

# Feminist critiques of Liberalism

## 1 freedom and equality - why were they not extended to women?

A question directed at moderns, the ancients/medievals did not hold beliefs of equality / freedom of individuals

Hierarchical ordering of society and therefore all beings in ancient/medievals: questioning universality would be anachronistic.

## 2 if liberal philosophy begins with universal ALL... why are women treated differently?

however liberal ALL was a certain grouping of MEN only

- Hobbes
  - Political authority is not natural, men are born free and equal.
  - political authority is constructed and legitimated by free and equal beings.
  - there are no natural groups of political authority (e.g. strength, cunning &c)
  - man made sovereign over women and family in marriage
    - marriage contracts are between two free individuals
    - legitimate natural authority only exists between parents and child, and even then with an emphasis on the mother
- Locke
  - Locke held that political authority does not derive from and and can not match paternal/patriarchal family/social ordering
  - family is contractual / consensual grouping
    - marriage contract contains consent to rule by the husband, derived from the natural subjugation of women to men in matters that concern the family unit
  - social contracts are between men who speak for their wives too
- Rousseau
  - universalising radical democratic rule - i.e. what one would will for ones self
  - reinforced subjugation and domestication of women, duties were to be cultivated from birth through socialising
- Kant
  - active /passive citizens
    - any one who was dependent on another was a passive citizen - servants, labourers &c, and ALL Women
    - women were considered dependent on the will of their husband
    - Women may not change their status unlike a slave or a wage labourer
  - women considered different and inferior to men
    - not considered fully rational. he is dismissive and scornful on women's intellectual capacity
- C19th socialist criticisms of liberalism dismissed subordination of women

### 3 J. S. Mill - critical of popular prejudice against women

- recognised the longevity of the social fact of the subordination of women
- Child of the enlightenment, questioned the social assumption of subordinated women  
what is the justification for the exclusion of women?
- Mill observed movement of recent history towards liberal individualism
- social institution of the family, despotic and unequal patriarchal order
- liberals sustained despotic family by not extending equality to women
- democratising of the family
  - accessible divorce, equal inheritance
  - any idiot can become a father... why should this be the arbitrary distinction of power
- utilitarianism - doubles mass of people in public life, let's not waste talent!
- personal gain of happiness on the liberated half a great benefit to us all
- choice between marriage & family OR work & public life

### 4 early feminism, a child of liberalism

- enabled by liberal ideas, not against liberal ideas  
formal inequalities attacked by proto-feminists
- Mary Wollstonecraft - if you proclaim the rights of All, why not women?
- Suffragettes - authority legitimate through consent, so give us the vote
- freedoms for women arising negatively,  
resisting irrational male dominance by holding liberals to their own promises

### 5 second wave feminism

liberal and socialist feminism both viewed differences between men and women as insignificant; equality valued and fought for over and above difference

- equal pay legislation not on statute books till the late 60s/early 70s
- socialist feminist critiques of liberalism
  - gender is a global form of oppression and injustice, as well as the relationship between class and capital
  - sex/gender inequality will not be done away with by the overthrowing capitalism
  - liberalism can only give women formal equality, not substantive equality.  
capital reproduces the systematic subordination of women  
critical of liberal theory because liberalism is philosophy of male capital  
structural requirements of free labour in the home, reproduction of social world. capitalism does not pay for homework
    - reserve labour force?  
from World War II.  
women guilt tripped after WWII to try and get them back into the home.
- liberal feminist critiques of liberalism
  - formal equality insufficient: positive discrimination, affirmative action
- radical feminist critiques of liberalism
  - highlighted real differences with women; aspirations of equality against/with men not desirable  
men: instrumental, war  
women: nature, care
  - difference is all importance
  - advocates of lesbian separatism, women needed to emancipate themselves from false consciousness
  - criticised for essentialising 'woman'
    - cross-cutting categories of class, race, &c
- feminists of difference
  - treatment of women as equals to men is to do violence to individual women  
if equality with males is benchmark / norm - do women want to be 'like a man'?
  - not a conservative feminism: still rejecting subordinated social order.
  - seeing people the same is an expression of a perpetuation the problem of inequality

## 6 seminar points

- liberal theory beginning with men and later elaborated and extended principles for women
- omission, commission or exclusion?
  - **socialist feminists** are critical of liberal structural exclusion of women  
men benefit from the subordination of women. there were/are structural constraints concerning the equality, the emancipation of women, be that male interests, or the interests of capital.
  - **feminists of difference** highlight the limits of liberal change,  
there are acts of commission, a gendered individual who is male  
the liberal equality overlooks the body (politics of equality), but this can not be diminished and we need a politics of justice.  
american problems of no gender exclusive legislation: pregnancy was termed a temporary disability in order to give maternity leave. This highlights the irrationality of liberal equality.
  - Genervive Lloyds - 'Man of Reason'  
mapping of binary distinction, binary divisions where one term is privileged, the other by its lack  
liberalism was constitutively male, based on cultural male reason/rationality: need to deconstruct gender seperatism
  - phemonology of the body - find essay 'throwing like a girl'
    - R. S. Maryann Young - bodies DO matter
    - not natural disposition (biological), cultural education (socialisation) - we have a phemonological relationship with our bodies.
    - Males (general) relationship with bodies is instrumental, womens (equally generalised) relationship with their bodies is one of coaxing.
    - Males are expansive in terms of projection into space, women minimising.
- deconstruction of social binarys
  - there should be no dependant and subordinated halves of the binarys
- relationship to the land versus land rights of private property  
demands for equal justice that are not demands for separatism