



social, political, and ideological consequences. Biology itself, she writes, to be precise, procreation

is at the origin of the dualism. The immediate assumption of the layman that the unequal division of the sexes is 'natural' may be well-founded. We need not look beyond this. Unlike economic class, sex class sprang from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equally privileged. Although, as de Beauvoir points out, this difference of itself did not necessitate the development of a class system--the domination of one group by another--the reproductive *functions* of these differences did. The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution. (22-23)

The reason for this is that the biological family (what she defines as the "basic reproductive unit of male/female/infant" [23]) is characterised by the dependency of human infants on its parents longer than any other species. As a result, this "basic mother/child interdependency has existed in some form in every society, past and present" (23) and this has in turn "shaped the psychology of every mature female and every infant" (23). Indeed, she argues that although there have been numerous variations on the biological family, the biological family "has existed everywhere throughout time" (23) and caused "specific psychological distortions in the human personality" (24). Firestone concludes that it is these "natural reproductive differences between the sexes" (23) which "led directly to the first division of labor at the origins of class, as well as furnishing the paradigm of caste (discrimination based on biological characteristics)" (23).

In short, Firestone offers in The Dialectic of Sex a striking explanation of de Beauvoir's description of the male-female binary which avoids the idealism into which de Beauvoir lapses. That is, in describing how the simple fact of biological difference produces a tendency to conceptualise gender relationally and, by extension, to think in terms of a Self/other dialectic, Firestone gives us a way of understanding the material causes of the dualistic structure to which human consciousness, according to Hegel, is predisposed. At the same time, she adds a much needed supplement to conventional Marxian analysis of gender by taking "class analysis one step further to its roots in the biological division of the sexes" (25).