

# Gender and Modernity

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## Abstract

In contemporary renderings of modernity, it is patented to the West and assumed to include gender equality; a commitment to gender equality then risks becoming overlaid with hierarchies of country and culture. One way of contesting this, associated with alternative modernities, takes issue with the presumed Western origins of modernity. Another, associated with feminism, subjects the claim the modern societies deliver gender equality to more critical scrutiny. But the first is vulnerable to the charge of describing different routes to the same ideals, and the second to the response that evidence of shortcomings only shows that modernity has not yet fully arrived. The contribution of the West to the birth of modernity is not, in my argument, the important issue. The problem, rather, is the mistaken attribution of a “logic” to modernity, as if it contains nested within it egalitarian principles that will eventually unfold. Something did indeed happen at a particular moment in history that provided new ways of imagining equality, but the conditions of its birth were associated from the start with the spread of colonial despotisms and the naturalisation of both gender and racial difference. There was no logic driving this towards more radical versions. It is in the politics of equality that new social imaginaries are forged, not in the unfolding of an inherently “modern” ideal.

## Keywords

gender equality, modernity, post-colonial theory, feminism, alternative modernities, inner logic

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Problems with modernity are by now reasonably well rehearsed: the presumption that it is a primarily European accomplishment; the implied contrast with the premodern, always to the disadvantage of the latter; the way the values supposedly associated with it are held up as a model for more backward peoples to follow.<sup>1</sup> Less fully rehearsed is the association with gender. Yet from (at least) the eighteenth century onwards, European philosophers and historians have taken the status of women as a crucial marker of a society's level of civilisation. This does not mean they turned a critical eye on their own society's past and present treatment of women. The preoccupation with stages of development and levels of civilisation was bound up with the exploration and conquest of lands where social relations often took markedly different forms, and it was in the differentiation of their own societies from these more "savage" lands that the status of women played its important role. The issue, at this point, was not whether and where women enjoyed equality with men: it would have been odd to single this out as the mark of modernity in a Europe that still patently denied women that status. The perception, rather, was that women from the "less civilised" lands lived in a state of degradation, lacked moral refinement, and (this was a frequent complaint) were disturbingly unrestrained in their sexuality. In her analysis of conceptions of modernity in the eighteenth century, Kathleen Wilson argues that all the key theorists—including Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, John Millar, William Falconer, and David Hume—agreed "that the status of women marked civilisation and progress."<sup>2</sup> She gives as one illustration William Robertson's 1777 *History of America*: "To despise and degrade the female sex is the characteristic of the savage state in every part of the globe."<sup>3</sup> The effects of this degradation were typically traced in what was perceived as a lack of femininity. In the Americas, for example, enslaved women from Africa were depicted as "masculine, muscular, aggressive and strong"—considered, at the time, exceedingly bad characteristics for a woman—"devoid of feminine tenderness and graciousness."<sup>4</sup> Similar charges were laid against Irish women, who were perceived as wielding too much power over their rather supine husbands.<sup>5</sup> Slavery and/or colonial settlement could then be represented as assisting the civilising process.

In the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels similarly employed the status of women as a marker of progress, though more as a critique of the degradation brought about by capitalism than a celebration of its modernity. In their account, "the change in a historical epoch can always be determined by the progress of women toward freedom, because in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation."<sup>6</sup> (Here, women appear as the weak, not the unsuitably

strong, a feature of nineteenth-century thinking to which I shall return.) This is the period when the European powers were radically extending the scope of their colonial empires in Asia and Africa, and the status of women came further to the fore in articulations of the “civilising mission,” as evidence of pre-colonial brutality towards women was served up to mask the greater brutality of colonialism itself. In India, it was *sati* that became the focal point of these self-justifications. Though the British initially limited themselves simply to regulating the conditions under which widow immolation could take place, they began banning the practice from 1829 onwards, and were joined in these efforts by many Indian social reformers.<sup>7</sup> Polygamy and child marriage were also taken as evidence of the pre-modern abuse of women and girls, though initiatives here tended to be more muted. The imperatives of colonial rule, requiring as they did the co-operation of local notables, usually tempered any reforming spirit.<sup>8</sup> But as ideology, at least, the notion that colonialism brought redress against the cruel and brutal treatment of women continued to circulate. Modernity, in this framing, was very much on the side of the women.

The contrast between modern and traditional, civilised and barbaric, has a long and gendered history, and this pattern continues into more recent politics, where much of the opposition to immigration, multiculturalism, Muslims, “the other,” is written on the bodies of women.<sup>9</sup> (The converse is true in many articulations of Islamism, where the corruption and impiety of Western civilisation are seen as typified by the state of gender relations.<sup>10</sup>) In contemporary renderings of what it is to be modern, the condition is widely understood as characterised by equality, belatedly including gender equality, and a supposed failure to adhere to this principle then becomes a handy weapon against people represented as other. Now celebrated as a key “Western” value (though rarely implemented to the same degree), gender equality is routinely deployed to disparage, regulate, and exclude those deemed practitioners of culturally backward patriarchal traditions. In recent European debates about immigration and multiculturalism, for example, a more overt racism is often reconfigured as differences of culture and religion, with attitudes towards sexual freedom and gender equality taken as significant markers of modernity. European countries now commonly make access to citizenship depend on adherence to what are said to be “core” values, and the list of these typically includes such matters as respect for human rights, democracy, and toleration. They almost always also include equality of the sexes. In some parts, this is further ramped up by an association of gay politics with cultural and political modernity. Judith Butler cites the example of the Netherlands, where applicants for immigration have been presented with videos including two men kissing, and asked whether they are willing to live in a democracy that values the right of gay people to free and open expression. The presumption, one

takes it, is that resistance to this image marks one as product of a benighted, backward culture, not yet ready to embrace the freedoms of the West. Modernity is here defined as sexual freedom, and resistance to that freedom as evidence of the pre-modern. As Butler puts it, “this places those of us who have conventionally understood ourselves as advocating a progressive sexual politics in a rather serious bind.”<sup>11</sup>

Political theorists have been more cautious than politicians in deployment of the modern/traditional trope (though Amy Allen’s recent engagement with Critical Theory demonstrates how powerfully notions of progress continue to underpin contemporary normative thinking).<sup>12</sup> But even when there is no explicit reference to progress, distinctions between the culturally advanced and the culturally backward often seem to lie just below the surface. Thus, when Susan Moller Okin wrote about tensions between feminism and multiculturalism, she made no explicit contrast between modern and pre-modern, and her writings overall have never suggested that “Western” societies are characterised by gender equality. But her formulation about some women perhaps being better off if the cultures they were born into were “to become extinct” generated an avalanche of criticism, and enabled critics to read into her arguments a hegemonic Western discourse that considered non-Western cultures as almost by definition patriarchal.<sup>13</sup> Manoeuvring around this terrain has posed difficult political challenges to feminists, for in a context where modernity gets attached to sexual freedom and gender equality, and arguments for sexual freedom and gender equality become overlaid with hierarchies of country and culture, mobilisation against oppressive practices risks co-option for very different ends.

For a period, this threatened paralysis: many felt that the only way to avoid that hegemonic discourse was to avoid normative judgment.<sup>14</sup> Possibly the larger worry today is that the very value of equality becomes too much tainted by association with discourses of modernity, to the point where radicals may prefer to set it aside. Critiques of modernity commonly stress the modelling of the modern on the parochial experience of one small part of the world, the projection of what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms a “first in Europe, then elsewhere” imaginary that takes Europe and America as the repositories of all that is progressive and advanced, and consigns the rest of the world “to an imaginary waiting room of history.”<sup>15</sup> One response, as he later notes, has been to “democratise” the usages of modernity, extending it backwards to include more and more of what might otherwise have been designated pre-modern, but also discovering alternative and vernacular modernities “in an attempt to rid the idea of modernity of all exclusivist and judgmental pretension.”<sup>16</sup> The risk here, as he argues, is the potential loss of precision. Merging everything into more of the same—as when feminists respond to

depictions of the patriarchal other by pointing to “equally” patriarchal practices in the West—hardly does justice to specificity. In implying that nothing we do makes any significant difference, it also seems to dash hopes of achieving change.<sup>17</sup>

The other, and perhaps more telling, feature of postcolonial theory has been its focus on the violence visited on the colonised and enslaved, and the insistence that this was no accidental accompaniment. In Fanon’s account, for example, the bullets and the bayonets are intrinsic to the very nature of colonialism, “dehumanising” the colonial subjects who can then be treated as animals. Grandiose claims about equality or the rights of man sit side by side with a stark refusal to admit the humanity of other men. He writes of “this Europe where they have never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe.”<sup>18</sup> This provides a still more devastating critique of the pretensions of modernity. It is not just that modernity is patented to the West; or that so-called modern societies extracted the resources that enabled their own development from the countries they colonised; or that binaries of modern and traditional misdescribe our complex and globalised world; but that the good things popularly associated with modernity—including sexual freedom, gender equality, and human rights—may have been saturated from their very beginnings with violence and *inequality*.

Equality has always attracted critics, but mainly from the right. There is also a long history of contrasting “merely formal” with “real” equality (mostly associated with the Marxist tradition), that can be construed, in some of its versions, as dismissing the value of equality or stressing the emptiness of equal rights. The additional challenge today comes from postcolonial theory, with its scepticism as regards the exclusions and dehumanisations built into declarations of equality; and some recent feminist theory, which calls for a politics centred on action and freedom rather than the potentially stultifying categories of identity and equality.<sup>19</sup> I take these bodies of criticism very seriously, but worry that we then lose what I regard as the crucial radical concern with equality. To put it somewhat bluntly (and with echoes of G A Cohen), I think we need to “rescue” equality from its association with discourses of modernity, and more specifically, “rescue” gender equality from the cultural and temporal hierarchies enacted in its name.

Two clarifications are in order here. First, I do not see historical periodisation per se as a problem, nor the singling out of gender relations as a key feature distinguishing one period (or place) from another. Historical periodisations are often illuminating, enabling us to identify with greater precision when something new has arrived on the scene; and while there is commonly a trade-off between ambition and accuracy (the more ambitious the claim, the

more likely it is to ignore discordant evidence), this can be a price worth paying for those moments of illumination. We would do well to abandon all talk of modernity, because of the difficulties of detaching the notion from moralised claims about progress, but this does not mean we have to give up on identifying key moments of historical change. Second, when I refer to gender equality, I do not mean to suggest a state of equality between two groups already defined by their gender. Such an approach too readily accepts the image of pre-constituted groups, and thereby misses a central part of what one is challenging in calling for gender equality: the seemingly endless attempts to corral us into two groups, to position us as either male or female, masculine or feminine, and define us through practices of gender. It also misleadingly suggests what Eleanor Rathbone derided as the “me-too” feminism that simply claims for women the rights and opportunities currently enjoyed by men.<sup>20</sup> Gender equality is not a matter of equality between “gender A” and “gender B,” any more than racial equality is a matter of equality between “race A” and “race B.” It is better understood as a refusal of the *inequalities* that become attached to gendered difference. The paradox, as Denise Riley and Joan Scott have elaborated, is that whenever one campaigns for an end to exclusions and regulations by gender, one seems to call back into existence the very gender difference one is rejecting.<sup>21</sup> We might add to this that whenever one challenges the universalisms that deploy the human, man, citizen, or individual as if these unproblematically include us all, one seems to put in their place a series of sub-categories (men, women, gay, straight, black, white, etc.) that only replace one large group by several smaller ones. These problems continue to haunt both the politics and language of gender equality, and though one can partially circumvent them by talking of *gendered* difference (rather than the more definitive *gender* difference), they remain a perennial source of difficulty.

In what follows, I start with a more careful scrutiny of the ways in which gender has featured in the evolution of ideas of modernity, a scrutiny that confirms scepticism about misleading binaries, and reveals how far short modernity has fallen of its now idealised images of gender equality. In the process, I confront one classic defence, to the effect that evidence of inequality and exclusion only shows that modernity has not yet fully arrived; and I engage with the misguided attribution of a logic to modernity that often underpins such arguments. Accounts of alternative modernities are less vulnerable to this, for in exploring the different narratives that develop in different regions and contexts, they are by definition working with plural modernities. This significantly tempers the arrogance of Euro-American modernity, but the contribution of the West to the birth of what is loosely termed modernity is not, to my mind, the important issue. If ideas like equality have a history—and how

could they not?—it seems entirely plausible that they will be articulated in specific historical periods and, indeed, specific regions of the world. But a story of origins is not—or should not be—a normative claim, and original formulations may not tell us much about later manifestations.

We should resist the temptation to think of ideas as arriving on the scene with an inner logic that will eventually unfold; that inner logic story is far too reminiscent of early modernisation theory with its inevitabilist stages of development. More to the point, it smooths over what is otherwise inexplicable, the coincidence of new articulations of equality with intensifications of *inequality*. In my argument, something did indeed happen at a particular moment in history that has provided us with new ways of imagining equality; but the conditions of its birth, which included the increasing commodification of people as well as goods, were associated from the start with the spread of colonial despotisms and the naturalisation of both gender and racial difference. A conception of equality that took for granted—as the majority of early versions did—that the constituency of equals excluded *all* women, *all* slaves, *all* the inhabitants of the already and soon to be colonised territories, and *all* the poor—could more plausibly be described as driven by its inner logic towards hierarchy and subjection. My contention, however, is that there is no logic in either direction. What happens with notions like equality depends very much on what people subsequently do with them, whether and how they resonate with political movements and concerns, and what kind of claims come to be made in their name. It is in the politics of equality that its values are refined and reformulated, not in an unfolding of some inherently “modern” ideal. If we continue, as I do, to attach significance to the claim that all people are to be regarded as equals, it is not because of what equality originally meant, or what lies nested in the concept, but because of what it was *enabled to become* through subsequent revisions, claims, and transformations. It is in the still evolving politics around equality that early articulations have gained or lost traction.<sup>22</sup>

## **“Modern” Gender Relations: Respect not Equality**

I have said that European commentaries on modernity and progress tended, from an early period, to represent the modern as characterised by greater male respect for women and the possibility of women’s own greater respect for themselves. This might suggest the first formulations of a principle of equality, of the notion that all individuals, regardless of who or what they are, are to be deemed of equal status. The catch is that these dealt almost exclusively with relations in the private sphere, carrying minimal—and sometimes negative—implications for women’s standing in the wider society. They also

maintained, and in many ways intensified, notions of gender difference. In the elaboration of ideals of modernity, the public realm came to be seen as distinct from the private, and though the equality of men was increasingly proclaimed from the seventeenth century onwards, this was an equality *of men* within the public sphere. In the reformulation of an older patriarchal order – what Carole Pateman theorised as the new “fraternal contract”<sup>23</sup> – women were incorporated into civil society through their (subordinate) relations with men, not through their standing in society as a whole, and some of the avenues previously available to them (widows inheriting and then managing their own business, for example) were gradually closed down. By the late eighteenth century, and particularly among the middle classes who tended to see themselves as the beacons of modernity, it was becoming part of the ideals of the new way of life that women need not engage with the hustle and bustle of commerce, and certainly not with the unpleasantness of politics. In the evolving doctrine of “separate spheres,” formulated with increasing confidence through the subsequent decades, each sex had its own clearly delimited roles, and transgression across the boundaries became less and less acceptable.<sup>24</sup> The modern way of life was then more “respectful” of women, but it was not premised on equality.

It is notable, in this respect, that while nineteenth- and twentieth-century binaries between the traditional and the modern often stress the centrality of the patriarchal family in the kinship structures of the former, contrasting this with the free association of individuals in the latter, these depictions rarely addressed actual gender relations within the family. (John Stuart Mill was one worthy exception.) When Henry Maine, for example, formulated his contrast between “ancient” societies organised around status and modern ones organised around contract, the patriarchal family loomed large in his conception of the former: a family organised around the figure of the patriarch, who exercises supreme authority over mothers, siblings, wives, children, clients, and slaves. The contrast, however, between this world of absolutist authority and the subsequent modern is theorised virtually without reference to gender relations.<sup>25</sup> Contrasts between status- and contract-based societies, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and between societies characterised by ascription and those characterised by achievement, continued to multiply in the literature. But while all these seem to scream out for an elaboration of changing gender relations, the idea that modern society is characterised by free and equal relations between the sexes played little role in the standard contrasts.

What we see, to the contrary, is a redefinition of political engagement as inappropriate for women, to the point where Ann Towns can claim that “by the end of the nineteenth century, the following norm was evidently in place:



*civilized states exclude women from politics.*"<sup>26</sup> Successive legislation in a range of countries closed off avenues for women's political involvement. In 1778, the British House of Commons introduced a prohibition on women attending or listening to parliamentary debates; in 1832, it expressly closed off any future slippage into votes for women by introducing the language of "male person" (no longer just person) into suffrage legislation. In France in 1793, political organisations for women were dissolved; in 1848, decrees prevented women creating or belonging to political clubs or associations.<sup>27</sup> In previous periods, female engagement in politics, including the not infrequent cases of women ruling as queens or queen mothers, had often generated anxiety, but not been subject to explicit prohibition. It was in the so-called age of modernity that this came to be seen as at odds with advanced or civilised ideals.

Nor is this just a temporary blip, reflecting some dire nineteenth-century sexism. If we fast forward to the era of modernist literature—normally seen as breaking with the claustrophobic conventions of the nineteenth century—we find the status of "being modern" taken as best exemplified by the male. In her study of this literature, Rita Felski highlights the tropes of masculinity that inform its ideals of "restless, endless self-expression,"<sup>28</sup> where to be modern involves freeing oneself from the deadening domesticity that was so conveniently associated with the female. In these depictions, the man strives for modernity; the woman more typically resists. Yet again, we see both the importance of gender in constructions of modernity, and the marked lack of fit between gender *equality* and modernist ideals.

## **"Not Yet Modern": Modernity's Inner Logic**

For those claiming a strong association between modern society and gender equality, the rigidity of separate spheres in the nineteenth century, and the association of the feminine with either sex or domesticity in the twentieth, poses a problem. One solution is the "not yet modern," and this goes back as far as John Stuart Mill. In his analysis of *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill was very clear about the ways in which the presumption of natural difference and the policing of separate spheres militated against equal opportunities for women. But he represented this primarily as a hangover from earlier times, at odds with what he took to be the principle of modern society, which was that people's position and prospects should be determined by competition, not birth. If that principle is true, he argued, "we ought to act as if we believed it, and not to ordain that to be born a girl instead of a boy, any more than to be born black instead of white, or a commoner instead of a nobleman, shall decide a person's position through all life—shall interdict people from

all the more elevated social positions, and from all, except a few, respectable occupations.”<sup>29</sup> In his reading, the continuing subordination of women stood out “as an isolated fact in modern social institutions; a solitary breach of what has become their fundamental law; a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else”<sup>30</sup>; and he attributed this failure to recognise the implications of the new principle to the operations of male self-interest. His account, in other words, ascribes to modernity a principle—formulated here as competition not birth—that should eventually render distinctions of sex and race irrelevant. That it had not yet done so is to be regarded as a case of the “not yet modern.”

It may be that Mill’s argument was partly strategic—seeking to shame his fellow men by exposing the contradictions between their espoused principles and their practices as regards women—but the form of the argument continues in contexts where this is less likely. Much later, for example, Martha Nussbaum offers a similar line of argument when she responds to feminist critics of liberalism. She acknowledges many legitimate critiques of the liberal tradition, and agrees that “taking on board the insights of feminism will not leave liberalism unchanged, and liberalism needs to change to respond adequately to those insights. *But it will be changed in ways that make it more deeply consistent with its own most foundational ideas*” [my italics].<sup>31</sup> In particular, she argues, the fact that many liberals failed to perceive the family as a space of inequality and violence should be seen as “*a failure of liberal thinkers to follow their own thought through to its socially radical conclusion*” [my italics]. What is wrong with the views of the family endorsed by Becker, Rawls, and others is not that they are too individualist but that they are not individualist enough.”<sup>32</sup> In this account, the prominence given to the individual in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European thought eventually delivers what was always implicit: the equal significance of both women and men.

In her account of *Inventing Human Rights*, Lynn Hunt is even more explicit in endorsing the idea of an inner logic that drives us forward towards the completion of modern ideals. Her analysis of the explosion of rights and equality thinking in mid- to late eighteenth-century Europe—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” (*American Declaration of Independence*, 1776); “Men are born free and remain equal in rights” (*French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 1789)—is by no means complacent. Like Mill and Nussbaum, she recognises the multiple exclusions from those seemingly inclusive proclamations, but stresses what she describes as “the logic of rights” (at one point, even “the bulldozer force of the revolutionary logic of rights”<sup>33</sup>) as one excluded group after another takes up the message and applies it to themselves. “The notion of the ‘rights

of man,' like revolution itself, opened up an unpredictable space for discussion, conflict and change. The promise of those rights can be denied, suppressed, or just remain unfulfilled, but it does not die."<sup>34</sup>

A delayed promise is one thing, and Mill offers the continuing power of male self-interest as his perhaps not entirely convincing explanation for this. But what of the often startling reversals in the unfolding of the supposed logic? How does the "not yet modern" argument deal with these? I have already noted the intensification of gendered difference alongside the proclamation of equal rights, but consider, too, the trajectory from the stadial accounts of human and social development that were a dominant trope in eighteenth-century European thought to the explicitly racist accounts of human difference that were more characteristic of the nineteenth century. The first is clearly hierarchical—hunting and gathering were regarded as lower achievements than settled agriculture, settled agriculture as lower than commerce—and in the context of colonialism, this lent itself to the self-vindications of the "civilising mission." It did, however, presume that we were all members of the same human race who could eventually arrive at the same highpoint. Yet as Kay Anderson has traced in relation to British views of the indigenous population in Australia, that more "humanist" understanding of the unity and progression of humankind gave way to racist accounts of difference in the face of Aboriginal resistance to the settled agriculture that was supposed to be their next stage. Karuna Mantena makes a parallel argument about shifts in British imperial thinking, citing the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and Governor Eyre's brutal suppression of the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 as key moments that promoted the change.<sup>35</sup> What was initially justified as a matter of bringing "backward" natives to a higher stage of civilisation quickly became a matter of enforcing order over peoples viewed as fundamentally different and permanently inferior.

Mill's power of male self-interest hardly works here: it offers at best an explanation for delay rather than for reversal. Hunt addresses the problem more directly, offering both a logic and counter-logic as her explanation. She argues that new ideas about human rights called forth what she describes as their "evil twins":<sup>36</sup> ever more virulent forms of sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism that sought to refute claims about natural equality by insisting on biological difference. In her account, there is a battle between progress and regress, between the unfolding logic of equal rights and the counter-movements that seek to resist it. This is not an incoherent position, but a more plausible and simpler reading is to say that there is no logic at all.

Versions of the logic argument often appear radical, because they recognise the role of political struggle, and in many instances, stress the role of struggles beyond the Euro-American "core." While continuing, therefore,

to accept the primacy of European and American thinkers in generating new principles of equality and rights, they may insist on the crucial role played by the ignored, enslaved, disenfranchised, and colonised as the agents who transformed the “truncated universals” of Euro-American modernity into genuinely egalitarian ideals. In these accounts (tellingly discussed in a recent article by Adom Getachew<sup>37</sup>), the “inner logic” of modern ideals would never have been realised had it not been for the struggles of those whom modernity so signally failed to take into account. Those startling proclamations from the late eighteenth century were not framed as applying to all men, and certainly not as applying to women. Where they said men, they meant men; they meant white men, not black; and the moment of declaration was almost contemporaneous with the period when the great powers started to divide up the world amongst themselves as colonial possessions, making vast numbers of people their subjects, not their equals. Left to themselves, it is argued, these grand assertions of rights and equality would have remained in the realm of ideology, disguising continuing domination with their cloak of fine words.

In this reworking of the trajectory of the modern, it was only through the struggles of the dominated, including those dominated in the colonised periphery, that their true potential was released. “In these accounts,” as Getachew puts it, “subaltern actors are immanent critics who take up existing ideals, point out the hypocrisies that undermine them, and thereby fulfil their universal intent. Their actions are thus viewed as central to the emergence of the universal ideals we celebrate.”<sup>38</sup> The complacent assumption that the West provided us with equality, including the ideal of gender equality, is thereby significantly tempered. But the account still operates within an inner logic framework, as if the fuller egalitarian ideals were already nested within those fledgeling declarations. The work of subaltern actors—women, slaves, colonised peoples, those discriminated against by virtue of the colour of their skin—may emerge as crucial to their realisation, but does not in any more significant way transform the nature of the values and ideals. As Getachew argues, the discourses remain derivative; the subaltern actors are “denied the possibility of reimagining those ideals or inaugurating alternatives.”<sup>39</sup> Modernity remains located in the West, and equality is still figured as an idea with an inner logic that will eventually work its way through. The approach then replicates some of the arguments about the “not yet modern.” The emancipatory implications of modernity may be delayed by the drag of tradition, or may have to be activated by the ignored and oppressed. But in both accounts, the more radical future is already contained within the early formulation.

## Alternative Modernities: But Still the Same Ideals?

Literature on alternative modernities is less vulnerable to notions of an inner logic, because it identifies narratives of modernity in the plural, arguing that while these may share common ground with Euro-American versions, they also embrace distinctive values of their own. This was very much Chakrabarty's project, in his exploration of Hindu reformers and writers in late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Bengal, reformers who drew in many ways on European narratives of modernity (how could they not, he asks, when colonialism guaranteed precedence to "a certain Europe of the mind"<sup>40</sup>), but developed within "the colonial crucible" a distinctively Bengali modernity. One of his key points of contrast is the abstract and autonomous individual, criticised by many feminists but defended by Nussbaum for its "socially radical" implications. Chakrabarty argues that the modernist project of Bengali nationalism managed without this character, offering "a colonial modernity that was intimately tied to European modernity but that did not reproduce the autonomous 'individual' of European political thought as a figure of its own desire."<sup>41</sup> In the Lockean story of the birth of modernity, an absolutist, paternally derived, power had to be dislodged to make way for the fraternal contract of equal (male) individuals. In the early Bengali story, there was no such compelling necessity, partly because the authority of the patriarch derived more from filial devotion than the overt exercise of power. Familial bonds could then continue to play a part in the theorisation of nation and national unity, and national unity could be represented—as, of course, it also was in the language of the French Revolution—as an extension of "natural brotherhood." It was through the cultivation and widening of an otherwise "traditional" sentiment—the feeling of attachment to one's brother—that a national sentiment could emerge.

In this account, the notion of modernity is stripped of any single defining essence: indeed it is central to his argument that there are "multiple ways of being human, which make it impossible for us to reduce this moment to any summary accounts of transition from a premodern stage to modernity."<sup>42</sup> And yet even here, one could imagine the defender of modernity's inner logic inserting a response. As Chakrabarty notes, the invocation of a national unity framed in terms of brotherhood was ineffective in addressing what was to become the central issue of Indian nationalism, which was how to achieve unity across the Hindu–Muslim divide. Not surprisingly, "Muslims did not buy this largely Hindu, upper-caste rhetoric of natural brotherhood. Nor did the lower castes, as the twentieth century progressed."<sup>43</sup> At this point, the defender of Euro-American pre-eminence and the logic of modernity might well respond that the Lockean version, however constrained in its initial

formulations by exclusions of gender, class, and race, at least contained the *potential* to think beyond difference to a genuinely abstract individual: to think, that is, of a unity in which it really did not matter whether one was male or female, Hindu or Muslim, upper or lower caste. If there is any mileage in this, it threatens to return us to the kind of “transition narrative” Chakrabarty set out to contest: to an acknowledgement, perhaps, that there have been different routes to and versions of modernity, but still a suggestion that all ultimately converge on what is currently understood as the Western one.

## The Politics of Equality

My own preferred starting point is to separate out the question of origins, which carries enormous ideological baggage but is ultimately a matter of historical investigation, from the attribution of an inner logic to ideas, which I take to be wrong. We should not get hung up on debating the centrality of the West in the birth of “modern” ideas of equality: ideas I take as including new understandings of the relationship between individual and community, a greater emphasis on what individuals achieve over the positions to which they are ascribed, and some tentative articulations of human equality. While it is entirely plausible, indeed by now well established, that ideas of this modern emerged in different modalities in different parts of the world, it would be odd if the *same* ideas sprung up simultaneously everywhere. If ideas have a history, it follows that they will be articulated in particular periods and most likely also in particular regions; but recognising or tracing this tells us little about any normative hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> There is nothing in being the first to come up with a particular idea that assigns moral superiority. More precisely, being first could only convey normative superiority within the framework of an inevitabilist picture of stages of development in which ideas are born, unfold themselves, and eventually achieve fulfilment. It is only within such a framework that one could plausibly claim that those who come up with the beginnings of a good idea will also be those who lead its completion. This is not, however, how ideas like equality develop, and it is especially implausible when we consider a conceptualisation of equality that emerged precisely at the moment of imperial expansion. I have argued, in other contexts, that equality should be viewed as political not cognitive: that it should be seen, not as grounded in or justified by “facts” about human beings (as when we say that all humans have quality x, *therefore* should be treated as equals), but as something to which we commit ourselves and something that we claim.<sup>45</sup> In similar vein, I stress here equality as politics, as something given meaning and substance through political movements and struggles, where the “we” who claim equality is usually one of the contested issues, along with the

precise nature and content of the equality. In saying this, I also commit myself to the contingency of current versions. In the articulation of novel ideas of equality, progress and regress do indeed march hand in hand, but not because of a logic battling it out with a counter-logic. Where progress occurs, it typically involves innovation and transformation. There is no good reason to assume that the process of innovation has now come to an end.

I take the view, derived broadly from Marx (and shared by Chakrabarty), that contemporary ideas of equality became thinkable in the context of increasingly marketised societies that could no longer sustain older notions of natural order and hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> As the value of people and goods becomes increasingly a matter of the price they can obtain on the market, this disrupts alternative systems of valuation; people become more interchangeable, and it becomes possible—in many ways necessary—to conceive of them as composed of the same sort of stuff. In Marx's account, society cannot measure the worth of commodities by the amount of labour put into them without in some way endorsing the notion that one person's labour is commensurate with that of another; in doing so, it has to break with long-standing assumptions about some people being qualitatively superior to others. Writing in the 1860s, and referring back to the classical political economists of the eighteenth century, he felt able to say that it was only when "the notion of human equality had already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice" that it became possible for them to come up with the notion of abstract labour.<sup>47</sup> He was wrong about that: it had not become fixed public prejudice as regards women and men; it hadn't become fixed public prejudice as regards equality across the class divide; and it certainly hadn't become fixed public prejudice as regards the rapidly growing number of colonial subjects. Indeed, one might read colonialism precisely as the refusal of this market valuation, as ensuring, through violence and forced labour, that the labour of colonial subjects did *not* become commensurate with that of their rulers. Defenders of modernity might then invoke yet another version of the "not yet modern," representing colonialism as a further breach of the "fundamental law" of modern social institutions—but this would be even less convincing than it is as regards gender equality. Colonialism played a central role in the expansion and consolidation of capitalism, and cannot be described as a "relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else."

With all this, there remains an important truth in Marx's claim. Something *was* happening here, as it was when Jeremy Bentham (not the world's most natural of democrats) formulated the principle that each should count for one and none for more than one. However much people varied in their qualities and achievements, however restricted the constituency of equals, something remarkable *was* happening in the formulations of equality and

rights that cannot be dismissed simply as an ideological cloak for increased exploitation. A notion that seemed totally bizarre at one point in time—the idea that all humans were born equal—was coming to be regarded as relatively commonplace in another.

“Being born equal” did not commit people to a strongly normative principle of equality, and as I hope I have demonstrated, certainly not to a principle of gender equality. One might think here of Thomas Hobbes’s take on equality, based on his observation that the weakest man, with cunning, can defeat the strongest. Hobbes rejected the comforting belief in a naturally ordained hierarchy, and even questioned (up to a point) the notion that, in a state of nature, men would “naturally” hold sway over women; but he took all this only as compelling reason why men should submit themselves to potentially unlimited sovereign power. Ideas of (initially only white male, and later) human equality emerged under specific historical conditions, conditions that were very much linked to the development of capitalism and increased commodification of all spheres of life. There was no guarantee that anything like the so-called “modern” principle of equality would emerge out of this, and *a fortiori* no guarantee that it would generate anything like a commitment to gender equality. The conditions that enabled the notion of all humans as made of the same kind of stuff *simultaneously* generated a separation of spheres that intensified notions of natural sexual difference; provoked an imperial expansion that subjected millions of humans to colonial control; and generated a racialisation of difference that many commentators see as the moment when notions of “race” and racial difference were born. Even in Mill’s formulation of the principle of “competition not birth,” which makes being born male or female irrelevant to one’s future station in life, the equality is taken as compatible with a continuing sexual division of labour so long as this can be said to reflect differential preferences, choice rather than coercion. In our own time, the lip-service paid to “being born equal” has proved compatible with a discourse of meritocracy that may pride itself on refusing natural hierarchies of gender or race, but has no qualms about a “natural” hierarchy of talent and intelligence. It deploys this to justify almost inconceivable inequalities in income and wealth.

My point here is that while it seems entirely plausible to say that something extraordinary *did* arrive on the scene, significantly challenging previous notions of natural hierarchy, and opening up the possibility of conceiving of ourselves as of equal significance and worth, there was no “natural” transition from this to any strong ideal of gender equality, or indeed to any strong ideal of equality at all. Political struggles around equality have been complex and often contradictory, and the contradictions come out nicely in the figure of the abstract individual that Chakrabarty picks out as a central feature of



Euromodernity. As feminists have often argued, this abstraction has been a stumbling block in many movements for gender equality.<sup>48</sup> It offers us a disembodied, degendered, deracialised figure, who is never as disembodied, degendered, or deracialised as he claims, yet manages by virtue of the abstraction to make contestation of existing inequalities considerably harder. And yet it remains the case that aspects of the abstraction *have* opened up possibilities for thinking the world anew, providing us with a language in which to think of a future where we no longer categorise and regulate ourselves according to assumptions of gender, sexuality, or race. Competing ways of conceptualising equality—one insisting on the continuing political salience of difference, another claiming an equality “beyond” difference—have both proved inspirational for feminism, one sometimes resonating more clearly than the other, but mostly working together in Scott’s “constitutive paradox” of feminism. It is not helpful to think of one as the correct reading of equality and the other a mistake. Both form part of the story.

Conceptions of equality could, and did, move off in dramatically different directions, partly because of the indeterminacy in what equality means, but also because novel ways of thinking were bound together with an anti-egalitarianism that derived, *not just from what went before*, but from what was coming into existence. There was never any guarantee that the equality claims that subsequently proved most helpful to those struggling against subordination would eventually win out. Nor, indeed, was there any guarantee that newer ideas would, in every context, prove more useful than older ones: think of the way people challenged the impoverishment associated with the marketisation of their lives by reference to earlier doctrines of a “just price.”<sup>49</sup> In all these moments, there is considerable historical contingency. Regarding subsequent developments as simply the unfolding of an implicit logic seriously misrepresents the complexities of historical change.

There is a second way in which the unfolding of an implicit logic mischaracterises these events, and here I am indebted to Getachew’s analysis of the Haitian Revolution, and her challenge to the “realisation narratives” that represent the slave rebellion under Toussaint L’Ouverture as releasing the “truncated universals” declared in the French revolution. Though there is an initial plausibility to viewing the Haitian revolutionaries as inspired by the 1789 Declaration to insist that they, too, were men, and they, too, had rights, this misses, in her account, the distinctiveness of events in Saint Domingue. The slaves were, indeed, inspired by events in France: this is not the issue. But their first demands were less about equal rights, and more focused on the specific injustices of the plantation economy, calling, for example, for the freedom to work their own gardens, and a prohibition on the use of the whip.<sup>50</sup> Rather than seeing these as limited or backward-looking demands, Getachew

argues that they contained within them the seeds of a different conception of autonomy that inaugurated further emancipatory ideals. As more and more slaves abandoned the plantations to work on uncultivated lands on the basis of small scale ownership, "they enacted a vision of freedom predicated on the ownership of land and cultivation for subsistence while rejecting a plantation economy in which their labor was directed toward the production of cash crops."<sup>51</sup> The specificity of this is not adequately captured in an account that represents the revolution as a call for more people to be included within the newly declared rights of man. It should be seen, rather, as generating transformative ideals of individual and collective autonomy, visions of a freedom from domination that had a material not just legal basis, and of an autonomy that challenged both the institution of slavery and monopolies on ownership of the land.

Getachew's argument resonates with themes that have figured in the long-running engagement between feminism and liberalism, where there has been a similar acceptance that liberalism did indeed inspire much of the feminism of the last two centuries; but a resistance to the notion that feminism simply pushes early liberal formulations of equality and autonomy to their logical conclusion; and a frequent insistence on feminism as inaugurating, in the shadow of "modern" liberalism, genuinely innovative ideals. One illustration here is the separation between public and private that has played such a large part in elaborations both of modernity (seen as involving greater differentiation of economic, political, and social spheres) and of liberalism (seen as securing rights and freedoms through the more rigorous separation of public and private spheres). There are aspects to feminist politics that could indeed be represented as realising the inner logic of that separation: the right to determine one's own sexuality, for example, without interference by church or state; or the right to decide for oneself whether to have children, and if so, with whom. But it is impossible to conceptualise a thorough-going feminist politics that does not, in some important respect, challenge the public-private divide, a divide that takes us back to the earlier point about the increasing gender differentiation and rigidity of separate spheres that characterised the arrival of modernity in Europe. Feminism has had to innovate as well as extend, and has done this in many different parts of the world, not just Europe or North America. The provenance of the ideas that help spark feminist mobilisations does not tell us much about which part of the world is "better" on the woman question.

The third point is that we cannot presume that innovations have now reached their historical end point. Indebted as contemporary movements are to "modern" ideas of equality and rights, the meaning attached to these has already changed considerably, and will almost certainly continue to do so. In the

understanding of rights, people still have to tussle with the relationship between individual and community: should we conceptualise this as individuals battling to free themselves from community constraints? Or as a recognition of our mutual interdependence in the pursuit of our rights?<sup>52</sup> In the understanding of gender equality, we still tussle with the relationship between equality and difference: do we take *any* gendered division of responsibility and labour as anathema to gender equality? Can we think of a gendered future in which we are equal but different? Or—to push this to a point I personally find difficult to follow—can we think of versions of equality in which men and women are separate but equal? The exploration of such issues is not helped by a language of modernity, which tries to settle in advance the parameters of debate.

“Modern” ideals of equality do not come from nowhere, and while the assumption that they *could only* have appeared “first in Europe, then elsewhere” owes more to arrogance than to serious investigation, there is nothing especially problematic about associating them with particular sociohistorical conditions of emergence. Something *did* happen at particular moments in history that provided us with ways of imagining equality that were not available in earlier times; and if this was linked, as seems plausible, to the intensification of market relations, the role of European philosophers in articulating some of its features and ideals is hardly a surprise. To the extent, however, that it *was* linked to this, it carried with it much that needed to be contested before any more radical or inclusive egalitarianism could emerge. The important point is that the very provenance of the ideals warns against the attribution of a single logic. “Greater respect for the female sex” turned out to be not only compatible with but in many ways actively drove women’s exclusion from power. The “rights of man and citizen” proved not only compatible with continued exclusions and unprecedented increases in material inequality, but in many ways actively secured that inequality by separating juridical from economic rights. The tendency to think of later and more radical versions as extensions of the original fledgling ideals, or as realisations of their inner logic, is better resisted. As Frederick Cooper observes, “there has been no unidirectional trend toward political inclusiveness, toward enhancing people’s choice of modes of livelihood, or toward representing their collective or individualistic aspirations in the body politic, but political opportunities, struggles, and constraints are at times reconfigured.”<sup>53</sup> The reconfiguring is what matters, and this will indeed draw inspiration from ideas and discourses that are newly arrived on the scene. But which and in what ways these come to resonate in struggles against slavery, colonialism, racism, or women’s subordination is not given by their intrinsic nature. New social imaginaries come into play that cannot plausibly be read as the realisation of modernity’s inner logic.

I began my argument with an eighteenth-century version of modernity that linked it to enhanced respect for women, and the failure in this to engage with more substantial understandings of gender equality. Nearly three hundred years on, the inequality and disrespect (too small a word in this context) exhibited not just in distributions of work and resources but in the daily incidence of violence against women and persistence of sexual harassment, including in what are deemed the most “modern” sectors of the economy, points to continuing failure. Detaching equality from modernity is a useful first step here, challenging both the complacency that regards “modern” societies as already characterised by gender equality, and the progressivist story that depicts the West as leading the world to higher stages of development. Some may conclude from my account that we would do well also to detach ourselves from equality, for a version born out of increasing commodification, invoked to justify gross *inequalities*, and steeped from its inception in exclusions, is not one to inspire future change; but this is not my view. In an era when the most basic face of equality—that fundamental acknowledgment of others as of equal worth to oneself—is so blatantly denied in the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, in the racialised valuation of life exposed in police shootings, in the contempt for the poor, and the violence against women, this would be a serious loss.

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## Notes

1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chap. 5. See also the symposium in *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011), with essays by Chakrabarty, Cooper, Gurinder K. Bhambra, and Lynn M. Thomas.
2. Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Gender, and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century," in *Gender and Empire*, ed., Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.
3. "Empire, Gender, and Modernity," 28.
4. *Ibid.*, 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 24.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1956), 258–59.
7. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
8. As Mahmood Mamdani puts it in relation to the South African example, "The Boer and British authorities in South Africa who righteously denounced polygamy as female slavery and bride price as 'purchase in women' had no qualms about legislating a customary code that treated women as perpetual minors subject to a patriarchal chief-dominated authority." Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 117.
9. See, e.g., the essays in Anne Phillips and Sawitri Saharso, eds., "The Rights of Women and the Crisis of Multiculturalism," special issue of *Ethnicities* 8, no. 3 (2008).
10. It also became commonplace for male politicians in parts of post-independence Asia and Africa to denounce as "modern" the uppity women who claimed equality. Lynn Thomas, for example, observes that "during the 1960s and 1970s, male politicians in East Africa routinely denounced 'modern' women who wore mini-skirts and wigs, used cosmetics, and demanded legal equality as corruptors of 'African culture.'" Lynn M. Thomas, "Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 727–40, at 735.
11. Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," *Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2008): 1–23, at 3.
12. Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
13. Susan Moller Okin, "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions," *Ethics* 108 (1998). An abbreviated version, along with several critical responses, was later published in J. Cohen, M. Howard, and M. C. Nussbaum, eds., *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

- 1999). See also Leti Volpp, "Feminism versus Multiculturalism," *Columbia Law Review* 101 (2001): 1181–218.
14. Concerns about this were part of what prompted my *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). They also partly inspire Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
  15. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7.
  16. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 663–75, at 665.
  17. In an otherwise compelling critique of Okin's famous essay on feminism and multiculturalism, Leti Volpp argues that "cultures, including our own, are patriarchal—not more or less so, but differently patriarchal." "Feminism versus Multiculturalism," 1217. This seems to me a message of despair: if no one culture is ever *less patriarchal* than any other, we might as well pack up on feminist mobilisation and go home.
  18. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1967), 251.
  19. Zerilli does not call on us to abandon equality, but encourages us to question accounts of women's claims to equal rights "which foreground claims to equality over practices of freedom" (*Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 122). Equality, in her account, tethers us too much to static conceptions of women as a social group.
  20. In 1920s Britain, Eleanor Rathbone was president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship—the body that succeeded the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies—and argued from this position for a "new feminism," focused less on equal rights with men, and more on issues specific to women, like birth control, ante- and post-natal care, and family allowances. The critique of a version of equality that simply simulated an existing masculine experience was well taken, but as often happens in the history of feminism, it threatened an equally problematic acceptance of gender difference.
  21. Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" *Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
  22. As Edward Said argues in his essay on "Travelling Theory," when a theory borne out of one set of historical circumstances is used again and again in different ones, its meaning and possibilities can change. Edward W. Said, "Travelling Theory," in Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). See also the work on *Travelling Concepts in Feminist Pedagogy*, <http://www.travellingconcepts.net/>.
  23. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).
  24. The complexities and sometimes contradictions are explored in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, which analyses the transformation in gender relations in England from the end of the eighteenth into the middle of the nineteenth century, drawing on material from rural Suffolk and Essex and urban

- Birmingham (London: Hutchison Educational, 1987; revised edition London: Routledge, 2002).
25. Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
  26. Ann E. Towns, *Women and States: Norms and Hierarchies in International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 79.
  27. Ibid., 78.
  28. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.
  29. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869, in Mill, *Three Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 448.
  30. Ibid., 449.
  31. Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Feminist Critique of Liberalism," in Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56–57.
  32. Ibid., 65.
  33. Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007), 160.
  34. Ibid., 175. Hunt's account is described by Samuel Moyn as a "creation myth." Moyn, "On the Genealogy of Morals," *The Nation*, April 16, 2007.
  35. Kay Anderson, *Race and the Crisis of Humanism* (London: Routledge, 2007); Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*.
  36. *Inventing Human Rights*, 212.
  37. Adom Getachew, "Universalism after the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution," *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016): 821–45.
  38. "Universalism after the Post-colonial Turn," 822.
  39. Ibid.
  40. Provincializing Europe, 148. The discussion of Chakrabarty draws on Phillips, "Global Justice: Just Another Modernisation Theory?" in Duncan Bell, ed. *Empire, Race and Global Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
  41. Ibid., 218.
  42. Ibid., 148.
  43. Ibid., 234.
  44. This is indeed taken for granted in much of the literature on alternative modernities, as in Chakrabarty's insistence on the way Bengali reformers drew on Western notions of modernity, or the comment by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar that "to think in terms of 'alternative modernities' is to admit that modernity is inescapable and to desist from speculations about the end of modernity. Born in and of the West some centuries ago under relatively specific sociohistorical conditions, modernity is now everywhere." Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 1.
  45. Anne Phillips, *The Politics of the Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
  46. Elizabeth Anderson makes a related point in "Ethical Assumptions in Economic Theory: Some Lessons from the History of Credit and Bankruptcy," *Ethical*

- Theory and Moral Practice* 7, no. 4 (2004): 347–60, at 352, when she argues that “capitalism, by enabling ordinary people to make a living without depending on noblesse oblige, thereby transformed the moral economy of social standing to a more egalitarian and potentially universalizable footing.”
47. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol I*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 60.
  48. The large literature on this includes Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).
  49. Edward P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, 50, no.1 (1971): 76–136.
  50. “Universalism after the Post-Colonial Turn,” 831.
  51. *Ibid.*, 832.
  52. As argued, e.g., in Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law’s Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy, and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
  53. *Colonialism in Question*, 149.

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