laws in the cosmic and biological realms at the atomic and subatomic level?

LÉVI-STRAUSS AND SOCIOLOGY

Levi-Strauss's fascination with deep structures and cultural codes has found some pioneer echoes in sociology through essays by Terry N. Clark, S. N. Eisenstadt, M. Godelier, Charles Lemert, Fred E. Katz, Talcott Parsons, and Arthur L. Stinchombe, among others (see Rossi 1982). Notwithstanding a renewed interest in the sociology of culture, no visible substantive work in sociology has followed this early effort, not even after a dialecticized development of the structural mode of analysis (Rossi 1983, 1993). One is hard pressed to find Lévi-Straussean traces in American sociological analyses, outside of passing references in treatises on the history of sociology and in graduate syllabi on sociological theory. Lévi-Strauss continues to be listed as a representative figure in the tradition of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss that focused on collective representations and their classificatory functions. In American sociology, Lévi-Strauss is usually portrayed as interested in the cognitive aspects and deep meaning (logical structure) that underlie the overt content of symbolic systems. The prevailing trend in American sociology is to focus on the behavioral aspects of social relationships and even on nonrational aspects of culture. However, the scope of this mode of inquiry is severely limited by the stringencies of "quasiscientific" methodology. Will the inner logic of culture (and of the human agency) ever become part of sociological inquiry if the latter remains anchored on these epistemological foundations?

— Ino Rossi

See also Durkheim, Émile; Religion in French Social Theory; Saussure, Ferdinand de; Semiology

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LIBERAL FEMINISM

Rooted in the humanism of the Renaissance and the person-centered, rights-oriented liberalism that emerged in Western thought during the Enlightenment, liberal feminism first found widespread expression during the nineteenth century in Western societies. Liberal feminism is that strand of women-centered ideas and practices focusing on achieving equal rights between female and male citizens as well as equal opportunities and outcomes for similarly situated females and males while deemphasizing the cognitive and psychological differences between females and males. This strand of feminist theory is the most widely known. Neither separatist nor radical, liberal feminism is fundamentally and sometimes passionately reformist. Liberal feminists work within the system. To what extent they identify with the institutional order and in what ways they work for social change within it are matters that differentiate one grouping of liberal feminists from another.

What puts them together on the same broad part of the political spectrum is their feminist articulation of classically liberal notions. Over the past several centuries, liberalism, with its emphasis on political freedom and citizens' rights, became politically foundational in as well as an antecedent condition of modern Western democracies. Becoming hegemonic during the nineteenth century as a centrist ideology, with socialism to its left and conservativism to its right (Wallerstein 1995:1), liberalism was likely a necessary condition for the first-wave feminism that eventually gained Western women the franchise. Among the latent functions of that first wave of feminism was that it made liberal feminism a more or less given ingredient of modern society (Frazer 1998:52).

Characteristically, even in its liberal versions, feminism has consistently criticized the Enlightenment values giving rise to it. Liberalism may have been a necessary condition for the emergence of a viable women's movement, but it was far from sufficient. The very values that liberals propounded were able to gain popular support in part by ignoring issues of gender injustice as well as racial and other forms of institutionalized inequality. The various rights guaranteed to white male citizens were monolithically withheld from their female counterparts as well as their male nonwhite counterparts. From the start, then, feminism was both enabled and constrained by liberal discourses.

Even today, liberal feminism continues to exhibit an ambivalent relationship with the liberalism that helped to spawn it.

All the while, its core assumptions do remain discernibly liberal. Foremost among them are assumptions about the primacy of the individual, generally articulated in one version or another of individualism; the separation (and thus the separability) of the public and private spheres and of the political and social spheres; the rationality of the self-interested, free-willed citizen; and rights protected impartially under the law and legal processes. From a liberal feminist perspective, what these assumptions amount to are male-centered, male-advantaging precepts that need to be reformed in egalitarian directions so as to have really fair systems. The notion of the individual cannot fairly be bereft of the possibility of pregnancy and birthing any more than it can be bereft of some notion of the common good or the person as a community member; the notion of a private sphere reliably and clearly separable from the public sphere must be chastened so as to enable governments to redress the kinds of violence and abuse that occur in intimate relationships, whether family- and household-based or not; the notion of rationality cannot be gender-inclusive without leaving some room for an ethic of care and practices of caregiving alongside concepts of self-interest and personal autonomy; to a substantial extent the law must be seen as a social institution with historically and culturally specific flaws that have to be remediated in order to promote gender equality and justice.

Similarly problematic are liberal presuppositions that, left uncritically accepted, largely operate against women's collective interests. Paramount among these is the presuppositions of hierarchy, which in turn presupposes an unequal distribution of rewards such as income, honor, and power. In a gender-unjust society, liberal feminists accept these presuppositions, just as they accept the aforementioned assumptions. Yet their acceptance rests on a critical, at times ambivalent, consciousness that in turn fuels their commitment to reformist changes that will make the hierarchies less androcentric and the distribution of rewards less biased in favor of males. Thus, liberal feminists withhold their full support from ideas such as meritocracy while working for social changes that more or less guarantee equality of opportunities and outcomes between women and men. Put differently, liberal feminists largely accept the status quo *except for its gender-biased practices and structures.* Instead of attacking or even rejecting the notion of hierarchy or inequality of outcomes, then, liberal feminists critique the observable gender biases of extant hierarchies and the gender-unequal distribution of opportunities and rewards.

Liberal feminists thus have no fundamental quarrel with well-established liberal notions. Their dissatisfaction lies with the gender biases in the social arrangements of those societies that are supposed to function as liberal democracies. To that extent, liberal feminists have been the main proponents of such notions as equal pay for equal work, equal standards for admission to postsecondary education, equal funding of females' and males' athletics in schools, and equality of opportunities for jobs, promotions, and benefits, including pensions and other retirement perquisites.

Among feminist theorists, liberal stances are common, if not predominant, in the Northern Hemisphere. Throughout feminist theory, the conceptual and axiological scaffolding of liberalism is widely operative, albeit in reworked terms with different twists. Barrie Thorne's *Gender Play: Girls and Boys at School* (1993) or Martha Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development* (2001), for example, are illustrative. As Mary F. Rogers (2001) pointed out elsewhere with respect to other studies, such works challenge "some fine print on the social contract, not its fundamental terms." Social theory, with its tradition of social critique, readily accommodates such theorizing. Ultimately, liberal feminist theory serves as a corrective to the gendered character of social theory by counteracting its masculinist underpinnings without insistently challenging its heterosexism, ethnocentrism, or class biases. For the most part, liberal feminist theory tends to reflect the outlook of relatively privileged women from European cultural and political traditions, and thus fails to contest social theory at its roots, even while counteracting its gender biases. Put differently, those feminists who identify themselves along more than one axis of oppression appear to be underrepresented among liberal feminist theorists, where heterosexual, middle-class, white-skin, and able-bodied privilege are more or less taken for granted.

Yet liberal feminist theory is far from uniform. Its theoretical variegations lie along a *liberal continuum* built up around *more* or *less* acceptance of institutionalized hierarchies other than the gender. As Zillah Eisenstein (1981) implies, a liberal feminist continuum includes at least three sets of theorists, namely, *radical liberal* theorists and *status quo liberal* theorists with *progressive liberal* feminist theorists in the middle. To some degree, all these theorists presuppose or even apply liberal notions of "freedom of choice, individualism, and equality of opportunity" while disagreeing about the racial, class, and other biases that they entail (Eisenstein 1981:229). Thorne's and Nussbaum's aforementioned works lie on the middle ground of the liberal continuum, with Nussbaum more firmly positioned among status quo liberal feminists insofar as she explicitly, though not uncritically, invokes universalist values.

Yet full-fledged status quo liberal feminists go much further than that, with the end result that their work gets little attention within feminist theory. Camille Paglia's *Vamps & Tramps* (1994), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life* (1996), and Joan

Mandle's *Can We Wear Our Pearls and Still Be Feminists?* (2000) exemplify such theorizing. None of these theorists pays sympathetic attention to lesbians, straight women of color, or any other grouping of women disadvantaged by more than gender. The vocabulary of oppression and domination has no place at this end of the liberal continuum.

At the radical liberal end of the continuum stand those feminist theorists who insist that feminism must be about a great deal more than gender because women make up substantial proportions of nearly every subordinate group in society except prison inmates. What might be called *race-class-and-gender feminists* occupy this part of the continuum. These theorists may address sexuality, age, disability, or other hierarchies, but their main focus is the intersections among race, social class, and gender. Perhaps exemplifying this part of the continuum is Patricia Hill Collins whose work revolves around theorizing an everyday *politics of empowerment* based on resistance to the stereotypes and constraints that African American women, in particular, face. Of late, says Collins (1998), these stereotypes and constraints amount to a *politics of containment* based on less overt, surveillance-driven modes of controlling African American women, whether they be mothers on welfare or professors in academe. Collins (1998:34, 35) also sees racism, mixed with sexism and classism, in current moves toward privatization in the United States as so-called market forces are alleged to be more responsible than policymakers and corporate executives for persistent inequality. With the public sphere more and more functioning as a site of subordination and surveillance, Collins (1998:228, 153) calls for a reoriented and visionary pragmatism as well as critical attention to how oppressive hierarchies are continuously constructed in tandem with one another.

Her focus on the interconnected character of social hierarchies is a hallmark of Collins's work. That concern could move her beyond the liberal continuum, but for the most part it does not. Despite her recurrent attention to social class, sexual orientation, and women of color other than African Americans, Collins does center her framework on African American women and thus around a racially specific grouping of women. That circumstance, plus her failure to challenge hierarchy generically, leaves Collins positioned on the liberal continuum, albeit at its left end.

Most liberal feminist theory lies somewhere between the relative extremes exhibited by sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Joan Mandle. Regardless of where we look on the liberal feminism continuum, though, challenges to that hegemonic variety of feminist theory abound. These challenges have taken most dramatic shape around postmodernism as an anti-Enlightenment perspective. Further challenges lie with multicultural and postcolonial feminist theorists demanding attention (postmodernist or not) to racial/ethnic and other hierarchies historically created by internal as well as global colonialism. Here works such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) are pivotal. Then, too, theorizing from lesbian (Judith Butler, for example) and psychoanalytic (Jessica Benjamin, for example) perspectives challenges liberal feminist theory. Considered from the vantage point of liberal feminism, these other strands of feminism represent more or less oppositional discourses where liberal feminism represents little more than a critical discourse.

One concern linking these various challenges to liberal feminist theory is their rendering the public/private binary problematic, sometimes problematic enough to warrant discarding the distinction. Carole Pateman (1979) offers one of the most influential, rigorous critiques of this binary. She emphasizes how liberal theorists routinely invoke the "state" in uncritical, taken-for-granted fashion. On that basis, they typically juxtapose the state as an impartial, objective arena anchoring political life with the private sphere as an emotional, subjective arena. Pateman (1979:173) argues that if the political is conceptualized as more than a state-centered arena, the divide between the political and the private spheres dissolves. With it goes the closely related division between the public and the private spheres. Barbara Marshall (1994:9, 10) implies that both binaries function to establish conceptual boundaries around the nation-state and that neither holds up well in the larger problematic concerning the relationship between individuals and their society.

This latter relationship is the generic concern that inspires a great deal of postcolonial as well as lesbian feminist theorizing. Perhaps no other theorist has covered as many bases and carved out a more complex opposition to liberal feminist theory as Shane Phelan, who writes foremostly but far from entirely from a lesbian feminist perspective. The opening sentence of Phelan's first book reads, "Lesbian feminism began with and has fueled itself by the rejection of liberalism." (1989:3) Thereafter, Phelan positions herself among the many contemporary as well as historical thinkers—Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche—whose work is marked as much by their rejection of liberalism as anything else. Like postmodernists and social constructionists, Phelan (1989:4) notes how law and public policy cannot get to the grounds of the institutional order or social life because neither focuses on discourses or language. Worse, liberalism fails to provide any standards, any grounds for articulating the common good, any values capable of illuminating oppression. Its seemingly "neutral rules flow from the denial that a common good beyond the sum of individual desires exists." (Phelan 1989:17) Before long, Phelan (1989:17–18, 20ff.) links liberalism with positivism as systems of thought supposedly promoting impartiality and objectivity.

All of this is more or less standard fare among critics of liberalism. In *Getting Specific* (1994), Phelan adopts a more pointedly postmodernist voice intertwined with her lesbian feminist one. There she rejects dualistic thinking in favor of an emphasis on liminality, where the boundaries between categories are fluid and unclear. Rejecting the "bait of identity," Phelan emphasizes persons' multiple embodied identities and social positions that often entangle them in contradictions that can become the basis of alliances across their supposed differences. Within this framework, the private and the public spheres bleed into one another as outcomes of the discursive systems and institutionalized hierarchies implied in Pateman's critique. The "private" becomes a sociopolitical fiction that stymies common action and shared commitments while failing to promote citizens' development and well-being.

Yet Phelan does not entirely reject the private/public distinction. Her theorizing is more radical than that. Explicitly in her earlier work and implicitly in her later work, she abjures any wholesale rejection of theories that distinguish between the public and the private realms. (1989:47) Indeed, she (1989:156) holds that the greatest weakness of liberal theory is the kind of agent it presupposes, namely, "the reasonable, liberal man." In the end, then, Phelan (1989:139, 155) says that we must "rethink" the public/private distinction and that we need to retain the "liberal *sentiment*" that whets our civic appetites for all the uncertainties and conflicts characteristic of public life in democratic societies.

Phelan's position reminds us that at its best, critical social theory forswears easy judgments and either/or thinking. So, too, with feminist theory. At its best, it is neither liberal nor radical, neither modernist nor postmodernist, neither psychoanalytic nor Marxian in straightforward, unadulterated ways. Instead, it is variegated to the extent needed to address whatever social complexities and ethical perplexities its promulgators have adopted as their focus. The limitations of liberal feminism hold these and many more lessons that continue to stimulate feminist progress, both within and beyond the academy.

— Mary F. Rogers

See also Benjamin, Jessica; Butler, Judith; Postmodernist Feminism; Radical Feminism

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LIFEWORLD

The lifeworld, or the world of everyday life and commonsense realities, is a concept that comes from the work of phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and has been developed for sociology by the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schütz (1899–1959). Schütz was concerned with the domain (the world of everyday life, the commonsense world) in which individuals grapple with the consciousness of others while living in their own stream of consciousness. The lifeworld to Schütz represented an intersubjective terrain in which people both created their social realities and were simultaneously constrained by those social and cultural structures already in place. It was in existence long before our birth, but we do have the power to act back upon it. Furthermore, each of us has our own individual lifeworld, although many of the same elements are common to all actors.

In this domain, people operate with what he calls the "natural attitude." That is, they take the world around them for granted. They do not doubt its reality or existence until such time as a problematic situation arises. It is only then that they cease to rely on "recipes" for handling routine situations and must develop creative ways of handling the problems they encounter.

There are six basic characteristics of the lifeworld. First, it involves what Schütz labeled as "wide-awakeness" (1973:213), or the state of consciousness during which actors devote all of their resources and attention to living life. Second, the actors accept without question the existence of the lifeworld. Third, and most important to Schütz's definition of what characterizes the lifeworld, actors do work. Work here is considered any nonphenomenological action taken by the actor with the intent of causing something to happen by virtue of that action. Fourth, the self understood through the work one does comes to be experienced as the total self. Fifth, the lifeworld involves