Feminine Wisdom and the World-Soul

Florence Quentin

The exacerbation of the masculine at the sake of the Feminine may be the root-cause of the contemporary “disenchantment of the world.” Might it be that the only “way out” of this dead-end is for the feminine energy to be allowed once again to flow freely in our societies?

Translated from the French by Patricia Reynaud (SFS-Qatar). The article was originally published in Ultreïa! 5, autumn 2015, p.65-69.
But where are people? You, man, should not seek the feminine in women, but seek and recognize it in yourself as you possess it from the beginning.

You, woman, you should not seek the masculine in man, but assume the masculine in yourself, since you possess it from the beginning.

But humankind is masculine and feminine, not just man or woman. You can hardly say of your soul what sex it is. But if you pay close attention, you will see that the most masculine man has a feminine soul, and the most feminine woman a masculine soul.

C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*

“Feminine: referring to all the dominant and permanent features considered to belong to women.” The definition given by the dictionary of this substantive contains the seeds of a rather common confusion, reflecting the difficulty of understanding masculine and feminine as names designating genders rather than sexes. These differences are real however and they do not overlap. “We are often split between two essential and definite classes, on the one hand ‘men’ and on the other ‘women’, as if each of us belonged only to one half of humanity,” denounced the sociologist Irene Théry. She argues that the gender, either masculine or feminine, is not part of the identity of the person, but a modality of acting and relating to others, a way of acting.

Two complementary polarities

In each individual, to various degrees, are combined in an equal manner these polarities, this “yin-yang”, which, in us, should go hand in hand harmoniously. In Taoist thought, the *yin-yang* is a creative opposition from which all perspectives emerge, two polar opposite but not a final duality, only two complementary forces necessary in order for Unity to arise. The world lives by the tension between two ways of acting, *yang* (as concentration or attack) and *yin* (dilution or defense). These two forces mix ceaselessly in the universe and in human being, whatever his/her sex is. Without one ever prevailing over the other.

According to depth psychology, and according to its founder C.G. Jung, there is a feminine in man, or anima, and a masculine in woman, or animus, the goal being the inner wedding between these two opposite and complementary forces, as a step toward the achievement of the process of individuation. The figure of the Self can thus be revealed only though the alliance between the masculine and the feminine, between two differentiated opposite, and this without gender confusion but though an intimate union of the two polarities.

But then, if one admits that they might show us the “way out” – barring “saving the world” – how to define, without caricaturing them,
the “virtues” of the feminine?

One generally holds that the masculine – it goes without saying from a psychical, inner standpoint – pertains to the realm of the assertion, the intellect, the *Logos* (word), motion, action and power. The ideal of masculinity would revolve around values of objectivity and lucidity.

To the feminine, one commonly associates values such as compassion, the affective order, the ability to welcome the other, to relate to the other, to receive from the other, interiority and the dimension of *Eros* – which ensures a mediating function between divine and human love.

The feminine would be associated with nature – which does not mean, of course, that “women” as such are only destined to reproduce or are incapable of logical reasoning, as a certain form of feminist essentialism would like us to believe (according to it, there would be no reason to distinguish between sex and gender, since the sex of a person determines his/her gender).

One cannot ignore that since Antiquity, the Western world has excessively valorized the rational, mathematical and syllogistic logic as well as the sensory-experience. The Hellenist Jean-Pierre Vernant shows convincingly (in *Les Origines de la Pensée Grecque*) the divorce – and then the transition – that took place in the 5th century BCE between *muthos* (word and explanatory narrative) on the one hand, thus defined as a tale, and therefore devalued, and the *logos*, the word based on the work of reason and a demonstrative approach. As the sociologist Michel Maffesoli rightly reminds us of the dominant values of modernity: “Imagination, which Descartes and Malebranche call ‘the chatter of the house’ (*la folle du logis*) is an obstacle to the proper working of the Goddess Reason.” In the footsteps of patriarchal values, our societies have, at the same time, relegated everything that pertains to the heart and to the experience of receptivity into the area of the archaic and the irrational. To quote the psychoanalyst Lily Jattiot, “in doing so [they] have granted the highest position to the intelligence of the masculine type, aiming at results to the expense of the intelligence of the feminine type which looks for linkages and connections.”

Cut from its nourishing roots, the logical and technological reasoning that prevails today – it is not of course a question of abolishing it here but rather of enriching it and opening it though the integration of new notions such as the imaginary and the emotional – has led the world to harbor illusions of unlimited power: the myth of a promethean

« The *anima mundi* permeates all of creation like salt in water. »

Marsilio Ficino
science that would provide us with the keys to fully understand the universe while dominating nature. This myth proves to be, more than ever in the history of mankind, a mere vanity. Isn’t “the disenchantment of the world” prophesized by Max Weber, who was announcing the advent of an order reducing everything to the material, to the rational and to the technical, one of its most depressing consequence? This evolution took and still is taking place at the expense of the Sacred and of Nature, which finds themselves disqualified, as well as the expense of an understanding and a wisdom of the relation, eminently feminine, more receptive and more aware of what binds man to the universe, to his environment, to others and ... to himself. An essential dimension that eco-spirituality now seeks to recapture. In this spirit, Michel Maffesoli (in Matrimonium) calls into question the image of the autonomous man, the man of progress, the dominating and controlling man and link this man to the despise for the earth than follows. By calling for a “sensory reason” (raison sensible) against a morbid rationalism, he is pleading in favor of an “ecosophy,” thus revivifying the figure of Wisdom. A disciple of Gilbert Durant holds that the postmodern man can retrieve his roots by taking a renewed care in “Mother-Earth” as “the ground of all experience of living together.” It is worth mentioning that he uses expressions such as “invagination” (“to withdraw into one’s self”) or “gestation” in order to prepare us for a new era characterized by “a new feminization of the world.” To these notions, he associates those of kindness, common sense and motherly clemency toward the other and toward nature, thus creating the basis of a viable universe.

As for Pierre Rabhi, he also makes the connection between the societal crisis we are going through and the urgent necessity to reclaim feminine values as well as to give again their rightful place to women, the true salt of the earth: “I believe it is necessary to bring this exaltation of the masculine to an end, meaning the will to power, aggressiveness and domination. I feel deeply hurt by the universal subordination of women. How many men would be able to take care of themselves without those they deem inferior to them? How many girls have no access to education and how many spouses are still oppressed and beaten up? I am abashed by the fact that so many lives are born from this violent encounter between the masculine and the feminine. The families, the societies that result from it, can only experience a deep imbalance. In Nature, the two sexes are indispensable to the process of creation. And the feminine possibly even more so.”

An idea lies at the heart of the eco-feminist movement and connects together the two forms of domination: that of men over women and that of human beings over
nature. By introducing the question of women within environmental ethics, this movement aligns itself as well with an ethics of care – attention, care, responsibility, thoughtfulness, mutual care⁴ – more social and political, seeing itself as a warning to the masculine, which in this world, always favors economic successes at the expense of other aspects, such as dependency or generosity ...

Ecofeminism thus develops a new type of attention to environmental questions (connected to health and to vulnerability) and calls into question an alleged autonomy of economics, with its tendency to obscure its double dependency toward the household and toward the earthly environment.”

If an ethics of care, consisting in bringing a concrete answer to the needs of others, reflects feminine values, it should not remain however the only moral concern of women, neither should it be seen as their essence. Care should become the everyday experience of most of us, whatever our sex is, because it is not a new form of altruism, but rather a universal form of care for others. Moreover, it is important to “extract the concept of care from the context of medical institutions and to transfer it into a more relational environment, into a human ecology in which we are all dependent on each other. In fact, care, as a medical proposition, introduces a form of inequality whereas in itself the act of taking care reintroduces a form of equality between all human beings. Cure and care split into two different paths as Gilles Raymond summarizes.⁵

The rehabilitation of the world soul

Our connection to “Mother Earth” in the face of the devastation of our world and the emergence of a renewed attention to our “common home” comes back as a leitmotiv in the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, published in 2015 by Pope Francis: in it, the Holy Father establishes a link between “the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity” and the relationship to the Earth and to wisdom ... of the Feminine, since the latter has always displayed the face of the *Sophia,* with the mystery of Love attached to Her. It is thus that Goethe, in his Second Faust, was writing that the Eternal Feminine “always attracts us and lifts us upward, toward the Highest”, only She can accomplish the salvation of the...
world since She holds the keys of the enigma on which it is grounded. “World-soul” which “ordsains and maintains the nature of all things” in the platonic thought – she is found in most cultural, spiritual and philosophical traditions of humanity, as in India where she takes the shape of the *Atman*, the universal soul of the world – about whom the philosopher Muhammad Taleb stresses “the feminine dimension, especially in Ibn Arabi, who identifies Her with the celestial Eve”.6 Taleb adds that she is also our “innermost interiority”, the one that “opens to us the side paths of the great universe.”

The emergence of “the Sacred Feminine” adopts new forms nowadays, such as groups or circles of women, flourishing everywhere throughout the world, betraying sometimes the syncretic shortcomings of the New Age, are the sign of a mutation in our societies. These gatherings that for some of them are related to the worship of Mother Goddesses, tracing their lineage before the rise of monotheistic religions, by essence patriarchal as well as matrilineal societies – because matriarchy as such is a contemporary fantasy — are often related to a criticism of capitalism, which in its most savage forms destroys nature and dehumanizes. A sort of echo to Malraux’s call – ”the task of the 21st century will be to reintroduce the gods in man – which among others could have as its epicenter the International Council of the 13 Great Indigenous Mothers, created by women-healer and women-shaman coming from the US, Nepal, Tibet, Central and South America, the Arctic Circles, and Africa in order “to spread throughout the world the message of awakening of the Great Original Mothers according to the tradition of the North American Natives: this earth that carries us and nourishes is the sacred earth, our mother” According to them, the awakening of consciousness will take place only through the feminine through the transmission of ancestral and spiritual customs such as traditional medicine. “Salutary” role of these women, working for peace and healing, indispensable

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“fire-break” in order to prevent the “in flight crash” of our society possessed by hubris – immoderation—focused as it is only on technology to the point of neglecting the ethical, social and human dimension which constitute it: a hubris dreaming of abolishing death in the name of the new trans-humanist catechism.

Are cloning and “the increased man” (*l’homme augmenté*)
haunting our future? It has become urgent to unite the real and the eternal, the flesh and the spiritual, consciousness to action!

Rationality (logos in the sense of definition, proposition, science, creating word) and spirituality (eros in the larger sense or “incarnated participation to things”) should enter into dialogue and fertilize each other.

A return to the fundamentals of the soul is needed in order to provide her with a support, in order for her to accomplish herself in all the dimensions and places where she expresses herself – art, meditation, prayer, the exercise of the body, beauty in general. So many “welcoming places where the hidden face of the divine reveals itself.”

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“By confusing the masculine with man and the feminine with woman, ours simplistic world mutilates both” concludes Lily Jattiot. "To restore to their full place the values and wisdom of the feminine, to rediscover play and joy without reason, may help us to find the way out of the dead-end.”

NOTES


2 Individuation – from the Latin *individum*, “that which cannot be divided” is a concept that we owe to Jung. It designs the path of growing through which an “individual” becomes one.

3 Care is used in the original French text because as Florence Quentin remarks “care in the French language does not have a precise translation.” [Note from the translator]

4 According the philosopher and feminist Elizabeth Badinter, the figure of the woman as mother implies the care of the weakest; for her, “care” may become a trap.

