in favour of Mill who was evidently not all negative when it came to emotions and care.

Although he was confined by society’s frames, which limited his expositions, Mill did address sexual matters. Nussbaum sees a need to scrutinize desire (the private sphere), accepting this to be an intelligible critique delivered by feminists, and claims that Mill paved the way for this type of inspection which is in accordance with “liberalism’s deepest aspirations”. Here Mill noted that a social deformation also occurred in the way that “gender hierarchy deformed the desires of both men and women. Society eroticizes female ‘meekness, submissiveness and resignation of all individual will as an essential part of sexual attractiveness’.⁶⁰ Women’s sexual submissiveness strengthens their already inferior status since motives connected with sexuality interacts with other motives that are related to women’s suppression. Nussbaum thereby display how women tend to harmed in a society that does not grant them the position as autonomous individuals/subjects. Nussbaum wishes to promote the importance of emotions but uses the liberal ancestors’ arguments in order to

⁵⁶ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 51

⁵⁷ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 65

⁵⁸ Mill, John Stuart, as quoted in Nussbaum’s *Sex and social justice*. p 79

⁵⁹ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 74

⁶⁰ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 78

show that since emotions have a social origin⁶¹ they might be abused if a society's norms are set to subdue women.

3.3 The gifts of relations: Neediness & Emotions

Nussbaum claims that men's sexual objectification of women is a central problem in a woman's life, a problem that feminist politics have struggled with to a great extent. Once again the dichotomy of femininity and individuality persists. However, Nussbaum also claims that the concept of objectification is a "slippery" and "multiple" concept, and moreover, although it is always morally problematic there are some features of objectification that are "necessary or even wonderful features of sexual life", if they are combined with equality, respect and consent.⁶² Sexuality and feminism can not be seen as separate entities. But Nussbaum concludes that dehumanization and objectification have several forms, like moral objectification, and the core of this must not be sexual. In fact it might be so that the deformation of sexual power does not anticipate other forms of objectification since economical norms and motives construct desire in a culture (Western) where "nothing is seen as an end in itself because the only end is wealth".⁶³ If we return to Locke's contract and how we enter contracts by "selling" our bodies Nussbaum writes that: "All of us...take money for the use of our body". The adjacent stigmatization of certain occupations can be founded on stereotypes of gender (like prostitution). Nussbaum argues that women are not free to enter contracts because they do not have a choice to make *de facto*. Women's financial situation might force them to use their body as a commodity, in the form of prostitution for one thing.⁶⁴ There are not many people that can afford to use their body in a 'truly human way' and then the "choice" or "voluntary" contract is more of a vision than factual.⁶⁵ These women (and men) must be empowered and assisted. Nussbaum ordains a capability approach as the optimal goal of public policy and as a liberal feminist she emphasise the importance of institutions and law. She refers to this as a "conception of the good" and although she believes

⁶¹ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 10

⁶² Nussbaum (I) 1999. pp 214-215

⁶³ Nussbaum (I). 1999. pp 238-239

⁶⁴ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 278

⁶⁵ Nussbaum (I). 1999. 298

that society must assist women she also states that it is primarily the individuals' responsibility to invoke this since the nation can not be the given base as a result of the "current state of world politics". This means that Nussbaum gives each and one of us an urgent assignment since politics can not 'determine a theory of the human good; evaluative choices must be left to the individual.⁶⁶ Nussbaum's solution (a set of central human functional capabilities) is stipulated in the following way:

1. Life
2. Bodily health and integrity
3. Bodily integrity
4. Senses, imagination, thought
5. Emotions
6. Practical reason
7. Affiliation
8. Other species
9. Play
10. Control over one's environment; political and material

This approach is supposed to guide policymakers in a political liberal society so that the focus on utility/resources will desist. This notion of the good is a way of granting citizens their *humaneness*. A deprivation of these opportunities for functioning (derived from Aristotelian lists of tragic predicaments), especially for women, is "particularly tragic".⁶⁷ As we can see Nussbaum's list does hold a place for our biological condition. Number five and number seven is also interesting since they relate specifically to our main theme (individuality versus dependency) and the importance of our relations is highlighted (see below for further elaboration). The capabilities are a minimum requirement which means that each society is free to choose other goals to pursue once they have granted the above mentioned capabilities. Nussbaum will not compromise as far as inequalities are concerned for "inequalities based on hierarchies of gender or race will themselves be inadmissible on the grounds that they

⁶⁶ Nussbaum (I). 1999. pp 39, 40

⁶⁷ Nussbaum, Martha C. *Upheavels of thought*. Cambridge 2001. p 418

undermine self-respect and emotional development”.⁶⁸ Nussbaum elaborates some of the capabilities in the following way:

“Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and person’s outside ourselves; being able to love those who love and care for us; being able to grieve at their absence; in general, being able to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger; not having one’s emotional developing blighted by fear or anxiety.”

“Affiliation. a) Being able to live for and in relations to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; being able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for the situation; having the capability for justice and friendship [...]. b. Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.”⁶⁹

This liberal approach evidently includes our deep need for relationships. It includes our biological needs as well as our emotional needs. Nussbaum is inclined to talk about neediness in the same spirit as Björk, although with a some what different attitude. Neediness exists and it can not be negotiated with. Nussbaum, influenced by Freud, states that: “Human infants arrive in the world in a condition of needy helplessness more or less unparalleled in any other animal species”.⁷⁰ Nussbaum is influenced by both Freud and Lucretius. She writes that the early infancy is a “drama of helplessness before a world of objects – a world that contains both threatening things and good things, the things it wants and needs”.⁷¹ Children are in need of love and care although the need for security and holding is different from the need of appetitive gratification.⁷² Nussbaum explains that as the child becomes aware of the transformations to its being they develop emotions which Nussbaum declares to be recognitions of a lack of full control, but just equally important, they are a substantial resource which makes life complete.⁷³ These emotions are a prerequisite for the development of

⁶⁸ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 43

⁶⁹ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 41

⁷⁰ Nussbaum. 2001. p 181

⁷¹ Nussbaum. 2001. p 182

⁷² Nussbaum. 2001. p 191

⁷³ Nussbaum. 2001. p 190

practical reason and the sense of self; the “emotion-thoughts” concern aspects of our well-being.⁷⁴ Society must grant individuals, at all ages, the prerogative of being “children”, imperfect and needy, by creating a political ‘facilitating environment’ that can hold these needs.⁷⁵ Nussbaum offers us a liberal approach which does not expect individuals to be completely self-made or self-sufficient.

Nussbaum promotes a notion of emotions as “essential elements of human intelligence” which are “appraisals or value judgements”.⁷⁶ Emotions involve value and they are *eudaimonistic*, meaning that they are concerned with a person’s well-being. They can be attached to the question: “How should a human being live?” The answer is related to a person’s perception of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is a Greek word meaning happiness. This kind of eudaimonia is very subjective and it is related to occasional or momentary happiness. Nussbaum believes that we in society should appeal to individual’s emotions rather than their will to obey a system of rules/institutions. She takes compassion (and love) to be a remarkable example of this. She says that compassion “is a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune”.⁷⁷ The problem is that people seem to have a hard time feeling compassion since it requires them to see another person’s suffering as an important part of their own scheme of goals and ends (a eudaimonistic judgement). Our own vulnerability must be related to the other person’s vulnerability if compassion is to arise.⁷⁸ Nussbaum wants us to launch an *adequate compassion* in society, that is, to teach compassion. Since institutions are marked by imperfection we need “compassionate individuals” to uphold political insights. We need compassion so that we can meet the needs of our fellow beings; a political conception is not enough. Citizens therefore need to be educated, by the means of literature for an example, so that they can become more sensitive to other individual’s precarious situation. As far as women’s situation is concerned Nussbaum talks about using ‘the prism of gender’.

Finally, Nussbaum is a great advocate of love and understanding. Her analysis of Wolf’s novel *To the lighthouse* deals with neediness and dependency. One chapter bears the

⁷⁴ Nussbaum. 2001. pp 200, 233

⁷⁵ Nussbaum. 2001. p 227

⁷⁶ Nussbaum. 2001. pp 3-4

⁷⁷ Nussbaum. 2001. p 301

⁷⁸ Nussbaum. 2001. p 319

title *The Window*. The window referred to in the novel is a token (a metaphor) of that even if life is “sealed” there is also room for communication (transparency). The novel is about the relationship between Mr and Mrs Ramsay, their communication and need for each other. Nussbaum writes that human beings are “finite in both body and mind, partial and incomplete, separate from humans of necessity and always”.⁷⁹ The love and need for one another (here referring to the two spouses that are the protagonists of the novel in question) will compel people to listen to the needs of others. “Love pulls...toward perceptions and reflections that elude...completely in the case of other people”. Nussbaum concludes that:

“By working patiently to defeat shame, selfish anxiety, and the desire for power, it is sometimes possible for some people to get knowledge of one thing or another thing about some other people, and they can sometimes allow one thing or another thing about themselves to be known.”⁸⁰

With her analysis of Wolf’s novel Nussbaum demonstrates that our relationships can be rewarding and beautiful. With time we can *learn* to understand each other and this will make us pay attention to our fellow-beings’ needs. This is a process which will take time. Human beings are sometimes scared or selfish as a consequence of dependency. However, *our own* need for love and understanding will help us become better “readers”. Relationships are not always filled with altruism but they have a great potential of becoming filled with understanding, compassion and equality. Nussbaum is trying to show that emotions and relationships are what enrich our life which is why they must co-exist with our individual freedom.

⁷⁹ Nussbaum (I). 1999. pp 356, 365

⁸⁰ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 368, 373

4 Analysis

This section consists of a comparison and an analysis of Björk's and Nussbaum's opinions regarding freedom and neediness. It will also involve the contribution from a third feminist; Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir's contribution will shed light on this complex relationship and how it explicitly affects women. I will use their arguments in order to answer my questions regarding the relationship between our freedom (independence) and our deep need of other people and why this tension is especially problematic for women.

The following themes will be addressed: how to define a woman, tensions between individuality and neediness, and finally, the alignment between independence and dependency. These subjects are as crucial for women, and feminist theory, today as they were in the past. I find Björk's contribution to be a sign of this. These subjects will also be intertwined with the feminists' specific agenda and position. Nina Björk, Martha C. Nussbaum and Simone de Beauvoir are all feminists, despite the fact that Beauvoir herself did not consider herself to be one until she was in her late sixties, that is, a long time after she wrote *The Second Sex*. Moreover, my three spokeswomen are feminists speaking about *freedom* and *dependency*, and by now we know that there is not just one definition of a feminist. There are several positions as will become evident in this section. Björk is under the influence of postmodernism, with a specific interest in biology, and she is a socialist. Nussbaum is under the influence of liberalism, but also social philosophy and radical feminism. Beauvoir is the most famous continental feminist, also a socialist. Despite this, their paths occasionally intersect in the vast landscape of feminist theory.

4.1 How to define women

These three feminists define women differently but I have chosen them since they refer to the real living women and not a mere abstraction. Nussbaum has stated that: "Feminism begins from the real lives of women".⁸¹ Although Björk is under the influence of post modernism her latest contribution offers us a concrete woman that is not just a social construction. Beauvoir,

⁸¹ Nussbaum (I). 1999. p 17

who also uses “women” (influenced by deconstruction) instead of just women, is yet first of all interested in embodied women. These feminists will assist me when fighting “the theory of malaise”; a feminism that only deals with abstraction instead of women who are made of a body and mind and who consequently experience both physical and mental abuse and discrimination. Björk states that women (and men) first of all are needy biological beings; therefore we can not be free. Björk rejects political liberalism and calls it “inhuman”. Björk calls for a *human essentialism* and a materialistic alternative since human beings are dependent and she points at the external environment, our biological body and our relationships with our fellow-beings. She clarifies that this is not some sort of ‘strategic essentialism’ (proclaimed by Spivak and Benhabib); Eagleton’s material essentialism is without quotation marks.

Björk utilizes deconstruction and in *Under det rosa täcket* she writes about humans as just human, not as female or male. In *Free Spirits* on the other hand Björk refers to humans as biological beings and although she says that she is not a biologist⁸² she writes about a *female materiality*. More precisely she uses the words “bodily woman”.⁸³ Björk keeps quoting Butler in *Free Spirits* and this is problematic given Butler’s stance regarding biology as a social construction. Björk herself seems to be aware of this in some way because she writes when quoting Butler: “For the human being in the making it is necessary - biologically necessary (no, Butler does not use those words) – to be acknowledged by the other”.⁸⁴

Nussbaum rejects Butler and her metaphysics since they do not deal with the *real* living women, for once again as Nussbaum writes: “Feminism begins from the *real lives* of women”. Nussbaum proposes a political liberalism where she begins with a practical fact: each person’s dignity. She states that each person is “a subject of political interest, as an end in herself, not of relations to others”.⁸⁵ Nussbaum is sceptical to all forms of metaphysics and Nussbaum criticizes Butler by claiming that:

“Butler does in the end want to say that we have a kind of agency, an ability to undertake change and resistance. But where does this ability come from, if there is no structure in the personality that is not thoroughly power's

⁸² Ullgren, Malin. *Finns det fria själar?* Dagens Nyheter 2008, November 16. p 11

⁸³ Björk (I). 2008. p 212

⁸⁴ Björk (I). 2008. p 194

⁸⁵ Nussbaum, Martha C. *Reply: In defence of global political liberalism*. Development and change. Vol 37. 2006. p 1323

creation? It is not impossible for Butler to answer this question, but she certainly has not answered it yet, in a way that would convince those who believe that human beings have at least some pre-cultural desires-for food, for comfort, for cognitive mastery, for survival-and that this structure in the personality is crucial in the explanation of our development as moral and political agents.”⁸⁶

Like Moi has pointed out, according to Butler the body is an effect of “a discursive ‘process of materialization’. Butler is an anti-essentialist. What she shares with Beauvoir is the belief that gender is created in society which also indicates that gender can be changed in society. Beauvoir, unlike Butler, thinks that human beings are *embodied* subjects⁸⁷ and she stands for a *philosophical essentialism*.⁸⁸ Björk and Butler do feel the same about a person’s (limited) freedom, both dislike liberalism. Björk’s position remains divided since she calls for a materialistic alternative and she writes about a bodily femaleness. This means that she is moving towards realism, while holding on to Butler’s abstraction.

Beauvoir defines women as embodied subjects despite the fact that she speaks of “women”, not women. Furthermore Beauvoir defines women as “the Other”. First of all humans do not define themselves as individuals; it is the couple – a *Mitsein* – that is the dominant state in which we define ourselves.⁸⁹ This *Mitsein* is not an unproblematic condition since the man defines the woman. With other words: “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other”.⁹⁰ Men’s definition of women as the Other has not happened; as long as there has been a woman (always) there has been subordination.⁹¹ Beauvoir states that women’s subordination entails a dependency since the *Mitsein* is an entity that consists of two parts (the Subject and the Other) and this separation is biologically given.⁹² Beauvoir finds women to be caught in the problematic transition from being the Other (an object) to becoming a free human being (a subject) since there are financial and social barriers in

⁸⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C (II). *The professor of parody*. New Republic (Magazine); February 22, 1999. p 7

⁸⁷ Moi, Toril (II).2008. p 263

⁸⁸ Marshall. 1994. p 106

⁸⁹ Beauvoir. 2004. p 70

⁹⁰ Beauvoir. 2004. p 26

⁹¹ Beauvoir. 2004. p 28

⁹² Beauvoir. 2004. p 29

society.⁹³ What follows then is that Beauvoir claims that lesbian women are free which makes sense since there is no man that can subordinate them.

4.2 The tension between freedom and neediness

4.2.1 The price to pay

Fox-Genovese has stated that late capitalist society has contributed with a bitter twist to centuries of female oppression and that: "... a host of changes have been interwoven in a dense network of isolation and anxiety",⁹⁴ explicitly affecting women. Björk uses Benedictsson's suicide as another example of a price that women pay for the liberal dream. Many prominent women have taken their life; Benedictsson, Virginia Wolf, Emily Dickenson and Sylvia Plath to mention some of them. Karin Johannisson, a Swedish professor in gender studies, has as well depicted this trend and she writes that women have tried to find freedom and to escape the private sphere through either professional life or artistry. Johannisson states that for doing so the price women have to pay is "high in the form of disease, depression and exclusion" which in some instances ultimately lead to suicide.⁹⁵ This would support Björk's opinion that liberation/freedom is just fiction or a dream. These women could not escape society's impact which made their emancipation a difficult thing to achieve.

I would like to use Beauvoir's ethic on life (and freedom) in order to shed light on Benedictsson's life. Björk describes how Benedictsson isolated herself in order to find the truth. She believed that she could capture her freedom by herself and through an avoidance of the others. Björk is of the opinion that she failed since we are relational beings, we need other people, and hence, we are not free (spirits). Beauvoir on the other hand agrees with the first statement but not with the last statement. She claims that no person can save herself alone.⁹⁶ No person can isolate herself from the world for we can only find *raison d'être* in other people's existence, moreover, this *raison d'être* is a requirement, one that we *must actively*

⁹³ Beauvoir. 2004. pp 84-85

⁹⁴ Fox-Genovese. 1991. p 14

⁹⁵ Johannisson, Karin. *Den mörka kontinenten. Kvinnan, Medicinen och fin-du-siècle*. Stockholm 2004.p 244

⁹⁶ Beauvoir, Simone de. *För en tvetydighetens moral*. Uddevalla 1992. p 61

seek.⁹⁷ Isolation will be nothing but an escape from a world that we must learn to handle and we need other people to define ourselves. Beauvoir argues: "... a life is a relationship with the world; the individual defines herself by choosing herself through her world".⁹⁸ Freedom, although not innate, is "the spring from which all the meanings and values emerge from".⁹⁹ This freedom has to be conquered and without any doubt this process will be hard and anxiety-ridden, especially for women.¹⁰⁰ In relation to men women tend to feel disadvantaged,¹⁰¹ just like Benedictsson did when she realized that even how hard she tried it would be a man's society that would dictate the terms. These problems find their silent solution in death; "a woman that decides to live is thereby more torn than a woman that decides to bury her will and her desires".¹⁰²

When Beauvoir started to write about existentialism she had a utopian wish. She modified it a bit when she wrote *The Second Sex*. In *The ethics of ambiguity* she writes that failing is something that is a part of our life's conditions and if we fail, which we most certainly will, we can not wipe out or accept that mistake. If we resign it is the same thing as dreaming about death, if we fall we must get up again and keep trying.¹⁰³ Furthermore she states that: "It is possible for a human to deny herself to love something in this world. She will prove and complete this denial through the suicide",¹⁰⁴ which was what Benedictsson did. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir added society's oppression to the equation which makes women's freedom a more tepid question. According to this philosophy Benedictsson should have fought harder instead of escaping her life (of failures) and her freedom.

We have now seen how relationships can be perceived as a threat. I find Nussbaum's contribution regarding compassion and love the most intriguing since she has faith in the positive aspects of our relations with others. Nussbaum is inclined to have much faith in our compassionate ability but we must be taught and trained in order to activate it. I would like to

⁹⁷ Beauvoir. 1992. p 67

⁹⁸ Beauvoir. 2004. p 82

⁹⁹ Beauvoir. 1992. p 34

¹⁰⁰ Beauvoir. 2004. p 750

¹⁰¹ Beauvoir. 2004. p 796

¹⁰² Beauvoir. 2004. p 796

¹⁰³ Beauvoir. 1992. p 124

¹⁰⁴ Beauvoir. 1992. p 125

see this as an *innate ability of compassion*. Her ethic of care demands a lot from the individual. She can be accused of putting too much faith in people's altruism, a danger she herself found to be represented by Mill. Yet she acknowledges the fact that not everybody is inclined to show compassion and love *easily*, but it can be done with time, as demonstrated in her analysis of Wolf's *To the lighthouse*. The liberal promise however will reduce this risk of egoism, according to Nussbaum, since women have been seen as means to the ends of others, and not as separate ends and for liberalism this is not acceptable. What came across was that liberal feminism often stresses the importance of institutions and laws. Nussbaum on the other hand also has a social philosophy where the individual's responsibility is just as extensive as is the state's responsibility. In the end it seems like Nussbaum favours the individual rather than the state. But since neither of them are a hundred percent reliable we must have both. The institutions are a prerequisite but without the good will of the individuals human rights or capabilities will be a remote dream. This might be seen as quite evident but there is a void as far as responsibility and ethical norms are concerned in a world signified by an expansive capitalism so it needs to be reiterated over and over again. Björk wants a normative approach and Nussbaum is offering one. The only problem is that Nussbaum offers her normative solution in the form of an ethic of care in a liberal context.

4.2.2 'The ethic of care'

Björk also expresses a concern regarding the liberal denial of the 'ethics of care', referring back to Mill's ideological work. This 'ethic of care' is based on a will to take care of other people and compassion. Let us take a look at Mill's associations once more. Björk concluded that they were: women – subordination – compliancy - self-denial – altruism - feelings. Björk claims that liberalism's individualism thereby requires that women give up their relationships and dependency. Nussbaum responds by stating that caring can be risky for women and she also states that liberal individualism does not ask women to be self-sufficient or to reduce her need of others. But, and this is an important objection, liberalism does ask her to be aware of the tension between her own well-being and the well-being of others. Women may love if they do so "freely and judiciously" otherwise they might give themselves away unconditionally since "women eroticize submission and *learn* to find satisfaction in giving

themselves away”.¹⁰⁵ Nussbaum thereby states that women are inclined to feel *too much* compassion and this could jeopardize her freedom since she will forget herself. Emotions have a social origin. Society tries to reduce a woman by appreciating passiveness and submissiveness. Beauvoir writes about the same risk when she states that women are expected to take the place as “the Other” which means that a woman is reduced to being an object, confined to immanence. Society dictates the terms, even when it comes to emotions. Björk addressed this matter of ‘ethic of care’ in a political spirit and makes no further attempt to define her own stance regarding women’s inclination to be more compassionate or self-sacrificing.

4.2.3 Femininity versus individuality

Björk who talks about the woman as a “threat” or a “promise” finds that women struggle in today’s society as a consequence of expectations concerning femininity. Women will carry a double burden trying to combine their individuality with their femininity. This was also mentioned by Beauvoir. She writes that men define women.¹⁰⁶ Moi has named Beauvoir’s concept on this matter “patriarchal femininity” referring to “mythological femininity”. Beauvoir writes: ‘The individual is still not free to do as she pleases in shaping the concept of femininity’.¹⁰⁷ Beauvoir wants men to stop dressing women like a symbol and instead see her as an authentic being, not as a myth.¹⁰⁸ Beauvoir states that it is very hard for women to combine their demand to be an independent individual with their “female destiny”, and it will take “exceptional circumstances” for women to succeed.¹⁰⁹ Women are split between the role given as “the Other” (object) and the demand for freedom.¹¹⁰ Given Björk’s account, women are not yet free from a pre-existing standard of femininity. Beauvoir states that ‘the quarrel will go on as long as men and women fail to recognize each other as equals [sembles]; that is to say , as long as femininity is perpetuated as such’.¹¹¹ Of course this must be seen as a

¹⁰⁵ Nussbaum (I). 1999. pp 76- 77 (my emphasis)

¹⁰⁶ Beauvoir. 2004. p 189

¹⁰⁷ Beauvoir, as quoted in Moi’s *Simone de Beauvoir. The making of an intellectual woman*. 2008. p 210

¹⁰⁸ Beauvoir. 2004. p 314

¹⁰⁹ Beauvoir. 2004. pp 82, 316

¹¹⁰ Beauvoir. 2004. p 84

¹¹¹ Beauvoir, as quoted in Moi’s *Simone de Beauvoir. The making of an intellectual woman*. 2008. p 211

consequence of her greatest contribution:” One is not born a woman, one becomes one”. This statement was delivered 70 years ago from a woman that lived in a society where women had just been granted the right to vote and where contraception and abortion were forbidden. Björk’s conclusion makes me think of Beauvoir’s predicament, highlighted by Vintges, that we will never achieve “complete harmony between people”.¹¹² If we return to Mill and his statement ‘the generality of men cannot yet stand the idea of living with an equal’; can the generality of men stand the idea of living with an equal today? It is still a crucial question given the perpetuation of inequalities in the world today. And like Moi argues: “The male or the masculine is still the norm, the female or feminine remains the deviation”.¹¹³ However, this does not mean that we should stop trying to achieve harmony, quite the opposite, according to Beauvoir. Beauvoir says that the formal battle is already won since the exceptional circumstances have been created in the form of institutions and the UN Declaration from 1948. What remains is for men to give up their artificial vision of women and for them to set her free. Also women themselves have a heavy assignment: they must *create* their freedom and themselves.

4.3 Can we combine our freedom with our neediness in a balanced way?

Björk has concluded that we are not free and we do not possess an innate freedom. There is not much hope to detect in Björk’s writing. Beauvoir offers much more hope. Nussbaum too is very hopeful, which might not be all surprising. We can, according to Beauvoir, become free as long as we acknowledge that we are not free, this is the first step towards freedom. This constant creative enterprise evolving around the concept freedom is the very heart of Beauvoir’s existentialistic philosophy. Moi states: “There is, in the *Second Sex*, an extraordinary consistent vision of freedom”.¹¹⁴ Even though there are aspects in this masterpiece that might be dubious, Beauvoir does not always speak kindly of women, there is a message or almost a promise of freedom. It is not a freedom that is innate like the liberal freedom for it must be situated; it is always part of a social interaction with others. Our

¹¹² Vintages, Karen. 2001. p 175

¹¹³ Moi (II). 2008. p 266

freedom occurs in social discourses. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir writes that we all have an absolute freedom, if we chose it and accept that our existence is limited.¹¹⁵ This might sound confusing at first, how can we be free and limited at the same time? In order to understand this paradox we must start from the beginning; that is from the very first day we are born in to this world. Beauvoir states that her ethic is about individualism but it is also about dependency.¹¹⁶ And now we are back to the pivotal matter that this paper starts with, and that is, Björk's conclusion that we are all relational beings.

We are born into dependency. Even the liberal Nussbaum agrees, human beings have a “*deep need*” for other people, not only when we are babies but also as adults. In fact nobody is contesting this fact, apart from some liberal ancestors. What is of relevance is how freedom and dependency are defined by Björk, Nussbaum and Beauvoir. Beauvoir poses a question that will function as a device when discussing neediness and freedom: “How can we find independence in the midst of dependency?”¹¹⁷ This is the paradox that haunts us in our lives from day one.

We are dependent beings that we can conclude by now. This dependency does not mean the same thing for Björk, Nussbaum and Beauvoir. Björk talks about our neediness in a context that is coloured by subordination, influenced by Butler. The connotations are thereby negative but what Björk really seem to want to say is that our needs are simply there, they are a fact. Nussbaum sees our dependency as something useful for it will help us develop feelings that will make us compassionate loving humans. Beauvoir does not see our dependency as something inherently positive or negative, it is what enables us to be free and it is seen as a necessity. Human beings are transcendent beings and we must strive to capture our freedom, a freedom that exists if only we choose to realize it, it is waiting for us. In order to justify our existence we must transcend ourselves for otherwise we face immanence and that is morally wrong since we are not taking responsibility for our life. This constant process in which we recreate ourselves is constantly present in life. Women on the other hand face a double challenge. While she chooses herself, for she too is an autonomous being, she faces a world where men try to define her as “the Other”. This struggle will tempt many women to fall back

¹¹⁴ Moi (I). 2008. p 204

¹¹⁵ Beauvoir. 1992. p 125

¹¹⁶ Beauvoir. 1992. p 123

¹¹⁷ Beauvoir. 2004. p 38

into immanence, instead of transcendence.¹¹⁸ But women are not a fixed reality and she has the possibility to transcend if only she is allowed to. To be free means to act. Beauvoir states that the problem is that we too often ask what women have been able to do instead of focusing on what she actually could do.¹¹⁹ Beauvoir elaborates her notion of freedom by situating it. It is the existence of other people that will save a person from immanence because this existence allows her to find her truth, her existence's truth.¹²⁰ She will find her truth through friendship and generosity. As soon as a woman is free she must create her own destiny.¹²¹ A woman must first be financially independent in order to be free but that will not make her entirely free.

Beauvoir argues that there will always be certain differences between men and women and that these two separate categories can create miracles together. But first women can no longer be slaves to men; men and women must both be seen as subjects. Women must also reconcile themselves with *their femininity*. Once that has been achieved in reality men and women can without any risks acknowledge their mutual need for one another and if they were to treat each other as equals their freedom could be realized in an authentic way.¹²² Beauvoir believed, as Vintges has pointed out, in a subject that creates herself as both an ethical and a political subject in the pursuit of *her* freedom as well as her *fellow human being's* freedom. This means that we are not only obliged to take responsibility for our own freedom (“an ethics of care of the self”), we must also help other help people with their freedom.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Beauvoir. 2004 .p 37

¹¹⁹ Beauvoir. 2004. p 68

¹²⁰ Beauvoir. 2004. p 193

¹²¹ Beauvoir. 2004. p 246

¹²² Beauvoir. 2004. pp 837, 839

¹²³ Vintges. 2001. p 171,177

5 Closure

5.1 Conclusions & Discussion

I initially posed a question in this paper: Can we be free and dependent at the same time? I can conclude by now that we do not really have a choice to make when it comes to neediness and freedom. It is more a question of *how* to combine our freedom with our dependency rather than *if* we can combine them. This relates back to Beauvoir's statement: How to find independence in the midst of dependency? We *need* to combine the two of them, as Björk, Beauvoir and Nussbaum has demonstrated. Neediness and freedom co-exist and this interaction is sometimes rewarding and sometimes complex, if not to say problematic. Occasionally our deep need for other people collide with our individual freedom. Women tend to be inflicted to a greater extent by this collision.

Beauvoir, Nussbaum and Björk have demonstrated that human beings are needy. This neediness will accompany us through our whole life. If we try to escape it we will not survive, physically or mentally. Björk and Nussbaum have turned to liberal ancestors in order to object to the concept of an *innate* freedom. They state that freedom must be situated. Beauvoir agrees although she does not put focus on liberalism in itself. When writing about freedom Beauvoir is under the strong influence of existentialism. However, none of them believe in an innate freedom since human beings are *embodied subjects* affected by history, ideology and biology. Nussbaum wants us to keep the liberal approach since it will be of concrete assistance to women so that they can be empowered as political subjects, in order to become free. Björk is reluctant to keeping liberalism and she claims that the self-made woman will fail since a liberal society is incapable of acknowledging the importance of history, ideology and most importantly biology. Nussbaum believes that we can up date liberalism and make it more sensitive to women's needs. She offers us the liberal capability approach which is a care-based approach that acknowledges our biological condition (our unconditional neediness).

It can also be concluded that the relationship between neediness and freedom is more

problematic for women since they live in a society where the male is still the norm. Beauvoir, Nussbaum and Björk highlight this fact too. Since women have been seen as the means to the ends of others they have been denied their individuality as well as their freedom. Men have defined themselves as subject whereas women have been defined as the Other (an object). With other words, women have been excluded in society. Moreover they have compromised with their freedom since society has taught them to do that. Women are encouraged to uphold the myth of a “true woman”. This means that women’s femininity, which is still defined by men, will collide with women’s individuality since women can only exist within the given frames of society. If a woman decides to create her own destiny and it challenges the given norms this attempt could be an expensive enterprise. As Beauvoir and Björk have demonstrated, many women have paid with their happiness, mental health or life.

It has now been concluded that there are tensions between our deep need for other people and our individual freedom. What does this mean then? Should we, like according to Björk, simply state that we are not free? Nussbaum says that we must keep trying to combine our dependency with the aspiration of endorsing freedom since freedom is the highest value. This is also Beauvoir’s motto. They both hold freedom as the highest value, a value that is always worth fighting for. And like Beauvoir says, we must first admit that we are not free in order to become free. We must fight for our freedom meaning we must act/transcend in order to become free. We need other people to help us escape immanence. This might tempt us to use other people for our own purposes. This leads us to one of the most crucial conclusions in this paper. Both Beauvoir and Nussbaum claim that we must take responsibility for, not only our own freedom, but also *our fellow human beings’ freedom* as well. Compassion, friendship and love could thereby foster a spirit of equality, understanding and freedom. This will also prevent people from being used as the means to the ends of others. If everyone were to be seen as a *human subject* dependency and independency could exist in harmony.

We will now ultimately return to the discussion about liberalism. Beauvoir, Nussbaum and Björk are all critical of the today dominant capitalist society and its adjacent values. They want people to ask what *should* make us happy. This paper is coloured and to a great extent preoccupied with liberalism and Western feminism (although Nussbaum has paid a lot of attention to third world women in her work). The Western society and our institutions are today very much focused on the individual. Other traditions of human rights (the African, the Asian or the Middle Eastern) keep the family as the main unit. The African Charter has for an

example not only rights but also obligations, something that Western societies often neglect. Even though the liberal rights have proved to be of assistance to many women there are also deficiencies, as Björk has demonstrated. I would like to believe that they are not irreparable; Nussbaum makes a good attempt at resolving the current flaws. I also believe that we, as Western feminists, can learn from other societies that might be able to offer valuable contributions as they acknowledge the fundamental fact that we are first of all relational beings, just like my feminists have stated. This is a matter that requires an entire paper all to itself so it is suffice to conclude that we must learn to combine our deep need for other people with our individual freedom. Dependency could have positive connotations if men and women were to see and treat each other as *human embodied subjects*. This is the vision that I believe Beauvoir, Nussbaum and Björk all share.

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