Handbook of Social Theory

Classical Feminist Social Theory

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[p. 125 ↓]

Chapter 11: Classical Feminist Social Theory

Classical feminist social theory has its intellectual origins in the development of Western political theory in the eighteenth century, the emergence in the nineteenth century of a faith that social amelioration was possible through a science of society, but above all in the age-old record of women's protest against their subordination, particularly as that protest coalesced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in both Europe and America, into a social movement centering on women's struggle for political rights—the so-called 'first wave' of feminist mobilization.

Definitional Issues

In the context of this chapter, we will focus on classical feminist sociological theory, by which we shall mean works created between 1830 and 1930, by women who were reflectively exploring the ameliorative possibilities of social science while developing a systematic theory of society and social relations, a theory infused with a woman-centered consciousness and committed to a critique of domination. As primary exemplars of this tradition, we discuss the social theory of Harriet Martineau (British, 1802–76), Flora Tristan (French, 1803–44), Anna Julia Cooper (African American, 1858–1964), Beatrice Webb (British, 1858–1943), Jane Addams (European American, 1860–1935), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (European American, 1860–1935) and Marianne Weber (German, 1870–1954). Our definition allows us to distinguish the works of these women from the works of thinkers who shared some but not all of their concerns: from feminist writers who wrote before the idea of social science became a part of Western thought—for example, Mary Astell (1668–1721), Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), Catherine Macaulay (1731–91), Abigail Adams (1744–1818), Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), Germaine De Staël (1766–1817); from contemporaries whose primary expression of feminist ideas was philosophical, political

or literary rather than sociological—for example, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Taylor Mill and John Stuart Mill, Frances Wright, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Maria Stewart, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells, Olive Schreiner, Virginia Woolf; from contemporary women social scientists who analysed a particular aspect of social life rather than constructing a general theory—for example, Elizabeth Blackwell, medical sociology; Florence Nightingale, health; Mary Van Kleeck, social organizations; Katherine Bernent Davis, criminology; Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, urban social problems, and from theorists who wrote about domination and women's subordination but not from a woman-centered perspective, for example, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg.

Biography and Historiography

Because the women theorists discussed in this review are relatively unknown to a social science readership, we introduce them in this section. Our introduction addresses a current debate in **[p. 126 ↓]** the historiography of sociology about the place of classical feminist theory in the sociological canon. We advance the claim made by one side in that debate—that a rich and lively production of feminist sociological theory occurred between 1830 and 1930, in the same period in which male-created sociology developed. Despite the pioneering work of scholars like Costin (1983), Deegan (1988), Fish (1981, 1985), Kandal (1988), Rosenberg (1982) and Terry (1983), this claim remains a contested one in mainstream discourses on sociology's history and theoretical traditions (see, for example, Crothers, 1998). Although some established texts on the history of sociological theory are beginning the incorporation of the women (for example, Lemert, 1995, 1999; Ritzer, [1996] 2000), others continue the decades-long practice of ignoring and marginalizing the feminist presence in sociology's classical period (see, for example, Ashley and Orenstein, 1998; Collins and Makowsky, 1998; Farganis, 1996; Levine, 1995).

Our introductory biographical sketches substantiate the claim of a feminist sociological heritage with five arguments: first, that the classical women theorists worked and wrote in an active relation to sociology as an organized area of scholarship and as a framework for social analysis; second, that the classical women theorists were

important public figures and were known as social analysts to the men who created mainstream sociology in the period 1830–1930; third, that that male discourse group was at best ambivalent and more typically resistant to the women's presence and sociological production, largely because sexist attitudes made it difficult to accept women's intellectual work as authoritative; fourth, that these same dynamics, coupled with a growing contrast between the aspirations for an objective and generalizing science in male sociology and the critical, activist, grounded formulations of classical feminist social thought led, over time, to a complete erasure of this tradition's presence from the histories of sociology created out of various male historiographical frameworks; and fifth that this feminist presence is currently being recovered by a growing body of scholarship grounded in a new feminist historiography, a scholarship which is rediscovering these women as social theorists relevant to a range of contemporary academic fields, and which is now in sociology sufficiently dense to produce multiple interpretations of some of these women's work.

Current scholarship easily substantiates both the connections to sociology and the public visibility of the five women who were privileged by class and race—Martineau (e.g. Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992, 2000), Addams (e.g., Deegan, 1988), Gilman (e.g., Ceplair, 1991), Webb (e.g., Romano, 1998) and Weber (e.g., Roth, 1990). Martineau, who from the late 1820s was Britain's leading woman of letters primarily on the basis of her social analysis, has survived in sociology's records only for her 1853 translation and abridgement, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*. But she was working on the construction of sociology from the 1830s, bringing out three extensive and interrelated works – *Society in America* ([1836, 1837] 1962) *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838b) and 'Domestic Service' (1838a). Hoecker-Drysdale (1992: 70–1) reports that in 1837 Martineau wrote of being asked to edit a new journal intending 'to treat of philosophical principles, abstract and applied, of sociology'.

Addams self-identified as a sociologist, taught sociology, was a member of the American Sociological Society, published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, wrote eight major books of social theory (including *Democracy and Social Ethics* ([1902] 1907), *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), which were reviewed in the *AJS)* and had significant relationships with Mead, Park, W.I. Thomas, Small and Burgess (Deegan, 1988). From her base at Hull House, the social settlement she founded, with Ellen Gates Starr, in Chicago in 1889, she

became a major spokesperson for progressive causes and was repeatedly voted one of the two or three most admired Americans in public opinion polls. Gilman was widely regarded as the leading feminist intellectual of her day but preferred to be known as a 'sociologist' (Degler, 1966: vi-vii). She wrote six book-length works of formal social theory – including *Women and Economics* (1898), *Human Work* (1904) and *The Man-Made World* (1911); published articles in the *American Journal of Sociology, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* and *Publications of the American Sociological Society;* held membership in the American Sociological Society from its foundation in 1895 (Keith, 1991), and maintained intellectual relationships with Lester Ward and E.A. Ross.

Webb's widely regarded autobiography *My Apprenticeship* (1926) describes her evolution into a 'social investigator'. She was tutored by Spencer, whose ideas she later rejected, taught sociology, worked as a social investigator on Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London*, and wrote her own independent investigations, climaxing in the socialist reform classic, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (1891). As part of a powerful scholarly and political partnership with her husband Sidney, Webb researched and co-authored eleven volumes of empirical sociology which helped lay the foundation for the British welfare state.

[p. 127 ↓] Marianne Weber lived at the center of German sociological circles and debated both Simmel and her husband Max in her own writings. She was a leader of the German feminist movement, the first woman to be elected to a German parliament, the author of eight books of social analysis and sociology, including the monumental work on the legal position of women, *Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtsent-wicklung* [Marriage, Motherhood and the Law] (1907)—which was reviewed by Durkheim in *L'Année sociologique*, and the collected essays, *Frauenfragen und Frauengedanken* [Reflections on Women and Women's Issues] (1919). She secured Max's position within sociology after his death by editing and publishing ten volumes of his work and writing her important interpretive biography of him.

The two less privileged women—Tristan disadvantaged by class, and Cooper, by race—had real but more tangential relations to sociology (see, for example, Grogan, 1998, for Tristan; Lemert and Bahn, 1998, for Cooper).

Tristan wrote three book-length sociological studies—*Peregrinations of a Pariah* (1838), *Promenades in London* (1840) and *The Workers' Union* (1844), which were informed by the ideas of the Utopian socialists Saint-Simon, Fourier, Considérant and Robert Owen—the last three of whom she knew personally. Marx and Engels defend her work in *The Holy Family* ([1845] 1956), and Marx was urged to meet her (and Georges Sands) when he took refuge in France in 1844. Tristan wrote with a knowledge of herself as a marginal person, a 'pariah', who spoke from the lived experience of the oppressed working-class woman. The daughter of a French woman of unknown origins and a Peruvian aristocrat, Tristan was left in poverty at the age of four when her father died. As a teenager she went to work in the printing trades for a French lithographer, with whom she had a brief, unhappy and abusive marriage. In her lifetime, Tristan's reputation was largely within socialist and working-class circles.

Cooper's major work *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South* (1892) formulates principles of 'sociology' to explain race, gender and class relations in the United States; she refers to Comte and Spencer and incorporates the social theories of the French historians Taine and Guizot. Cooper was an associate of W.E.B. DuBois, the African American sociologist, whose sociology has also been neglected in histories of the discipline (Lemert, 2000). In 1925, she defended her dissertation, *Slavery and the French Revolutionists, 1789–1805*, at the Sorbonne before a committee that included Célestin Bougie, one of the leading figures in French sociology of that time, whose ideas about race and democracy Cooper attacked. *A Voice from the South* received superlative reviews from black and white publications alike and established her as a prominent intellectual and spokesperson among African Americans.

Despite their work as social theorists and their public visibility, the classical women sociologists were perceived only as a marginal presence in the male discourse groups constructing sociology in the period 1830–1930. The crucial barrier appears to have been patriarchal culture, which both in interaction and through social structures, denied women the authority necessary for recognition as serious participants in the discourse. For example, Cooper was well known to W.E.B. DuBois—and yet was cited by him only as 'a woman of the race' (Washington, 1988). Weber saw herself on a journey of intellectual development during her engagement and marriage to Max, but was advised by him to create a sure base for herself in domesticity when she turned to him for help in selecting theoretical and philosophical readings (Weber, [1926] 1975). Webb, who

resisted acknowledging her gender as a social impediment, nevertheless reported how Alfred Marshall (whom Parsons (1937) treats as a major contributor to the sociological tradition) discouraged her from writing *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain* (1891), telling her: *'A book by you on the Co-operative Movement I may get my wife to read to me in the evening to while away the time, but I shan't pay any attention to it* (Webb, 1926: 352, original emphasis). The women theorists themselves explore the obstacles that their gender presented to their intellectual and social science aspirations. In the introduction to *Society in America*, Martineau answers the charge that being a woman made it difficult to do social research; she argues instead that as a woman, she has easier access to the sites of domestic life which are 'excellent schools in which to learn the morals and manners of a people'—and that anyone may learn about 'public and professional affairs … who really feelfs] an interest in them' (Martineau, [1836] 1962: I: xiii). Addams, in one of her earliest published works, focuses on the denial of authority to the female voice, likening the woman scholar's experience to that of Cassandra—'to be in the right and always to be disbelieved and rejected' (1881: 37). Gilman constructs a major work, *The Man-Made World, or Our Androcentric Culture* (1911) around the thesis that women's meanings are denied and rendered inconsequential by patriarchal culture.

The women's erasure from subsequent histories of sociology and its theories resulted from the working out of this problem of authority in two interrelated politics—a politics of gender and a politics of knowledge. The politics of gender **[p. 128 ↓]** proceeded as described above; the politics of knowledge involved a struggle over the purpose of sociology and the social role of the sociologist. This recurring struggle—variously described as 'objectivity versus advocacy' (Furner, 1975), 'scientistic' timelessness versus historical specificity (Ross, 1991) or 'the objective service intellectual' versus 'the purposivist' reformer (Smith, 1994)—was first fought between 1890 and 1947. In this period, sociology's male academic elites moved to a consensus that the appropriate role for the sociologist is that of the objective service intellectual committed to scientific rigor, value-neutrality and formal abstraction. This consensus delegitimated the work of the classical women theorists, and many men, who practiced a critical, activist sociology of advocacy. The primary explanation for the growing emphasis on scientistic expertise was sociology's move into the university as its 'legitimate' work site, a move that was part of its quest for professional authority, social status, and job and salary

security—and a move which further marginalized the women who were accepted as students but not as faculty. Location in the academy produced a distinctive theoretical voice and a way of building theory which assumed theory to be an activity done in a particular part of one's life, where one purposively set out to find something to theorize, proceeding in linear fashion towards increasing abstraction and predictions subject to scientific verification. The classical women theorists offered an alternative way of doing theory, as an activity done as part of a larger project of social critique and amelioration, in which the theorist responds to situations in the everyday lifeworld, constructing 'weblike' accounts whose verification lies in the utility of the theory for the people who are its subjects. This difference in theoretical voice is a key factor in delegitimating the achievements of the classical women theorists and justifying their erasure from the canon.

Until the late 1980s no major sociological study recognized the feminist tradition in classical sociology. The scholarship of the classical women theorists was noted only when pertinent to the accomplishments of important male founders of the discipline —Martineau as Comte's translator, Weber as Max's biographer, Webb as Sidney's partner helping construct the British empirical tradition (Kent, 1981). The impetus for the recovery of the women discussed in this chapter, and of the tradition they represent, has come not from sociology itself but from a new feminist historiography born of the burgeoning scholarship of second wave feminism. Path-breaking work on the earlier tradition of feminist social science has been done by feminist historians (Caine, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1990; Giddings, 1984; Hill, 1980, 1985, 1995; Muncy, 1991; Rosenberg, 1982; Sklar, 1995). This new historiography now permeates most academic disciplines, so that the significance of various of the classical women theorists is being discussed by philosophers (e.g., Baker-Fletcher, 1994, on Cooper; Seigfried, 1996, on Addams), economists (e.g., Dimand, 1996, and Sheth and Prasch, 1996, on Gilman), political scientists (e.g., Silverberg, 1998), and literary scholars who have produced a vast literature on these women.

In sociology the first major products of this new historiography appeared in 1988, with Deegan's detailed argument for Addams' importance, and Kandal's carefully documented exploration of the uneasy relation between feminism and sociology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1990s four key works have substantiated the claim for a feminist contribution to the construction of sociology:

Deegan (1991), Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998), McDonald (1994) and Reinharz (1992). Taken collectively, these texts provide the basic information about the women who are the subjects of this chapter. In addition to these key works, a growing literature on these women is proceeding unevenly, with some of the women still only sketchily explored, while others are now the subject of a lively literature that is producing multiple interpretations of their work. Weber, surprisingly—given her productivity and her relationship to Max—has to date had only preliminary attention. Little of her writing has been translated into English, except for her biography of Max ([1926] 1975) and three essays from her 1919 collection *Frauenfragen und Frauengedanken* (see Kirchen's translations in Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998). Available, too, in English are studies of her experiences with Max (Scaff, 1998), her position *vis à vis* Max's on gender (Thomas, 1985) and her theoretical debates with Simmel (Scaff, 1988; Tijssen, 1991). Wobbe's 1998 review of her general social theory is available only in German. Tristan, too, is still only partially visible to a sociological audience, although all her key works have been translated into English. Her social theory has been described by writers approaching her as a Utopian socialist and feminist (Beik and Beik, 1993; Cross and Gray, 1992; Desanti, 1976); Grogan (1998) and McDonald (1998) have included brief assessments of her social science contributions. As with Tristan, Webb's sociological work can be in part discovered through current discussion of her feminism (Beilharz and Nyland, 1998). She has had direct attention as a sociologist from Broschart (1991), McDonald (1998) and Romano (1998).

The movement to incorporate Cooper and Gilman into the sociological canon is much further advanced, with Cooper being presented **[p. 129 ↓]** as almost paradigmatic of black feminist social theory (Collins, 1990; Lemert, 1999, 1995; Lemert and Bahn, 1998) and Gilman of white feminist social theory (Deegan and Hill, 1998; Lemert, 1995, 1999). There is some trend towards multiple interpretations of Gilman – as an analyst of women and health (Oakley, 1997), a materialist feminist (Walby, 1990) and as a feminist Darwinist (Doskow, 1997).

The two deepest areas of scholarship are those on Martineau and Addams. Martineau is being recovered both as a feminist (Yates, 1985) and as a sociologist (Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale, 2000; Hoecker-Drysdale, 2000) with major accomplishments as a methodologist (Hill, 1989; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2000), as a sociologist

of work (Hoecker-Drysdale, 2000), and as a political sociologist (McDonald, 1998). A growing body of feminist work is exploring the complexities of Addams' social thought, seeing her as a critical pragmatist (Deegan, 1988), a feminist pragmatist (Seigfried, 1996), an empiricist (McDonald, 1994), a feminist sociologist (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998, 2000), an interpretive theorist (Ross, 1998), and a theorist of war, peace and the state (McDonald, 1998).

Themes

Despite the fact that the women theorists we discuss here represent two different generations and various national traditions in their relation to feminism and to sociology, and that each woman creates a distinctive social theory, those theories taken collectively reveal a coherent tradition of classical feminist sociological thought. The hallmarks of that tradition are apparent in the theorists' central problematic, methodological orientation, model of society, emphasis on social change and the explanatory significance assigned to the individual and to ideas.

The Central Problematic

The central problematic of the classical feminist sociological tradition is the description, analysis and critique of socially produced pain, and, as befits a critical theory, the exploration of the social conditions that produce happiness or joy. Probably no other sociological theory has been as explicit in its dedication to both these projects. Martineau argues in sociology's first treatise on methods, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838b), that the project of sociology is to see how various peoples develop culturally diverse systems of 'morals and manners' around the great end of all social life, '[t]hat man should be happy' (1838b: 25). Webb and Addams both sought to combine empirical observation with ethical mobilization—in Webb's case to study the 'poverty amidst riches' (1926: 216) generated by capitalism; in Addams', first, to understand and alleviate 'the stress and need of those who bear the brunt of the social injury' (1895: 183–4) and as a second purpose to urge that the modern world act to 'organize play' as it has organized work (1909). Tristan introduces her major work of social observation,

her study of London, as a depiction of 'the suffering of the English people' intended 'to put a stop to abuses … trac[ing] them back to their causes' ([1840] 1980: xix). Sixty-four years later, Gilman would make much the same argument: 'our study of sociology is prefaced by social pathology [because] society feels first and most what hurts it; … [s]o unbearable is the amount of human pain that we alone among all animals manifest the remarkable phenomenon of suicide—a deliberate effort of a form of life to stop living because living hurts so much …' (Gilman, 1904: 10, 16).

In this tradition socially produced pain has many dimensions—the material experience of physical want, suffering and exhaustion caused by an unjust distribution of material resources and an unjust arrangement of the work of social production; the cognitive experience of lack of agency, stemming not from one's lack of will but from social arrangements that deny that will the opportunities for meaningful action; and emotional experiences of frustration, alienation and loneliness, whose causes also lie in social inequities. Joy is seen as realized in experiences of free creative agency and spontaneous sociability, for which some of the social prerequisites are material security, absence of stress, adequate leisure, education and a cultural endorsement of playfulness.

Methodology

The methodological stance of this sociological tradition is framed by a feminist awareness and anchored in the concerns of the central problematic with socially produced human pain. The early women theorists develop four key methodological strategies:

The Standpoint of Women

The classical women sociologists affirmed that they approached the task of analysing society from their distinctive knowledge and experiences as women, and that this standpoint gave them particular advantages as theorists. Martineau's 'Introduction' to *Society in America* explicitly confronts the significance of her gender for her research. Discounting the frequently made charge 'that my being a woman was [a]

disadvantage' ([1836] 1962: I: xiii), she asserts that women have an advantage over men as social researchers, for they know about and have easy access to domestic life, a key location from which to discover a people's morals and manners. Cooper begins *A Voice from the South* (1892) with a now famous claim for the necessity for the black woman's voice in any social analysis which wishes 'a clearer vision and truer pulse-beat in studying' the American dilemma of democratic aspiration and racial injustice (1892: ii). Moving from their own standpoint as women to the more general issue of the sociological value of women's understanding of the social world, the classical women theorists affirm women's standpoint as an essential lens for discovering the organization of society. Gilman repeatedly turns to women's experience in the home as a basis from which to critique not only the subordination of women but the corruption of society. Gilman (1898, 1903) makes the production of food—one of women's key experiences—the distinguishing feature of human social life. She uses food preparation to illustrate everything that is wrong with a society founded on the 'sexuo-economic relation', Gilman's term for gender stratification. First, food preparation is paradigatmic of the sexuo-economic relation in which the woman gives unpaid service of all sorts in exchange for a livelihood. Second, food preparation reveals the social isolation of the uninstructed and untrained woman in the patriarchal household. Third, food preparation illustrates the public sector vulnerability of women that results from this isolation, for as single purchasers of food, they can exercise little power in the market place. Fourth, this power imbalance between women as consumers and male-dominated capitalist production leads to the variety of social and cultural problems resulting from unfettered greed.

Situated Vantage Points

The women who created sociology's classic tradition of feminist theory moved from this general understanding that one's sex (they did not have the term 'gender') affected what one knew and experienced about the social world, to a more reflective exploration of the significance of differently situated standpoints for the social analyst's quest for knowledge. Since they worked from the feminist position that what women knew and experienced mattered, they focused particularly on the issue of differently situated women; since their theory was a critical one, built around a central concern with socially

produced pain, the differences they most frequently explored were those produced by the inequalities of class, ethnicity, age and race. They sought to create a general theoretical understanding of social life which could capture this complexity of experience and viewpoint. In an early example of this theoretical method, Martineau explores the relation between employer and domestic servant as collisions in the vantage points of variously class-situated actors: '[W]ho that does not live by manual labor understands the feelings of those who do? How many of the hundreds of thousands of employers reflect on the early life of the servants they hire and make allowance for them accordingly? …' (1838a: 424). The maid servant in turn is uncomprehending of her employers' activities—reading and writing, for example, seem to her leisured frivolity (1838a: 424). Cooper's (1892) analysis of American race relations focuses significant attention on the ways those relations create and are reproduced by the different attitudes of white and black women, white and black feminists, and women, both white and black, of various class backgrounds. Weber consistently recognizes categorical differences among women produced by their various locations in social structure, of which location in the class structure seems to her the most important. She understands the profound differences between rural and urban women in the Germany of her day, and the distinctions between rural women themselves, which contain 'such diverse existences as those of the peasant landholder … the resident farm worker, the seasonal worker and the day laborer' ([1912W1919] 1998: 46). In urban society, she argues, differences in class location produce material differences, and these turn into differences in life style, needs and perceptions. Weber is particularly concerned about the argument by privileged-class feminists—including Gilman – that all women can be emancipated and fulfilled through wage sector employment. She argues that within the realities of capitalist employment, most women's wage work, indeed, most people's **[p. 131 ↓]** wage work, is done out of necessity and is hard, 'fragmenting' and unfulfilling. Bearing the double burden of wage work and housework, women of most class positions lead lives in which the solution 'employment for all' will not produce utopia.

Dailiness

The strategy of building a social theory which incorporated the experiences and knowledge of different and unequal social actors allowed the early feminist sociologists to remain firmly oriented to their theoretical problematic—the social causes and the lived actualities of human pain. This orientation also produced a distinctive theoretical account, one which grounded itself in lived actualities by preserving within the theoretical account the details of people's daily lives. They did this by using what literary scholars call 'texture'—those details that remain in any text after the paraphrasable argument has been removed. The paraphrasable argument is of course the abstract proposition. The classical women theorists affirm a theoretical strategy directly at odds with that of Durkheim's foundational principle for male sociology: *'When, then, the sociologist undertakes the investigation of some order of social facts, he [sic] must endeavor to consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations'*([1895] 1938: 44–5; emphasis in original). Sometimes this inclusion of texture is done by a brief list of the concrete particularities of a subject's life—such as in Marianne Weber's summary of the work done by the housewife in her essays, 'Women and Objective Culture' ([1913] 1919) and 'Women's Special Cultural Tasks' ([1918/1919] 1998). Sometimes it is done by more extended descriptions of routine activities, such as Gilman's treatment of housework's many faces in *The Home* (1903) or in Webb's study of the dock workers of East London (1887). Sometimes we are presented with a brief but vivid snapshot, as with Cooper's notes on her traumatic train ride through the South. Sometimes these portraits are more detailed, as in Tristan's accounts of her tour of the London prisons and her visit to Ascot. But above all, the presentation of texture is done through storytelling or narrative. The purest example of this use can be found in Addams, who uses narrative to show a world in which differently situated standpoints collide (for example, housewife and servant, charity workers and their clients, settlement workers and their working class immigrant neighbors) and to offer a rich, often poignant, imagery of the body to evoke the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity and age in individual biography.

Reflexivity

The classic women theorists reject the theoretical stance in which the theorist locates her- or himself outside and apart from what he or she analyses, speaking as a disinterested and omniscient observer. Instead, they use three strategies for locating themselves in their social theory: they let the reader see the particular socioeconomic background from which they speak; they share with the reader their valuational and emotional responses to the situations they analyse, and they work where possible to have the subjects in those situations respond to their analyses. Additionally, they all write major autobiographical accounts—a reflexive practice that contrasts with the male counterparts of their generation. Weber discusses the particular privilege of women like herself—financially secure, educated, in marriages like her own with liberal minded husbands—or unmarried. She argues that this privilege brings responsibility: to represent women's experience in all its diversity in the growing male discourse of social science and to advocate policies for women that are not necessarily the 'most feminist' but that lend themselves most flexibly to the diverse circumstances under which women live. Cooper's major work of sociology, *A Voice from the South*, signals the autobiographical nexus of gender/race/class from her opening pages: the volume's extended title, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, runs opposite a photo of Cooper, showing a well-dressed, clearly African American woman, seated at a table covered with a lace cloth on which several books await her attention. Webb (1926) argues that sociological knowledge can transcend class perspective; presenting herself as a person of extreme class privilege, she describes how her study of poverty leads her, against her class socialization and interests, from an individualistic to an increasingly collectivist interpretation. Tristan, who also identifies herself to us, cryptically in the title of her first major publication, *Peregrinations of a Pariah*, illustrates the recourse to emotional and valuational response which is a distinctive feature of classical feminist method: 'It was a pitiful sight, the courtyard of that hospital … dedication to suffering, which only a true religion inspires, is nowhere evident … [The sick] dying of thirst, uttered feeble, mournful cries … the sufferings … overwhelmed my whole being; I … deplored my own inability to help' ([1838] 1993: 19–20). Addams actively sought strategies for monitoring her accounts, making it a point never to speak to 'a Chicago audience on the subject of the Settlement and its vicinity

without having a neighbor to go with me, that I might curb any hasty generalization **[p. 132 ↓]** by the consciousness that I had an auditor who knew conditions more intimately than I could hope to do'' (1910: 96), and never allowing herself to forget 'the harrowing consciousness of the difference in economic condition between ourselves and our neighbors' (1910: 133–4).

The Organization of Society

The classical women theorists present a model of society as having a threefold organization: interactional, institutional and stratificational. In this model, the interactional order is the fundamental order; here, people relate out of interests, emotions, sociability, moving in and out of multiple relational sites and carrying with them, in transition, between sites and within sites, certain ideas about ethics and manners that they adjust situationally. For example, Gilman defines the subject of sociology as 'human social relation', a phrase she uses to describe the process of reciprocal action and inter-psychic orientation among individuals within the context of a shared collective membership (1900: 278). While much of social life is to be found purely at this ephemeral yet persistent level of association, human interactions also pattern into denser nodes around activities or functions essential to social life. Some of the functional or institutional areas named are the familiar 'key institutions' – economy, government, law, education, religion, family, media. But others are distinctive to this woman-centered approach—charity, recreation, friendship, domesticity and community. Martineau and Addams, for instance, both take as one of the key indicators of the efficacy of social organization the practice of charity in a society. Superimposed on or permeating interactions and institutions is the stratificational order—class inequality, race inequality, ethnic inequality, age inequality and, central to their analyses, gender inequality. One distinction among the theorists is the form of inequality on which they focus: Tristan focuses on class and gender; Martineau, on class, gender and race; Cooper, on race and gender; Addams, on class, ethnicity, age and gender; Gilman, and Weber on gender; and Webb, on class.

The feature of stratification which particularly concerns them is domination. Like any group of critical theorists, the classical women sociologists offer two visions of society— a vision of society as it ought to be organized and a vision of society as it is organized.

The good society fosters human happiness through social arrangements that promote individual agency, moral autonomy and spontaneous sociability. Domination is a power relation whose most active feature is the denial of the subordinate's subjectivity—that is, the subordinate's capacity for and right to agency, moral autonomy and spontaneous sociability.

Domination is presented as working both as a structure and a process, an underlying grammar of social relations. All the early women theorists offer definitions of domination. For Martineau the crucial issue in conceptualizing domination is always that of the enforced 'submission of one's will to another' (1838a: 411). For Cooper, it is the refusal to allow difference an equal place, the need to make difference—whether of gender, class, color or shade—the basis for hierarchy; in America, domination distorts difference to mean both departure from and subordinate to the norm of Anglo Saxon whiteness. For Weber, as for Addams, domination is the violation of a fundamental ethical principle—the duty to acknowledge the subjectivity of the other, a principle Weber summarizes: 'that each one must heed the command in every other human to become an end in oneself, that no person may regard a fellow human being *as simply the means to his/her own personal ends*. In practice there is hardly any conceivable human relationship that can disregard this principle if it wishes to be ethically sufficient …' (Weber, [1912a/1919] 1998: 217; emphasis in original). Domination, then, is a critical concept, that is, it is the social condition that must be ameliorated.

Significance of the Individual

The human individual is given a dynamic and essential role in classical feminist social theory. Realization of the human potential is seen as a universal mandate for social organization; a key measure of societal efficacy is the degree to which human happiness is facilitated or subverted by social structure. The individual social actor is thus neither determined by nor independent of social organization; rather, social actor and social process relate in varying degrees of mutually satisfactory or unsatisfactory interdependence. Above all, for classical feminist social theory, the willful individual is not a problem to be solved by social structure but a living fact to be nourished and empowered.

The women theorists assign the individual a complex of qualities and capacities. Perhaps distinctive to feminist theoretical tradition is the understanding of the social actor as an embodied subjectivity; personhood exists in a physical body, bearing the signifiers of gender, class, race, age and health, and responding to enactments of domination with pain, exhaustion, debilitation. Here then is a major cause of socially produced human pain—social arrangements which are unkind to the human body. Descriptions of **[p. 133 ↓]** embodied human pain are to be found throughout the women's writings—the beating and mutilation of black slaves in America (Martineau), the physical collapse of convicts from intricately contrived hard labor (Tristan), aged working-class immigrants whose hands are gnarled by arthritis and overwork (Addams), housewives providing house-service on weary feet all day and deep into the night (Gilman and Weber), black washerwomen 'pinched and stooped' over their huge loads of laundry (Cooper), and dock workers bearing lumber on their 'hummies', neck callouses developed by and essential to their work (Webb).

These embodied people are characterized by a rich inner life marked by agentic subjectivity – by capacities to think and to will, by ethical orientation and by irrepressible desire. The actor is understood as having purposes of his or her own which the reformer and the social analyst must take into account: 'We are not content to include all men in our hopes, *but have become conscious that all men are hoping* and are part of the same movement of which we are a part' (Addams, [1902] 1907: 179; emphasis added). Addams' theory of human development revolves around the way this will is nourished, shaped and thwarted. In this theory, the human sense of ethics is seen as rooted in human propensities for sociability, kindness and aspiration towards the good. People wish to find themselves in right relation with others and with universal principles of good action: 'If there be any human power and business and privilege which is absolutely universal, it is the discovery and adoption of the principle and laws of duty' (Martineau, [1837] 1962: II: 229–30). The capacity of the human individual to hold on to will, desire and aspiration even in the most repressive and degrading of circumstances is a central faith in this theoretical tradition, an object of awe, and the underlying imperative behind their theoretical project of critique and change: 'It is that "Something" – that *Singing* Something, which distinguished the first Man from the last ape, which in a subtle way tagged him with the picturesque Greek title *anthropos*, the *upward face*, and which justifies the claim to equality by birthright …' (Cooper, [1925] 1998: 292–3).

Significance of Ideas

In the tradition of classical feminist sociology, collective ideas serve as the key social mechanism linking the potentially willful, desirous, ethical human individual to a societal order which teeters between domination, on the one hand, and the facilitation of human happiness, on the other. Human beings, motivated by ideas which pattern interests and ethics, act in ways that reproduce or change social structures. Although individuals are understood to have the capacity to generate new ideas, in most routine social situations they acquire their ideas, and thus their motives for action, from the collectivities in which they live. But collective ideas are not necessarily reflective of the human potential for agency, sociability and ethical 'right relation'. Instead, much more frequently and pervasively, collective ideas arise out of prevailing forms of societal organization as those forms have evolved over history. Thus human beings may be motivated to act in ways that reproduce social structures inimical to their happiness.

The classical women theorists identify two major societal sources of wrong ideas: structures of domination and uneven social change. For Weber a major source of ethical distortion comes from patriarchy, the system of male domination. She shows how the doctrine of freedom of conscience became the basic moral claim in both the political revolutions of the eighteenth century and the philosophic achievement of German Idealism. Yet in looking at the marriage relation, the philosophers let the male desire for domination override the philosophical argument for moral autonomy, arguing that the woman in entering into marriage willingly agrees as part of that contract to relinquish her autonomy to the husband. For Gilman, human ideas have been distorted by the interaction of capitalist domination with patriarchy. Together these have produced an 'androcentric culture', which has valued being male rather than being human (1911) and created a system of false economic concepts which have corrupted work —potentially the greatest source of joy—into an experience of deep alienation. Cooper locates the motivational pressure towards domination in American racism. She analyses the situation of the African American as the direct result of the Anglo American's confusion of belief: '[T]he problematical position at present occupied by descendants of Africans in the American social polity … grow[s] … out of the continued indecision in the mind of the more powerful descendants of the Saxons as to whether it is expedient

to apply the maxims of their religion to their civil and political relationships' (1892: 185). Ideas also become misaligned with human needs and aspiration because of historic social change. For Martineau, an 'anomaly' may arise between the morals a society formally upholds and the manners or routinized practices it creates over time. She finds such anomalies in the United States between the founding moral principle of the society, the principle of equality of claim to inalienable rights, and the institutionalized practices of slavery, the subjugation of **[p. 134 ↓]** women, the tyranny of public opinion, and the fetishism of wealth. For Addams, the chief problem in United States society in her day is what she terms the 'belatedness' of the relation between industrial production and ethics; while material production has become increasingly 'socialized', ethics have remained rooted in the restrictive values of individual morality, militarism and loyalty to the family. The thesis that distorted thinking sustains domination, while right ideas can initiate ameliorative social change towards the good society, undergirds the classical women theorists' understanding of their social role as theorists: they will create ideas that can help produce the good society.

Social Change

Classical feminist social theory was in large measure created because the early women sociologists wished to bring about positive social change to alleviate human pain and actively promote human joy. The women theorists saw their theoretical work as having three roles in the production of ameliorative social change: as a catalyst for changes already in motion, as a pressure on the state for social reform, and as a project of radical transformation through an appeal to the disempowered. Martineau, Gilman and Cooper all argue that their social critiques would help clarify and accelerate changes already under way. They see the potential for ameliorative change in the lines of tension existing in American society, in the anomalous situation between formally proclaimed morals of equality and routinized practices of domination (Martineau), in the clash between a patriarchalcapitalist system of widespread alienation and the irrepressible human impulses for self-actualization through work and sociability (Gilman), and in the racial and gender power struggles triggered by the newly enfranchised African Americans' drive for self-improvement and the increasingly mass-based women's movement for political rights (Cooper). They all saw their own theoretical analyses

as intended to add clarity and energy to these emergent critiques. Cooper, for example, argues that 'from her peculiar coigne of vantage as a quiet observer … [t]he colored woman … is watching the movements of the contestants … and is all the better qualified, perhaps, to weight and judge and advise because not herself in the excitement of the race' (1892: 138).

Of theorists who sought to bring pressure on the state, Weber believed that the legal system was potentially a neutral but powerful mechanism for ameliorative social change and that with the pressure of feminist mobilization it could be turned away from patriarchal practices and towards policies making for greater gender equality. Webb argued that social experiments in alternative social organization were taking place all the time as collectivities, businesses and governments try different actions to see if they will produce desired effects on various groups of people. She sought through social science research to analyse those social experiments that bring political democracy to economic life, as for example, the consumer cooperative movement and municipal government efforts to procure a collective rather than an individual good – such as roads and parks (the latter done with her husband Sidney). Her sociological strategy was to systematize and promulgate these 'natural' strategies for communitarian group life.

Still other theorists called for the radical repatterning of social relationships. Gilman, for example, argued for a fundamental restructuring of the heterosexual household in order to give everyone a genuine home from which they could develop their fullest potential. Tristan and Addams both sought the transformation of capitalism into a socialized democracy. Tristan's approach was militant: 'Workers,… the day has come where you must *act* … in the interest of your own cause. At stake are your very lives —or death, that horrible, ever-menacing death: misery and starvation…. You have but one legal and legitimate recourse permissible before God and man: THE UNIVERSAL UNION OF WORKING MEN AND WOMEN' ([1844] 1983: 27–8). Addams' approach was reformist and moderately stated yet hers may have been the most pervasively radical theory of ameliorative social change. In the context of contemporary American society, Addams states that what is called for is a 'social ethic'—a truly democratic and collectivist culture—to both mirror the new socialized forms of production and to curb its excesses. This ethical transformation requires, first, a change in consciousness and habits of interaction so that people learn to identify their individual interests with

the common good. Second, to acquire these new habits of thought and relationship people must invent new forms and sites of association: settlement houses, trades unions, educational clubs, consumer leagues, study groups, investigative task forces and cooperatives. Third, people under the impetus of the social ethic and of these new associations must pressure the state to formulate socially responsible policies. Addams, thus, called for an entirely new arrangement of culture, group life, government and production—one in which the individual, social organizations and government act out of concern for the well-being of the full, and fully differentiated, community.

[p. 135 ↓]

Significance of Classical Feminist Social Theory

The rediscovery of classical feminist sociological theory, as outlined above, has several important implications for sociological theory and the history of sociology. It shows us that the contemporary burgeoning of feminist sociology and feminist sociological theory can claim a heritage in sociology's history. It expands our understanding of the nature of theory construction, the ways theory is written, and the places where it is created. It leads us to recover some of these forgotten sites for sociological work, such as the settlement movement and the social science movement. It expands the tradition of sociology as a critical science. And, it shows the writing of the history of sociology as a complex construction involving multiple politics, including a politics of gender.

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