

1. How does an A/Not-A dichotomy work according to Nancy Jay? Your response should make reference to the principle of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the principle of excluded middle.

Binary structures or dualism dichotomies were formalised by Aristotle through the Law of Non-contradiction. The Law of Non-contradiction applies in sets of 'irreconcilable' dichotomies such as mind-body; nature-culture and reason-emotion. The Law states that for any proposition, it and its negation cannot both be true. In other words, the law states that there are no true contradictions; A cannot also be Not-A, female cannot also be male, Asian cannot also be Australian, presence cannot also be absence and life cannot also be death.

According to Nancy Jay, "the structure of A/Not-A is such that a third term is impossible: everything and anything must be either A or Not-A. Such distinctions are all-encompassing. They not only cover every possible case of the category (gender, propositions, and so forth) to which they are applied, but they can, and logically do, order 'the entire universe, known and knowable'" (Jay, 1981 pg. 44). E.g if 'Man' is classified as A then everything in the universe that is not 'Man' is placed in the Not-A category.

In a binary structure A has an identity (if anything is A, it is A) and Not-A is merely the absence of A, hence it's only virtue is the lack of an 'A' identity. A material example of this logic can be found in Freud's castration complex. He speaks of the "momentous discovery which little girls are destined to make. "They notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, (and) at once recognise it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ" (Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes, 252). Female genitals in Freud's analysis are a lack or absence of male genitals, not worthy of an autonomous identity, nor an identity of the counterpart to male genitals.

Nancy Jay uses the sacred/profane dichotomy to explain how the borders between these concepts are ideological rather than empirical. She uses Durkheim's example of the sacred/profane dichotomy to propel her argument. "Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate [A]; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first [Not-A]" (Jay, 1981, pg. 42). Jay explains "the origin of these principles cannot be explained by either the empiricist or the idealist. They are not representative of the empirical world; they are principles of order" (Jay, 1981, pg. 42). The use of the sacred and profane in a theological sense, according to Jay, "leads directly and necessarily to a radical separation of women and men in religious life. Because women are profane in relation to men, they are, according to Durkheim, excluded from all rituals, even from knowledge about them." (Jay, 1981, pg 42).

Jay uses the example of the Levitical Law in which a man who touches a menstruating woman becomes unclean himself to exemplify the excluded middle. She explains it as "the essential empty space between A and Not-A (the "difference" that must be kept between the clean and the unclean), holds the chaos of Not- A at bay." (Jay, 1981, pg. 45). Whatever comes into contact with Not-A is necessarily Not-A itself. Hence Jay uses the Durkheimian argument that women are excluded from religious ritual from fear of contamination of the inherent chaos of the Not-A entity.

2. For Nancy Jay, A/Not-A dichotomies are "dangerous" (page 47). Why? If you wish, you may respond to this question with reference to your own examples of the A/Not-A dichotomy from texts that you are familiar with.

According to Jay, A/Not-A dichotomies are effectual in withstanding change. Those whose understanding of society is ruled by such ideology find it very hard to conceive of the possibility of alternative forms of social order (third or more possibilities).

Further, the lack of contour and specificity to Not-A means everything in Not-A flounders in chaos together. This means in binary logic that woman has no identity apart from not being man and so she gets readily confused with a miscellaneous collection of unrelated items, such as mystery,

desire, animals, deformities, land, property; as well as literally anything else that man is not. It is clear these dichotomies are value-laden and exclusionary in that A is the sign of presence and Not-A is the negation of presence and therefore subjugated.

A/Not-A dichotomies are social creations, and as such require continual work to maintain them. This means punishing those who tread the line between A and Not-A, which can result in fatal consequences where all of one ethnic group or political identity are considered a source of chaos or a subversion of 'A' and thus need to be exterminated to retain 'order'. This is also a central plot line in cinema and TV, where the threat of being 'taken over' by a usually dormant or suppressed force that has reawakened to destroy the source of its imprisonment out of malicious intent.

Jay calls upon a dangerous woman, Anne Hutchinson, who was "banished from Massachusetts in 1638, (for) having violated social dichotomies: 'You have stepped out of your place, you have rather bined a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject.'" (Nancy Jay, 1981, pg. 48). The threat here is not the extreme threat of being swallowed by the 'Not-A' feminine entity but by contradicting her role as a woman in her time, she threatens to break the dichotomy between the accepted sexes of the time and therefore to break the established order.

Jay warns it is "necessarily distorting when A/Not-A dichotomies are applied directly to the empirical world, for there are no negatives there." (Nancy Jay, 1981, pg. 48). In the empirical world nothing is absolute and indefinite forever, every form is in a constant state of transition. Because these laws and principles cannot apply to anything in transition they ultimately distort reality and "cannot have their origin in the individual's sense impressions" (Nancy Jay, 1981, pg. 49), where change is experienced first-hand. What we are consuming is an ideology out of sync with the world as it is.

A plausible alternative to dichotomies is creating (A/B/) categories where all contraries are of a positive value such that men and women may be conceived as men and not men, or women and not-women, between which there is logically not continuity, or as two forms (A,B) of the class "human".