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IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY: LESBIAN-FEMINISM AS
POLITICAL THEORY

A Dissertation Presented

by

SHANE PHELAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1987

Department of Political Science

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IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY:
LESBIAN-FEMINISM AS POLITICAL THEORY

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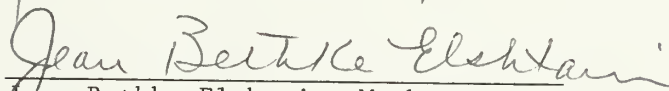
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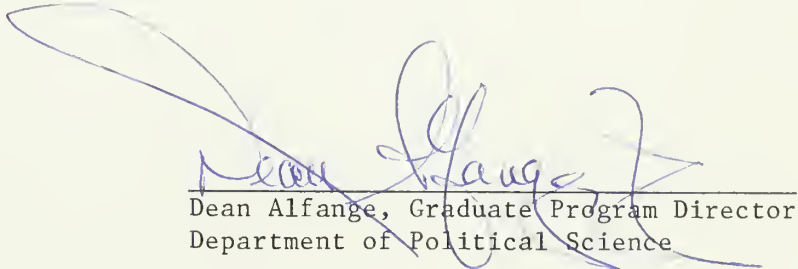
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people that must be thanked for their help in a project such as this. I would first like to thank the Department of Political Science, for continued support and encouragement over the years; my tenure as a student there has been singularly blessed. I would particularly like to acknowledge the members of my dissertation committee. And most especially, I must thank my chair, Jerry King. His belief in me, his support for an idiosyncratic project, his ability to keep me calm and focussed on what mattered, and his sense of humor made an adventure out of what might have been an agony.

The agony was averted at home by Kaile Goodman. Her technological support, in the form of a computer, made an incalculable difference in the ease of my project. Her expertise and willingness to explain the technology transformed potential into actuality. And her love and patience with a monomaniac helped me to remember that I am a human being even in graduate school. Words on a page will never be enough.

Most of all, I thank God for all of the above, and for everything else.

ABSTRACT

IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY:

LESBIAN-FEMINISM AS POLITICAL THEORY

MAY 1987

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The dissertation seeks to understand lesbian-feminism as a theory addressing the needs of lesbians for a positive identity and sense of community. It locates this development within the larger context of the problems facing liberalism in the late twentieth century, in particular the issues surrounding the social construction of the self. The criticisms of modern society made by lesbian-feminists are largely the same as those made by male and heterosexual female communitarian opponents of liberalism, though their understandings of their projects often diverge.

Early chapters examine the problems of liberalism, first in the recent literature of political theory, then

in the specific context of the treatment of lesbians. Liberalism is seen to hide or minimize loci of social conflict in a way that, ironically, denies dignity to those it seeks to help. Chapter Three examines the rise of lesbian-feminism as a response to this 'poverty of liberalism' and finds that lesbian-feminism fails to provide a ground for genuine autonomy and dignity, instead offering the lesbian an insular community that is defined in terms strikingly similar to those used by opponents of homosexual practices and identity. Chapter Four treats the issue of sadomasochism as a result of the peculiar configurations of power and sexuality engendered by lesbian-feminism, considering the argument as both a logical development of these configurations and as evidence of their problematic nature.

The final chapter concludes that the failure of lesbian-feminism to develop a theory that remedies the problems of liberalism without engendering a totalist, narcissistic community is in fact due to the nature of the modern self, a self that is peculiarly trained for and suited to the liberal ideal of self-control and responsible choice. This self cannot be simply disposed of, but must be accounted for in the further development

of liberalism in a direction that does justice to the reality of community and social life while nonetheless acknowledging the dignity of a self that transcends social construction.

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INTRODUCTION

Why would a political theorist write about lesbian-feminism? Is there even such a thing as lesbian-feminism to be addressed? If there is, what does it have to do with political theory?

Political theories premise themselves upon conceptions of human nature and the self. These conceptions carry recommendations for the construction of society and polity. The premises do not concern simply the questions we traditionally label 'political' - questions involving obligation, order, and justice. They also bear on the issues at the heart of all social relations - problems of language, of sexuality, of difference.

In the current era, these issues have emerged at the forefront of political theory. This emergence is at least partially due to the breakdown of the liberal separation between society and politics which is itself so characteristically modern. The challenges to liberalism have relied heavily upon the recognition of the ways in which our political relations are shaped by our social and economic conditions and expectations, and this recognition has served in turn to structure our

ideas of how a more human, more just, order would look.

Lesbian-feminism, as a theory of the oppression and nature of lesbians and women, is one of these visions. Seeing the limits of liberalism's appeal for justice, lesbian-feminists have sought to explain those limits and to offer an alternative conception of proper human relations. This conception is a species of the family of theories that is loosely labelled 'communitarian'. The hallmark of communitarianism is, first, the recognition that humans are not ontologically isolated - that they are 'social animals', *zooi politikoi*, by their nature bound together through language and culture; and second, the appeal to a return to, or erection of, a political order that does justice to this recognition by fostering and enriching the ties between us. These theories are neither 'conservative' or 'radical' in nature, unless they are both - united in their rejection of the limited liberal state. For writers such as Alisdair MacIntyre and Michael Oakeshott, the communitarian stance serves to criticize the poverty of tradition and order in modernity. For those such as Karl Marx, it provides the wedge with which to pry open the locked doors of capitalism and expose the tyranny behind neutrality.

A prime example of the problematic status of communitarianism is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Seemingly radical in his critique of the society around him, an inspiration for the French Revolution, he was vilified by Edmund Burke as the author of wanton destruction. However, this radical loudly protested the growing license and equality of women in society, earning himself the hatred of feminists and the title of reactionary. Is there a contradiction? Perhaps to the liberal, with her particular understanding of equality and freedom, but not to Rousseau. Amidst the complexities of his thought we see a coherence. This coherence rests on the understanding that political life does not exist in a vacuum, that political community requires social cohesion of a sort that capitalism erodes. His conception of the just political order is inseparable from his vision of the moral family and its 'natural' order.

Is this inseparability a fluke, a flaw unique to Rousseau? Or is it a consequence of the nature of communitarian thought itself, a danger to be addressed by any critic of liberalism? Communitarians on all points of the political spectrum have had to face charges that they in fact ignore the rights and freedoms of some in

order to ensure those of others, or that they reject fundamental liberties in the quest for those overlooked by liberal theorists. Whether the mandate arises from God, tradition, or the general will, the question that looms before the communitarian is, what do we do with those who do not fit into God's order, who defy tradition, who reject or obstruct the will of the people? In short, the problem is: how do we deal with difference?

Lesbians in the twentieth century are a group defined by difference from an assumed norm. The history of their attempts to understand their difference is a classic example of the problems facing all societies today. Lesbian-feminism is one attempt at explaining and supporting this difference; as such it provides us with a 'case study', if you will, of the strengths and weaknesses of communitarian thinking in the twentieth century.

If it can be said that there is one primary influence behind this dissertation, the influence must be that of Michel Foucault. I have fought with Foucault (in several senses) for years; this battle will surely continue. His work has been called anarchist by some, latently reformist by others; I will not, cannot assess

those charges here. What I will suggest is that he has provided us with a new set of questions to ask, a new perspective on power and language and action that is sorely needed if we are to progress in our thinking about community and liberty. In making these questions my own, I perhaps use Foucault for purposes he would not sanction. However, the range of appropriation and recognition of one's work by a diverse group is surely an indicator of the power of one's thought, as well as being out of one's hands. If I have tamed him, he has certainly energized and radicalized me; what higher tribute can a teacher receive?

I do believe that the years ahead will see a growing body of work on the connection between Foucault and the great stream of Protestant Enlightenment thought, as well as the French liberal tradition. It is my aim in the work at hand to reclaim the Augustinian impulse that gives rise to liberalism while pruning the modern branches of positivism and privatization. These growths give rise to theories that acknowledge what they neglect; my hope is that we might find some vision that can do justice to all the needs (if not all the wants) of humans and their home.

CHAPTER ONE

LIBERALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In theory, the liberal order should have collapsed long ago. Its lack of a public philosophy; its inability to base any theory of justice on the common needs of the community; the incompatible claims that can be founded on an appeal to the interests of the individual (the only basis of social policy liberalism acknowledges) - these deficiencies make it impossible for liberalism to articulate a theory of the good society or to reconcile the claims of competing interest groups.¹

...the crucial moral opposition is between liberal individualism in some version or other and the Aristotelian tradition in some version or other... (the differences) extend beyond ethics and morality to the understanding of human action, so that rival conceptions of the social sciences, of their limits and possibilities, are intimately bound up with the antagonistic confrontation of these two alternative ways of viewing the human world.²

Is the contest of modernity that between Aristotle and the liberals? Why hasn't the liberal order collapsed? And why does Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue, introduce Nietzsche, the renowned critic of liberalism, as the worthy - the only - opponent of Aristotle?

For Americans, the conflict between those with agendas for the good life, the good society, and those who oppose any such public program is a basic struggle of

political life. Historically, this struggle has had varied forms and outcomes - a free market engenders some tyrannies even as it displaces others; free speech is both liberating and threatening, to individuals and to societies. In the late twentieth century, liberalism appears as an incoherent, alienating, boring doctrine; at its best a compromise position, at its worst a mask for the many faces of power. It is this evaluation that leads MacIntyre to counterpose Aristotle and Nietzsche. He believes, as do many, that liberalism in any form is rationally indefensible and that therefore the only alternatives are a return to Aristotelian ethics and an open irrationalism, the triumph of will over reason:

...there is no third alternative and more particularly there is no alternative provided by those thinkers at the heart of the contemporary conventional curriculum in moral philosophy, Hume, Kant and Mill. It is no wonder that the teaching of ethics is so often destructive and sceptical in its effects upon the minds of those taught.³

To MacIntyre, the choice is clear. Between a return to some pre-modern morality and a world of "arbitrary order and nihilistic resistance"⁴, his vote is for pre-modern visions. But how are we to construct such a

morality, given our modern scepticism? Is it possible for us now to construct an ethics and politics simultaneously meaningful and non-oppressive?

Before we embark on an answer to this, we must satisfy ourselves that the situation is as dire as the critics of liberalism have painted it. Is liberalism in fact the defective, dangerous doctrine that it may seem? In the Anglo-American world, liberalism is still a very viable philosophy, both academically and culturally. Lest we think that we have seen its burial, Anthony Arblaster reminds us that

No creed or doctrine could attract the kind of fierce, vital hostility which liberalism often stimulates were it a complete anachronism. Totally dead doctrines - those with no significant hold over people's minds - do not attract that type of hostility. . . the presumption must be, therefore, that liberalism is alive enough to be worth attacking, or defending.⁵

What must be discovered is no longer the defects of liberalism, but the source of its tenacity in a world that seems to cry for more than liberalism can possibly offer. The strength of liberalism is clearly not due solely to the force of liberal arguments; in its

clearest, analytical form liberalism seems an impossible basis for social relations, just or unjust.

Individualism

The core of liberalism's problem has been its metaphysical basis in an individualism that isolates us from one another, both as objects for analysis and as subjects engaged in social intercourse. In explaining the connection between ontological and ethical individualism, Arblaster says that the effect of seeing the individual as more 'real' than society is to lend a higher moral status to the individual simply because she is an individual. This reinforces the atomistic conception of society that is behind liberalism.

Meaning at its simplest no more than 'the single human being', there is almost invariably an additional weight of emphasis on the aspect of singleness, on what separates or distinguishes one person from another, rather than on what one person has in common with his or her fellow human beings. . . . It tends therefore to impute a high degree of completeness and self-sufficiency to the single human being, with the implication that separateness, autonomy is the fundamental, metaphysical human condition.⁶

The unity of the Greek world, the unreflective coincidence of cosmic and individual meanings and values, broke down under the force of empire. The retrieval of Aristotle in medieval Christianity was essentially an attempt to return to this orderly cosmos and its appreciation of the social nature of personality. The breakdown of medieval Christianity resulted in the collapse of that cosmos and its teleology. Conceptions of the good that had earlier been treated as natural or God-given were revealed as excuses for violence and domination.

Within this shifting world, the liberal project was not a rejection of meaning, but rather an attempt to relocate it in a place whose reality could not be denied. This place was the individual. Whether through religion or philosophy, through Luther's conscience or Descartes' cogito, the individual was accorded ontological primacy. Of course, the ease and comfort with which this is achieved depends upon how one conceives that individual, and especially upon the conception and evaluation of human reason. For the Enlightenment, reason was both universally accessible and singularly directive; that is, the lack of a God whose revelation was a clear and

reliable source of public policy did not rule out the possibility of what Michael Sandel has referred to as "subjects capable of constituting meaning on their own - as agents of construction in the case of the right, as agents of choice in the case of the good."⁷ Once unshackled from prejudice and tradition, human reason may be counted upon to find its way to certain universal principles of justice.

However, reason cannot provide a principle of the good - of a proper telos for humans - without violating that which the deontological liberal sees as the essence of humanness - the capacity for autonomous choice. The essential distinction between liberalism and other doctrines is its focus on the will rather than reason as the decisive feature in human life and dignity. The fact that 'construction of the right' and 'choice of the good' can be separated is indicative of this. The liberal has a teleology, but that teleology is rooted in the will - the capacity for moral choice.⁸ Because of this difference, non-liberals can easily see liberalism as a doctrine bereft of ends or standards. Liberals themselves have seen their project as antiteleological, because it is opposed to organic or rationalist schemas

for society. However, this is a misunderstanding. The 'concrete' reality of the individual and her desires is ontologically and ethically prior to any construction of the good; however, this reality itself carries within it the focus on choice so characteristic of Protestantism and its progeny.

Utilitarian versus Deontological Liberalism

This primacy of the individual led liberals in two directions, depending on their epistemological foundations. For the later British empiricists, the only ethics compatible with liberalism was utilitarianism, which hoped to eliminate the seeming arbitrariness of social teleologies by direct appeals to individual happiness. The rationalist heritage of the European continent, however, remained tied to a notion of humanity based, not on desire, but on reason and will. While the utilitarian ethic possesses the rationalist virtue of consistency in its attempt to avoid evaluations of desires, it cannot provide a commitment to justice that prevails over public opinion.

In contrast, Kantian liberalism attempts to retain the primacy of justice in ethics, to provide a bastion for individual determination of the ends of life. Michael Sandel explains this: "though it [Kantianism] rejects the possibility of an objective moral order, this liberalism does not hold that just anything goes. It affirms justice, not nihilism. The notion of a universe empty of intrinsic meaning does not, on the deontological view, imply a world wholly ungoverned by regulative principles"⁹. The problem then becomes obvious: it is "to find a standpoint neither compromised by its implication in the world nor dissociated and so disqualified by detachment."¹⁰ The Kantian needs to provide an account of justice that does not become an account of the good while simultaneously remaining above the relativity and multiplicity of particular preferences. The public realm is the realm of freedom, but in a distinctly non-Aristotelian sense. Charles Taylor describes Kant's conception of the point of politics as "the regulation of external freedom, in a way consonant with morality, and therefore inner freedom. Not that political structures can hope to realize this latter. That is quite ruled out...since law can never

direct motives, and we must never try. But the political structures will come closer to the idea of law if they organize external freedom in keeping with the basic principle of this idea, that of a moral order of free beings."¹¹

While this is not the place for a full exposition of Kant's liberalism, some points are in order. The basic premise of moral thinking for Kant is that "human beings are rational agents. As such, what they must be accorded above all is the respect of being treated as ends and not just as means. . . but to respect a being as an originator of ends is above all to respect his freedom of action."¹² The withdrawal of God from the public world does not, for Kant, eliminate meaning. Rather, it frees us to recognize the essential dignity of humans. The fundamental fact in a disenchanted world is the capacity of the human to originate ends, to choose and to act. Any politics that obscures this by reliance on a substantive concept of the good is ipso facto a violation of human dignity.

This charge tells against utilitarianism as well as against any Aristotelian doctrine. To prioritize happiness is to sneak in a telos, however loosely formed.

If our goal is to respect the freedom of originators of ends, then the only ground on which we can restrict the freedom of one such agent in our attempt at reconciliation is to harmonize it with the freedom of others. Happiness cannot be a justification of such restriction. No one else's happiness can be, because to overrule his own goals in the name of those of someone else would be to use him as a means. And his own happiness cannot be, because to restrict him for his own utility would be to determine for him in what his happiness consists. This would be an unacceptable paternalism, one that would constitute a rejection of his status as a free rational agent.¹³

While happiness may be the goal of each individual (or it may not), to a Kantian liberal it has no more priority in political debate than does any other individual choice. The individual capacity for choice remains the fundamental value, the unacknowledged telos of liberalism. This telos demands that each be left to decide for herself what her desires and ends are.

While Kant's liberalism appears at first as a fortress for individual dignity and freedom, it has suffered the fate of most distinctively modern political theory. In attempting to eliminate the grip of tyranny, liberals of all persuasions find themselves losing also their grasp on community and on morality. The immediate

consequence of ontological individualism is to problematize social relations - thus the eternal recurrence of contract theory in liberal thought. Contract theory serves both to provide a description of social relations and to ground arguments for particular forms of those relations.

In the most powerful contemporary presentation of contract theory, John Rawls has argued that we must distinguish between persons as private beings with "attachments and loves that they believe they would not, or could not, stand apart from", who cannot imagine themselves apart from "certain religious and philosophical convictions and commitments"¹⁴, and as public agents whose sense of self has no grounding in particular social matrices. However, Michael Sandel argues convincingly that "the deontological conception of the self cannot admit the distinction required. Allowing constitutive possibilities where 'private' ends are at stake would seem unavoidably to allow at least the possibility that 'public' ends could be constitutive as well. Once the bounds of the self are no longer fixed, individuated in advance and given prior to experience, there is no saying in principle what sorts of experiences

could shape or reshape them, no guarantee that only 'private' and never 'public' events could conceivably be decisive."¹⁵

The liberal who cannot admit of such a publicly constituted self may retreat to utilitarianism, hoping to conceptualize human relations along abstract but inclusive lines. Charles Taylor explains:

What did utilitarianism have going for it? A lot of things undoubtedly: its seeming compatibility with scientific thought; its this-worldly humanist focus, its concern with suffering. But one of the powerful background factors behind much of this appeal was epistemological. A utilitarian ethic seemed to be able to fit the canons of rational validation as these were understood in the intellectual culture nourished by the epistemological revolution of the seventeenth century and the scientific outlook which partly sprang from it.

In the utilitarian perspective, one validated an ethical position by hard evidence. You count the consequences for human happiness of one or another course, and you go with the one with the highest favourable total. What counts as human happiness was thought to be something conceptually unproblematic, a scientifically establishable domain of facts like others. One could abandon all the metaphysical or theological factors - commands of God, natural rights, virtues - which made ethical questions scientifically undecidable. Bluntly, we could calculate.¹⁶

However, as mentioned before, this choice is not available. To the extent that we adopt utilitarian theory, we agree to conceive of one another as potential means to happiness. While this has the attraction of a certain pessimistic realism about it, it has not been possible to reconcile this vision with the demand for individual autonomy and respect. And so the liberal is stuck, as Arblaster points out:

This principle of respect for each human being as an end in himself is often seen as central to liberal individualism.

Yet at the same time there is another strand within liberalism which asserts and reasserts that the individual is naturally egoistic, and therefore tends, as Wolff has rightly pointed out, to treat other individuals not as ends, but as means to his or her own ends. . . .Of course it is possible to resolve this contradiction by jettisoning one or other of the two elements. But an individualism or egoism which abandons the principles of equal rights and respect for the human person...is certainly no longer liberal. While on the other hand the abandonment of psychological egoism requires a reconstruction of the theory of the personality and human motivation which liberalism has never undertaken. So the contradiction remains.¹⁷

What exactly does Arblaster mean when he says that liberalism requires a 'reconstruction of the theory of the personality and human motivation'? In the effort to

avoid substantive teleology, liberalism has been forced to abstract itself from any conceptions of human nature or psychology, lest it sneak in ideas of the proper ends or conduct of life. The demand for dignity and rights is taken to be completely independent of the particular character of the individual - in fact, liberalism as a political doctrine cannot allow itself any concern with individual character. However, this avoidance is possible only at the price of incoherence and irrelevance. Any attempt to justify individual rights must be based on some notion of what it is in us that commands respect. And this notion in turn must act as a prescription, an injunction upon us to build our lives and our society in such a way as to foster and develop those features.¹⁸ Attempts to avoid this logic of rights by making some abstract idea, such as the capacity for rational choice, the basis of rights cannot reflect any concrete connection with actual policies and choices in political life. That such a liberalism is only incidentally liberating is evident in Kant's acceptance of the need for total obedience to the state on the part of the individual, even when the state is oppressive. The Kantian freedom to choose becomes immediately either the

freedom of the Stoic or that of the libertine - a retrieval of inner dignity amidst tyranny, or a denial of any responsibility within society. Kant falls off the Stoic precipice, and when he tries to scramble back over the edge, his grip is repulsed by Nietzsche. Nietzsche it is who says out loud what so many were (and are) thinking, but afraid to say: that humanism is nihilism, that liberalism is a doomed attempt at the survival of meaning.

The Endurance of Liberalism

In his attack on Kant, Nietzsche provides us with a perspective on liberalism that has since become ubiquitous:

inferior in his psychology and knowledge of human nature; way off when it comes to great historical values...a dogmatist through and through, but ponderously sick of this inclination, to such an extent that he wished to tyrannize it, but also weary right away of skepticism...a delayer and a mediator.¹⁹

In this statement we can find the charges that today are levelled at liberalism: its faulty ontological, epistemological and psychological foundations; its

abstraction and ahistoricity; its ambiguity and lack of inspiring force. Liberalism is indeed the political theory of scepticism, but it is a scepticism which is continually referring to ideals in a most dogmatic way -- surely the strangest sort of thinking to be seen.

This strange thought has, however, an enduring appeal to moderns. Its appeal springs, I believe, from the fundamental dilemma of modernity - the sense that something has been lost, coupled with the fear of getting it back. Our alienation - from ourselves, from one another, from God - is real and painful. The liberal sees clearly, however, that this alienation cannot just be transcended or eliminated by the re-constitution of society. Once sundered from a source of intrinsic meaning, humans can only pretend to return to unity and purpose by suppressing and oppressing that which is not part of the scheme. The 'glassy essence' of reason and truth is produced at the expense of constructions of the Other that lie in wait beyond the borders. The liberal focus on choice is an attempt to retain the awareness that beyond Otherness is humanity - that the patient is still an agent, the homosexual a citizen, the prisoner a

human being - and that this humanity lays claim to some sort of acknowledgement.

Thus we see that MacIntyre's conclusion, though perhaps accurate logically speaking, is fundamentally misleading. It may be true that for modernity the choice lies between some sort of Aristotelianism and something else. But to see Nietzsche as the final representative of that 'something else' is to concede the nihilism that he recognized as a constant threat for Western philosophy. Nietzsche and Aristotle would be united in their disdain for liberalism, and on surprisingly similar grounds. Liberalism asks us to behave as if we agreed on ends, but only short of the point where we betray ourselves; and it hopes that the point of betrayal is beyond the points of necessary social intercourse.

To the totalist, the metaphysician, whether teleological or psychological, this is a naive hope; to the liberal, on the other hand, it must be the constant focus of concern. Hence the liberal is forced to sift and re-sift, weigh and reweigh, explain and justify again and again. In this, she angers those who demand a complete and logical answer, as well as those who want to be done with deliberation. To those who are, in Mill's

words, "destitute of faith and terrified of skepticism", the liberal lives in bad faith or false consciousness; reluctant to make final choices, she refuses to face up to the need to reassert community and order, thus failing to give these issues their due.

The truth is that the liberal agenda is simply different than the non-liberal, however often the two may meet. On this agenda, the top is always reserved for individual rights and choice; or rather, the individual's rights are prior to any issue on the agenda, high or low. And this reservation would annoy Nietzsche just as much as it would Aristotle. This reservation is indicative of the location of meaning for the liberal, and it suggests that this meaning is just as real to her as the good life, God, or the will to power is to another. It may be incoherent, as Taylor suggests. It may be used to mask the flow and absorption of power, as Foucault demonstrated. Yet it is meaning nonetheless.

The Limits of Liberalism: Oppression and Identity

If liberalism is not premised on the destruction of meaning, however, it is surely reflective of the loss of

some shared values and goals. In its ontological form, liberalism functions as a meta-theory, an argument about what we should include in political discourse which becomes explicit in its attempt to draw a line between public and private matters. The importance of this line is peculiar to liberalism, and it opens it to attack from two sides. On the one hand, there are those who fear the disintegration of morality and tradition, of shared understandings, as the result of public neutrality; on the other are those who perceive the play of power, the weight of established concepts and discourses within a context that denies them. Sheldon Wolin puts the problem thus:

If we were to imagine two intelligent readers of Hobbes, each equally distant from him in time, the first representing the middle of the fifteenth century, the other the middle of the nineteenth, we would naturally expect each to make radically different criticisms on some points, but we might be less prepared to find them agreeing on others. Our fifteenth-century reader would be shocked by Hobbes' sardonic treatment of religion and the ruthless way he divested political philosophy of all traces of religious thought and feeling. The nineteenth-century man, surveying Hobbes from the vantage point of Marx and the classical economists, would pronounce him utterly lacking in any understanding of the influence of economic factors upon politics. Both criticisms would

add up to the conclusion that Hobbes had achieved a pure political theory by sloughing off religious elements while remaining innocent of economics.²⁰

Since Hobbes first wrote, writers have examined one or the other side of this conundrum. Today, however, these two diverse criticisms are increasingly being bound together, most prominently in the work of Wolin, Strauss, Connolly and MacIntyre²¹. The modern twins of reason and power rush to fill the gap left by the absence of traditional norms, and the forms of modernity are the varying compromises and conquests effected between these two. Unable to restore historically spontaneous unity, moderns attempt its imitation through denial of disunity or the scientific explanation and destruction of diversity. However, denial cannot do the job; for those upon whom unity is pressed are irrevocably aware of their fundamental divisions.

It is for this reason that much current study is focussed on groups and issues not long ago thought of as peripheral to politics. Thus, thought some of the issues brought up by racial and ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and women have not been readily addressable by

liberalism many of them are; and this fact has consequences both for the political strategies of the groups and for our related understanding of politics and the political. The liberal bases her political views and hopes on a clear demarcation between the political and the social, the public and the private. The experiences of minorities in the last thirty years have illustrated the shortcomings of such theoretical demarcation. In particular, the struggles of sexual minorities have revealed and made problematic the connections between public policy and morality, political theory and ontology. The arguments in these struggles center directly around the nature of the human self. Every theoretical and social construction provides some answer to the questions: can we say in what humanness consists? If so, in what does it consist? What are the responsibilities of actors - public and private, individual and corporate - given this standard? What sort of society is required in order for this humanity to manifest itself?

Liberal individualism parts with other theories when it posits the capacity for judgment and choice as the central feature of humanity. Its insistence that we cannot - dare not - say anything definitive about

humanness leaves both an opening for individual definition and a black hole for public validation, community and mutual responsibility. The Hegelian revolt against this void is being manifested today in the construction of new social ontologies and teleologies which attempt to provide a stronger ground for the self. The awareness that something is missing in modern liberal societies has combined with the perception of injustice and pain to produce a plethora of critiques and visions for fulfillment.

The centerpiece of these critiques is the category of oppression. Oppression is a word with many contexts and shades, and it is precisely this ambiguity that gives it its power. To the political theorist, oppression consists in "the systematically unjust exercise of authority or power over a person or group of persons".²² However, in other usages oppression refers, not primarily to the actions of others, but to the psychic condition of the individual. To be oppressed in this sense is to be shaped by oppression, to be stunted by the weight of the burden placed on one's shoulders. This burden does not always result from state action. It issues, rather, from the entire social matrix of which politics is but a part.

In this broad sense, oppression involves the denial of one's own voice through the imposition of an external, alien standard for the interpretation and judgment of one's thought, action and being.

The problems and issues involved in the category of oppression are manifold. When does another's opinion impose on me? What sort of power must be involved to make this imposition oppressive? How are we to correct this situation: is it a matter for political action, or a matter for education and social discussion? Are there perhaps many places to deal with aspects of the problem?

In large measure, the attractiveness of the notion of oppression is due to its ambiguity. This flexibility allows for a much more personal analysis than that allowed in liberal theory. Liberalism's historic and philosophical tie to positivism has resulted in its dismissal by those whose feelings of being oppressed cannot be located in consensually and systematically verifiable injustice, and whose claims have been rejected on that basis.

Lesbians are one group among many that perceive and protest such felt oppression. Clearly their sense of oppression is not operative solely at the level of laws,

but is derived everywhere from a culture that presumes heterosexuality as the biological, psychological and moral standard. Lesbians are silenced by laws defining their sexual behavior as criminal; they are forced into hiding on the job, in housing, in custody battles, and elsewhere; they are ignored by tax and probate laws. These issues and others are increasingly common topics for legislation and debate within the U.S., in a way reminiscent of the civil rights battles of blacks and women.

Also reminiscent of these struggles is the further awareness of many lesbians that their problems go beyond laws and public policy to the core of social structure - to language and the construction of self. Beginning with the realization that self-respect, an essential ingredient of happiness, has been denied them by virtue of definitions and perceptions of lesbianism and homosexuality, lesbians began the fight for an identity that would lend itself to self-respect and pride. In this process, attitudes and choices have emerged that are characteristic of much American political argument, and the failure to date to produce a satisfying theory and program for lesbian action is reflective of the failure

of modern political thinking to return us to a safe home in the world. The struggle between the desire for a secure social teleology and the awareness of the price to be paid for such security is being played out within the lesbian community (communities?), as it is, over and over, within the American polity as a whole.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that nothing has changed. In a perceptive essay, Robert A. Goldwin has noted that Americans are a people given to moral thinking about public issues, so that we can be enlisted in causes not directly our own, and sometimes even in opposition to personal interest, if we are given a convincingly principled argument.²³ This is indeed the case for minorities and women, who made ready use of the American belief in equality and opportunity. The case is not so simple for gays and lesbians, however. In this instance, heterosexuals are being asked for a number of things. First, minimally, they are being asked to tolerate a group which is distinguished, not by obviously inherited traits, such as race or sex, but by behaviors, and moreover by behaviors which are widely believed to be immoral or pathological in the Judeo - Christian tradition. The claim really goes beyond this, however.

What is asked is not just that homosexuals be left alone, ignored by law; it is that society at large reorient its understandings and opinions of homosexuality, abandoning its traditional distaste and distrust. The awareness of the psychological experience of oppression leads to a demand that the social context of such experiences be removed.

Such conflicts are nothing new in Western history. Every change in attitude, in culture, in Zeitgeist is effected at least in part by conscious struggles for specific rights and privileges. However, the self-conscious use of political metaphor and imagery in an area that liberalism has ordinarily reserved for private life has led to the adoption of strategies and arguments that seem to transform the topic seriously, even, perhaps, dangerously.

What do I mean by 'political metaphor and imagery'? I am referring to the reconception of traditionally 'private' issues in terms of power rather than understanding. The phrase 'the personal is political' marks the rejection of any simple division of realms, seeking to deny the distinction between private and public motivations, interests and contests and to expose the

play of power in personal and social relations. At some points the power is visible and direct, as in the legal ability of a psychiatrist to commit a lesbian to a mental institution against her will. At others, it is on the level of gossip and harassment. The most intriguing and compelling power, however, is that which operates within discourses and languages to structure and organize our perceptions, thoughts and judgments. Such a power is particularly insidious because it is so hard to see. Once seen, it becomes the most obnoxious, because it is so immediate and invasive. The most revolutionary work in lesbian-feminism has been focussed on these points of power: in psychiatry and psychology, in heterosexism in language, in the visual language of pornography. This work has been based on and has contributed to theory and philosophy in diverse areas - Foucault's analyses of the diverse and minute loci of power, phenomenological and hermeneutical discussions of the constitution of self and language, and critical theory have all fed and been developed by the analysis of the status of lesbians and gay men.

As with oppression, we must note carefully the import of this 'political' understanding of society. A

major effect has been the critique and rejection of all authority beyond individual conscience, not because particular authorities have proved abusive or unjust, but because the concept of authority has lost its legitimacy. If the world as presently constituted admits of no legitimate authority (and in a world where authority is solely a mask of power, the notion of legitimacy vanishes), then either a new world must be built or we must accept the fact of power and become adept at its management. At present, both responses are being attempted - sometimes simultaneously, and by the same person.

These responses are made at different levels. One is the level of vocabulary and logic - of explanation, definition and justification of one's actions and one's being. The struggle of lesbians and gay men has provided us with a clear example of the connections between explanation and justification. It is a philosophical commonplace that "the attribution of virtue or vice to a person because of a certain activity or practice involves some reference to the agent's state of mind; and his state of mind is in turn affected by his own view of the causes influencing and forming his state of mind."²⁴

Rarely, however, are we treated to such a demonstration of the politics of explanation²⁵ as that afforded us by the experience of gays and lesbians. In coming to see that the psychiatric establishment was conceptually incapable of understanding their lives as they did, lesbians became acutely aware of the need of all groups and all individuals for access to self-understandings that allow dignity and self-respect.

The response to this awareness is reflective of another level of the struggle for a secure space in the world. The phenomenon of a group attempting a self-conscious definition, explanation and history is fundamentally a product of the Enlightenment. The rationalist belief that humans can construct an ideal society finds one more expression in this instance. This is particularly a temptation for Americans. Nothing could be more natural for Americans than to believe themselves capable of re-discovering and re-mapping their world. With this, there is the belief that this can - indeed, must - be done without the benefit of earlier thinkers. This is especially tempting for lesbian-feminists, since most earlier recorded thinkers were male heterosexuals. This re-enactment of the Cartesian drama often leads to

the same disappointing results as the original, with the new rationalists engendering their own nihilistic twins, as Rousseau bred his Sade. Later chapters will discuss to what extent and in what ways this has in fact happened within the lesbian community.

This process of definition is part of a larger attempt to found a community capable of grounding individual identity. Just as the attempt at explanation must be performed self-consciously as never before, so too the construction and maintenance of a community in this manner is a radical development. The implication of any community is order of one sort or other, and so this attempt to found community is simultaneously the erection of a new order. This order sometimes clashes with the prior commitments and understandings of its members, and thereby introduces questions about the connections between morality and identity. What is it to be a lesbian? What is it to be a feminist? What is it to be a lesbian-feminist? Is there a feminist ethics that is separate and distinct from other ethics? What does a self-defined community do with those who claim membership while violating certain mores - and particularly those who deny that their behavior is in fact a violation?

What exactly is at stake in the definition of communities? These questions fan out from the particular concerns of lesbians to the general ground of political theory, and the struggles of lesbians to come to grips with these issues are illustrative of the bind that moderns are in. It is my hope that this history of lesbian-feminism will aid us all in understanding the dilemmas and resilience of liberalism and the problems to be confronted by those who seek to dispense with it.

CHAPTER TWO

MEDICAL DISCOURSE AND THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

One of the perennial problems for political and social theory is how sufferers can be so blind to their suffering when it is so clear to theorists. The explanation always involves some contrast between an essential, possible self and the actual, incidental one, whether the lines be drawn on the basis of ethics, politics, religion, or medicine. Plato imagined us huddled in the cave of ignorance; Marx referred to the fetishism and reification that constitute the alienation of capitalism; Freud explained our repression and avoidance of reality. The solution always lies in bringing the real self to the surface of consciousness and letting it speak and act rather than accede to the false, limited self. To this extent every ethicist, every revolutionary, every psychotherapist is a teacher, a guide to the true way. They are each carriers of the power that flows through their discourses, the grammar that marks off right from wrong, oppression from liberation, sickness from health. They are united in their task of enlightenment and ordering, but in fundamentally differing ways. The means at their disposal, the locus of action, and the criterion of success vary from language to language.

Medical Discourse

In modernity, the moral philosopher is at a disadvantage. The peculiarity of our era lies in its particular adaptation of the dichotomy between truth and falsehood. The scientific world-view locates truth in facts, in correct apprehension and perception of an actual, external world. In this system, 'facts' are separated from 'values'; facts are events, conditions capable of repetition and verification through experimental procedure, while values are shifting, with their origin seemingly within the individual. The atomist conception of the individual discussed in Chapter One results in a conception of individual consciousness as a 'black box', only accidentally connected to the world around it. This conception gives rise to an understanding of values and emotions as something unamenable to public, rational dispute. The positivist split between the inner and outer person, between belief and behavior, leads to a division between the realm of values, murky and deep, and that of facts, perhaps hidden but always potentially available. To such a mind, truth

and falsehood are not categories for values, but solely for facts. Truth becomes not a property of things, or acts, but of judgments and propositions. In this view, falsehood is reduced to an incorrect judgment or mistaken proposition. The power of truth as **aletheia**, that which is dis-concealed, and of falsehood as the shadow that covers ultimate reality, is lost. To a scientist, to say that something is not what it is - what it has manifested itself to be - is to speak nonsense. What something 'is' is revealed through careful, verifiable examination. The hole of positivism - the question of the origin of hypotheses, categories, descriptions that structure examination - is unseen. The other side of the positivist's concern for facts is a remarkable obtuseness and inability to deal critically with questions that suggest that the world of 'fact' is socially constructed.

The consequence of the hegemony of the scientific view is that the philosopher must either be willing to be located with the other 'metaphysical' disciplines - the vestiges of medievalism - or she must find a way to translate her ethics into a more reputable discourse. Over the last several centuries, there have arisen two candidates for such assimilation: politics and medicine.

Politics opens an avenue by pointing to oppressions, to unsatisfactory, inhuman conditions; medicine provides a language of sickness, of malnutrition and deformation, of perversion. In modernity, politics and medicine are the two primary sites of social control of the body.

Politics appeals to the dignity of humans and the needs of the society, while medicine argues about the needs of the body and the means of its control. Politics speaks, as Foucault tells us, of sovereignty and obligation, rights and duties; it deals straightforwardly with issues of order and control. Medicine, on the other hand, is the vehicle for a subtler, more insidious power, the power of health and of reproduction¹. Both discourses appeal to 'facts', even as they invoke values and ideals; of health, of justice. Both politics and medicine have the appeal to grammatically assumed social concern. Such concern channels and translates the individual's compassion and desire for a better world, and so serves to validate the power that flows through both arenas. Such power, being suspect, must either be justified or it must be denied - treated as nonexistent or unimportant. The positivist rejection of metaphysics does not lead automatically to the revelation and celebration of the

play of power, but rather to the veiling of power in a new language. As religion and metaphysics become suspect, science becomes the new basis for ontology and teleology.

In this denial of power, medicine has the advantage. This is so for two reasons. First, it is intrinsic to our understanding of politics that it is **the** realm of power - that is, we define power politically and define politics in terms of power, whereas medicine enjoys a status removed from both, sheltering itself under the umbrella of the sciences. Second, the discipline of the body that is marshalled by medicine is so immediate, so particular to us that we cannot readily see it. It is for this reason that Michel Foucault saw the need to trace and describe the development of modern medicine². In discussing the increasing drive toward normalization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Foucault noted that "it's medicine which has played the basic role of the common denominator. Its discourse circulated from one instance to the next. It was in the name of medicine both that people came to inspect the layout of houses and, equally, that they classified individuals as insane, criminal, or sick."³ In this process, the direct,

ethically-based reactions to unacceptable behavior began to give way to 'treatment' aimed at eradicating the sickness, the disease behind the symptoms; illness became an ontological category, filling the void left by the eviction of truth and falsehood from the individual.

This sort of ontological revolution is by no means unprecedented. Societies all adopt and evolve standards of humanity, of maturity, of worth; and these standards all serve as channels of power. Such standards delineate who may be ignored, who punished, who hidden; they also designate those who may make the judgments about such matters. The peculiarity of modern psychology and psychiatry lies not so much in their maintenance of these distinctions as in the shape they give them and the authority given their practitioners. Murray Edelman points out that "to label a common activity as though it were a medical one is to establish superior and subordinate roles, to make it clear who gives orders and who takes them, and to justify in advance the inhibitions placed upon the subordinate class."⁴

The Medicalization of Difference

The adoption of this model has been particularly relevant for those whose behavior falls into categories which are always problematic. What was once a simple matter of punishment or acceptance has become an invitation to colonization of the mind and body of the deviant. The medical model has several implications. First is the perception of problems as individual rather than social.

As a rule, the psychiatrist does not begin working with emotionally disturbed people until he has had considerable experience working with the physically ill. Physical illness, for the most part, implies a defect in the individual, not in society. The psychiatrist's medical training and his constant work with individuals who seem handicapped subtly encourage him to view human unhappiness as a product of individual disorder. Even if he is exceptionally aware of social forces that contribute to his patient's unhappiness, the psychiatrist's orientation as a physician tends to distract him from dealing with such forces.⁵

The second aspect of medicalization is its effect upon popular perceptions of the patient. Halleck explains:

When an individual is given a medical label, society is encouraged to believe that his behavior cannot be controlled; a nonmedical label, on the other hand, leads society to assume that an individual can control his behavior. Thus, a heavy drinker may be thought of as imprudent or obnoxious; however, once we call him an alcoholic, we assume that he cannot control his drinking... The movement from a moral to a medical or psychological evaluation of an individual's behavior has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, society treats the persons who cannot seem to help himself with considerable solicitousness, but it also fears him because presumably he is unable to contain his impulses. Society views him as an inferior person who is dangerous because he lacks the autonomy and control that normal people have. Thus, the community is justified in imposing restrictions upon him and in rejecting or ignoring whatever he might try to say.⁶

The most constant and prevalent of these deviances is homosexuality. Homosexuality enjoys a special status in modern society, as Thomas Szasz explains:

How much homosexuality is dreaded in our society is illustrated by the fact that this condition is considered not only a crime but also a disease. On the one hand, the homosexual may be treated as a sexual offender, while, on the other, he may be defined as mentally ill and subjected to involuntary "hospitalization" and "treatment". Thus changing an important moral and social problem into a medical one has loosed on the homosexual the sanctions, or the threat of sanction, that psychiatrists are in a position to exercise vis-a-vis mental patients.⁷

Homosexuality has this status precisely because of the location of its deviance. Not only is it different, it is different at a critical point of social organization: reproduction of the species. Because of this location, the pressure brought to bear on homosexuals in Christian society has always been tremendous. Whether the grounds be religious, ethical, political, or medical, homosexuality has been seen as a threat to society.

Within this framework, lesbianism has been a lesser crime than male homosexuality. This is perhaps due to the relative impact of each on the reproductive economy; male homosexuals are abstaining, refusing to participate in the maintenance of the economy, and this cannot be overlooked. Lesbians, however, may still become wives and mothers, whether by choice or by force. At some times, lesbianism has been less troublesome than heterosexual adultery, precisely because it has had only a marginal impact on the reproductive and lineage systems.⁸

Medicine has participated in this discrepancy. It has been done more by neglect of the topic than by

condonement; just as lesbians slip through the sodomy laws of many states, so too do they slip through most clinical discussions of homosexuality. Delores Klaich notes that "Until the mid - and late - nineteenth century, lesbianism was ignored by Western investigators." However, it soon became a topic of medical debate and, as such,

lesbianism began to be looked upon (by the medical profession) not as a vice, not as a crime, but as a disease, and primarily a congenital disease... it was at this time that lesbians began to pass out of the hands of God and the courts and into the hands of the medical men - where they remain, in one study or another, to this day.⁹

The conceptual consequence of medicalization was a move from perceptions of lesbians as evil to that of them as sick, demented, degenerate. This move was usually accompanied by pleas for greater tolerance and compassion on the part of society; doctors and patients have portrayed the lesbian as doomed, whether by nature or childhood, to an unfulfilling, immature existence. This plea is not only analogous to that made for the insane; it is a plea for those who are seen to suffer from a particular insanity, a certain illness. Halleck describes this:

While most psychiatrists have made repeated pleas for tolerance of homosexuality, their professional attitudes toward homosexual behavior have probably not helped the homosexual's plight... To assert that the homosexual is ill helps to convince both the individual and the public that he cannot control his behavior; this has a detrimental effect on both parties. The homosexual who believes that he is ill feels more driven and less responsible, and the public comes to assume that at any time he can be overwhelmed by a monstrous lust... Since the public tends to view all sex deviates as violent, it assumes that the homosexual is potentially violent. Thus, the psychiatric diagnosis leads to restrictions being placed on the homosexual that may be as severe as those placed on the rapist or murderer.¹⁰

The political consequence of this shift in paradigm was a trend toward medicalization of what had been a legal problem; however, this movement has never been completed, as the legal establishment has fought to retain control over an issue which has been within its purview throughout Judeo-Christian history. What the legislators and activists can see is the way in which sexuality as a social issue slips through the cracks of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment; it is that reality, too, that accounts for and clarifies issues that the medical paradigm cannot seem to cope with. To the extent that issues of sexuality are seen as the province solely

of psychiatrists and psychologists, they are handled as matters of health. The fact of the social unacceptability of homosexuality and lesbianism is made secondary to the 'disease' or 'character disorder' which needs explanation and treatment. Further, this prioritization is no longer open to discussion, for the linguistic form of medicine is that of a truth beyond politics, beyond compromise or power, speaking from the truth of nature. In such a form, struggle is useless; the protester reveals only her own defects, her lack of understanding and development. "The person who adopts a non-middle class norm needs help even if she or he does not want it", Edelman asserts; in fact, within the medical/psychological paradigm, this resistance is evidence of the depth of the sickness.

Health and Freedom: The Liberal Dilemma

It is clear, then, that the psychological language of health, development and maturity functions in modernity as a teleological language. As such, it has faced the same challenges faced by moral language everywhere. The revolt of modernity is a revolt against a community that

is too total, too singular for those whose consciousness is not in unison with that of the majority. Its language is that of differentiation, of rights, of privacy. The liberal is not consciously aiming at the destruction of moral discourse; rather, she seeks to preserve it by limiting its scope to what is safe or certain. This is done by placing morals and teleology behind a door, where they need not arise in public debate. It is this closeting of moral discourse that challenges liberalism whenever it is seriously questioned by the proponent of any more sophisticated conception of society.

The arguments of the 1960s and 1970s over the medical status of homosexuality are replications of the struggle between liberals and non-liberals in every area. From the outset, the psychological community concurred in its judgment that homosexuality, as any deviance, is pathological. Before Freud, questions were asked about the 'nature' of the homosexual, and the answer was primarily that of degeneracy - of genetic, constitutional deformity and weakness.¹¹ The Freudian language of personality development attempted to remove the stigma attached to sickness, but the attempt failed; as Philip Rieff notes, "any arrestment of natural development is

Freud's basic definition of illness"¹². Since Freud explained homosexuality in terms of arrestment, the conclusion is clear: homosexuals are sick.

What are the consequences of this conclusion? In Homosexuality and Psychological Functioning, Mark Freedman lists "the implications of the "sickness" metaphor in relation to homosexuality":

all homosexuality has the same uniform etiology, or causal basis; homosexuality has a definite "prognosis"; homosexuality can and should be "cured"; and homosexual behavior is undesirable and to be avoided - like a communicable disease.¹³

Various writers have suggested that 'the homosexual' is a creation of the medical gaze, a 'type' with a sexuality, 'homosexuality', which is uniform and deformed. They further suggest that we have allowed the homosexual's sexual object choice to dominate and control our imagery of gay life and have let this aspect of a total life experience appear to determine all its products, concerns, and activities.

Once the type has been created, it can - it must - be explained, and in depth psychology this explanation takes place on the level of personality development.

Daniel Levinson describes how this explanatory process selects subjects:

One of the most common tendencies is to introduce personality factors in the hypothetical explanation of deviance, but to assume that personality has little to do with the acceptance of prevailing norms. In this view it is, so to speak, merely "normal" to go along with group pressures, but to deviate is "abnormal" and therefore of personality relevance.¹⁴

Many things are interesting to the psychiatrist; however, they become noticeable as an object for explanation only when they deviate from the unexpected. Once they deviate, all the force of medicine and science must be brought to bear on their examination. If the deviance is at a critical social nexus, its existence must be eradicated. This does not take the form of repression or political injustice; it is a cure. The peculiar tyranny of the helping professions stems, not from ill will, but from the importation of the language of science, the language of fact rather than choice, into areas of moral concern. The essence of scientia, as Michael Oakeshott describes it, is exactness and precision of statement; this essence operates to "the

exclusion of whatever is private, esoteric, or ambiguous."¹⁵ Once within her world, the scientist is bound to its constructs and symbols if she is to be a scientist. Personal understanding and flexibility of judgment gives way in medicine to a teleology and a reality that has no room for moral choice about sexuality; and, just as one cannot choose the 'right' sexuality, but must grow into it, so one cannot make private judgments about sexuality - the 'facts' speak for themselves, telling us all we need to know.

The consequences of this move were double-sided. The turn to medicalization at the opening of the 20th century resulted in arguments for tolerance and compassion for those attracted to their own sex. Under the sway of the idea that homosexuality was an illness rather than a crime, sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing argued that homosexuals should not be held legally responsible for their desires, and should not be persecuted for a 'condition' which "was not a consciously chosen preference"¹⁶. The work of Sigmund Freud significantly extended this argument when he located homosexual desires within the more general framework of sexual development; this had the effect of suggesting that homosexuality was

not even a disease.

However, the liberalizing influence of Freud and the sexologists was effectively subverted in the United States by "a growing consensus in American psychiatry that the condition is a serious psychopathology, that it in all cases produces anguish and unhappiness for those so afflicted, that it is clearly abnormal (not a variant of normal sexuality), and that, like all diseases, it should and could be cured."¹⁷ In the hands of practicing American psychiatrists, the psychoanalytic medical model has functioned , not to provide greater dignity and respect for gays, but to base a minimal tolerance upon the acceptance of medical authority over and medical interpretations of their lives. Seeing themselves as victims of heredity or childhood, lesbians and gays could not afford to celebrate their sexuality and their partners, to see them as the choices of reflective adults. No matter how 'humanitarian' the practitioner, the discourse of medicine functioned increasingly to relegate homosexuals to second-class status, minimizing both the possible social importance of their choice and the extent to which individual problems might be

reflective of social attitudes and pressures rather than individual deformity.

The Rejection of Liberalism

Most psychiatrists and psychologists argue quite forcefully that homosexuals should have all the rights and privileges of other citizens, and they oppose attempts to single out gays for special legal treatment. While holding firm to the "psychological consensus" that "homosexuality is a symptom of neurosis and of a grievous personality disorder...manifested, all too often, by compulsive and self-destructive behavior"¹⁸, most argue that the illness is not itself a public danger, that treatment is mandated only when the illness breaks out into criminal behavior. This argument is that classic of the liberal, an effort at containing conflict by eliminating difference from discussion, and it fails. With all their good will, with all their compassion and attempts at understanding, the history of the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements begins precisely with the rejection of the medical paradigm and its participants.

Why exactly is this? Prior to this period, homophile organizations¹⁹ and homosexual individuals had sought out members of the psychiatric establishment to serve on boards of directors and to provide relief from their problems. An early member explained:

At first we were so grateful just to have [professional] people - anybody - pay attention to us that we listened to and accepted everything they said, no matter how bad it was...We invited people who were willing to come to our meetings; obviously, it turned out to be those who had a vested interest in having us as penitents, clients, or patients... When somebody with professional credentials came to address your meetings, that legitimized the existence of your organization. And then when you went out and approached other people, you could say that Dr. So and So or the Rev. So and So had addressed you; that made you less pariahlike to these other people whom you needed.²⁰

In order to maintain these contacts, the homophile organizations needed, not simply to invite 'reputable' speakers, but to maintain a rapport with them. Toby Marotta explains that the price of this rapport was public acceptance of the professionals' opinions:

To give their groups an aura of studious detachment, the leaders refrained from asserting that homosexuals were as mentally well-adjusted and as ethical as heterosexuals. To

accommodate the views and interests of involved professionals - most of whom made their livelihoods studying the "deviant", ministering to the misguided, and counseling the disturbed - they questioned the attractiveness of traditional homosexual styles and the morality of the gay subculture.²¹

Thus we see that, ultimately, the price being paid by gays within this framework amounted to their self-respect. If they really believed what was being said about them, they could not truly see themselves as fully human and adult; if they did not believe it, they were living a lie to buy a minimal protection. During the 1960s, an increasing number of gays and lesbians began to challenge the medical view of homosexuality as "ugly and dangerous and self-defeating".²²

They began to argue that the 'problem' of homosexuality was not the sexuality of the individual, but that, like the problems of other minorities, there is "no homosexual problem except that created by the heterosexual society."²³

There were three responses to this charge. First were the conservative psychiatrists, led by Irving Bieber, Edmund Bergler, and Charles Socarides. This group was quite clear in its opinions, and they under-

stood the issues. When challenged, one doctor said that to accept homosexuality as normal is "to assault the fundamental building blocks of all societies, namely, the heterosexual bond and the family that springs from that bond."²⁴ This is no small matter, indeed. With such an understanding, to sanction homosexuality would be not only medically unsound, it would be antisocial.

In direct opposition to this group lay the radical psychiatrists such as Thomas Szasz, Evelyn Hooker, and Hermann Ruitenbeek, who had long been arguing that in fact gays were an oppressed class, subject to persecution, whose illness (if any) was due to social stress. Seymour Halleck explained that often "a person is thought to be disturbed because the psychiatrist or the community doesn't know about all of the stress that causes him to view his world as excessively oppressive...very real stress can be imposed upon someone without him knowing its source. But he is not the only one who may have difficulty perceiving the source of indirect stress; often those around him cannot see it at all."²⁵ This will be especially true when those around him are imposing the stress, whether in the name of health, morality, maturity, or any other. These psychiatrists

could agree with their conservative counterparts that heterosexuals had a big stake in the enforcement of a heterosexual norm; the point of dispute was over whether that should continue. To the conservatives, the issue was biological survival, and it would be insane not to treat sexuality in such a light; to the radicals, the issue was social organization and conformity. In this light, the potential for change and the room for diversity were considerably greater than in the first case. In opposition to the 'building block' argument, Szasz argued that the question was, "in sexual form, the classic dilemma of popular democracy: How much diversity should society permit?"²⁶

Between the conservatives and the radicals stood a group representing the classic American response to the classic dilemma of popular democracy: the liberals. The hallmark of the liberal in this battle is the position which a radical labelled "a fundamental contradiction": "that homosexuals are seriously mentally ill and compulsively driven by needs over which they have no control" while asserting "in the same breath that they should not be subject to legal sanctions".²⁷

How can this be done? Quite simply, by separating 'private' judgments, whether medical, moral, or religious, from one's beliefs about 'public' affairs, i.e. issues of government and politics. The liberal psychiatrist is in the uncomfortable position of allegiance to two competing world-views - the teleological and the liberal, the Aristotelian and the individualist. This dual allegiance is made possible by the fact that the modern medical view is not explicitly, self-consciously teleological, but rather is itself a child of the split between 'is' and 'ought'. This split enables the doctor or scientist to describe phenomena in terms that suggest rank judgments and moral evaluations while denying that these judgments have any relevance for public policy except insofar as they act as a data base for political debate. The realm of the political is sharply (if not always clearly) divided from that of the medical, the scientific.

Because of this division, 'liberalism' quickly became irrelevant to the discussion of homosexuality in the medical community, being dismissed by the main antagonists as, on the one hand, insufficiently attuned to the social implications of medical judgments, and on

the other hand, naive about the level of social danger posed by open homosexuality. The main parties to the debate became, on the one hand, the hardline conservatives who found such deviance "to be sufficient justification for involuntary treatment and/or commitment", and, on the other hand, the growing body of gay liberationists and lesbian feminists who saw the full implications of the medical model. Their reaction was to begin to develop counter-explanations of homosexuality as well as radical political recommendations. This challenge began with the drive to remove homosexuality from the list of illnesses in DSM-III, the American Psychiatric Association's guide to diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric disorders. The reaction of the conservatives was predictable and direct; however, the issue was (and is) very difficult for the liberals. Their commitment to the medical paradigm led them to a distrust of attempts to change judgments by a political rather than scientific process, but their commitment to justice and political equality fostered a sympathy with the position of people whose lives were distorted by others' hatred and fear. Writing in 1971, Dr. Halleck noted that

There is a strange and unfortunate tendency among psychiatrists to believe that professional activities designed to change the status quo are political and activities tending to strengthen the status quo are medical or neutral. This kind of thinking is illogical. By reinforcing the position of those who hold power, the psychiatrist is committing a political act whether he intends to or not. Once this fact is appreciated, the psychiatrist's search for political neutrality begins to appear illusory.²⁸

However, 'appreciating this fact' can be harder than Halleck acknowledges. Even the psychiatrist who can accept that his judgments will have political consequences need not, within a liberal framework, assume responsibility for that fact. Like the physicist who only designs the bomb, the ontological and moral individualism of the liberal allows him to distinguish knowledge from its use, research from development, fact from policy. Thus, the liberal becomes estranged and impotent. Teleological systems do more than make rules; they provide a basis for identity, for self-reflection and evaluation. They provide a universe of positive meaning for our acts, while liberalism is always forced to fall back on other systems to provide meaning even as it insists on their limitation. To the conservative, the

liberal is weak-kneed, unable to face the implications of what he acknowledges to be the truth. To the radical, the liberal is naive about science and politics, and consequently not a reliable ally. The scientific liberal cannot deny what clinical experience and others' research suggests, namely that gays are disturbed and that homosexuality is pathological; but neither can she deny that they are human, and therefore entitled to the claims of justice.

Once the door is opened to the possibility that homosexuality is not a crippling social condition, any lesbian or gay man is given the option of self-respect. However, that door cannot stay open simply on the basis of intellectual laissez-faire; the medical perception of the centrality of sexuality to modern social order seemingly can only be countered by a theory that acknowledges that centrality. The liberal attempt to make sexuality a matter of what people do in bed does not have the force of intuition behind it, and consequently arguments based on such an understanding get pushed off stage by both extremes. The fundamental insight of both gay liberation and lesbian-feminism has been the need for counter-explanations of the role of sexuality in

personality organization as well as social structure. The challenge for both is to provide these explanations and new standards in a framework that does not itself perpetuate or initiate oppression. The liberal psychiatrists were (and are) trying to be faithful to truth and its judgments while refraining from imposing any unnecessary burdens in the lives of gays. While it is easy to be impatient with or condescending to those who fail to grasp post-liberal social theory, it is impossible to dismiss their good will and efforts without ourselves becoming the new doctors, the new elites of consciousness. The fact that these people are still vocal and supportive of gay rights suggests that they have some insight or intuition about society and politics that we cannot ignore. In subsequent chapters, I will be looking for that intuition that makes the American liberal such a hardy breed.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
2. Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic (New York: Vintage, 1973); Madness and Civilization (New York: Vintage, 1973); The History of Sexuality, vol.1 (New York: Vintage, 1980).
3. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 62.
4. Murray Edelman, "The Political Language of the Helping Professions" in Michael Shapiro ed., Language and Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1984), p. 47.
5. Seymour L. Halleck, M.D., The Politics of Therapy (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 14-5.
6. Ibid., pp. 114-15.

7. Thomas Szasz, "Legal and Moral Aspects of Homosexuality", in Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality, ed. Judd Marmor, M.D. (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 130.
8. For a more extended discussion of differences between male and female homosexual existence and experience, see Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in Catharine R. Stimpson and Ethel Spector Person eds., Women: Sex and Sexuality (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1980).
9. Delores Klaich, Woman + Woman: Attitudes Toward Lesbianism (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1974), p. 55.
10. Halleck, op. cit., pp. 122-23.
11. See Klaich, Chapter 2; also see Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men (New York: Wm. Morrow & Co., 1981), pp. 239-54.
12. Philip Rieff, Freud: The Mind of a Moralist (New York: Viking Press, 1959), p. 183.

13. Mark Freedman, Homosexuality and Psychological Functioning (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 37-8.
14. Daniel J. Levinson, "The Relevance of Personality for Political Participation", in Personality and Politics, ed. Gordon J. DiRenzo (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), p. 447.
15. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" in Rationalism in Politics (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 215.
16. Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider, Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Co., 1980), p. 183.
17. Ibid., p. 187.
18. Robert Kronemeyer, M.D., Overcoming Homosexuality (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), p. 7.
19. For a discussion of the political history of the

words 'homophile' and 'homosexual' in gay organization, see Toby Marotta, The Politics of Homosexuality (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), p. 11n.

20. Barbara Gittings, quoted in Marotta, *ibid.*, p. 18.

21. Marotta, *ibid.*

22. Kronemeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

23. Donald Webster Cory, The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach (New York: Greenberg, 1951), pp. 227-28.

24. Harold M. Voth, M.D., quoted by Kronemeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

CHAPTER THREE

LESBIAN-FEMINISM: THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY

The clinical approach to homosexuality came under fire in the late 1960s as lesbians and gay men began to question the validity of psychiatric descriptions and judgments of their lives. Clinical portraits presented a deformed, stunted development resulting in personal tragedy and social instability. During the 1960s, gay men and women began to argue that they were not sick, and that their position was analogous to that of other groups seeking recognition and affirmation in American society, notably blacks and women. Organizational efforts blossomed, and with them arose the perennial issues of social change movements: How much change is needed? What sort of change? How soon? How is it to be achieved?¹

At the same time, women's liberation was developing, both theoretically and organizationally. Faced with these questions, groups formed, splintered, developed, proliferated. The call was for women, as women, to examine and change the structures and relations that burdened their lives.

The possibilities seemed infinite. Before the advent of contemporary feminism, politically active

lesbians had been isolated from heterosexual women. Whether they were members of predominantly male homophile organizations or active in the Daughters of Bilitis, lesbians were acutely aware that they belonged to a population labelled pathological, and that they could safely reveal their sexuality only to others within that population. Indeed, before the feminism of the 1960s, they would have little basis for non-economic interaction with heterosexual women: the privatized lives of most women kept those who worked outside the home isolated from those who did not. The call of women's liberation, however, was to every woman. The energy of 'single' women and working wives could now be shared with women who could meet at night or on weekends, and bonds could form. Previously bereft of vocal communities, the late 1960s found lesbians with two.

The price of membership in each was high, however. Lesbians in the gay rights and gay liberation movements found themselves in the position of women in the civil rights, anti-war, and New Left movements - conceptual appendages and organizational housekeepers/-secretaries/sexual partners.² In the gay movements, this conceptual annexation took the form of denial by male

leaders that lesbians faced problems unique to them and due to their status as women; in reaction to calls for specific treatment of the problems facing lesbians in society and complaints that these were ignored by male homosexuals, one leader retorted that "the Lesbian (sic) IS, after all, a homosexual, first and foremost - subject to all - yes all - of the problems of the male homosexual and with no special problems as a Lesbian(sic)."3 While not called upon to provide sexual services for the men, women in gay organizations found themselves faced with the same assumptions about coffee-making and secretarial duties as their heterosexual counterparts did elsewhere. The consequence was likewise similar; lesbians began to see their sex as an issue commensurable to, and perhaps more fundamental than, that of sexual preference.

The influx of lesbians into the women's movement was not unproblematic, however. The liberal feminists of the National Organization for Women, in particular, were extremely uncomfortable with lesbian claims of and demands for solidarity; recognizing the power of the epithet 'lesbian' to discredit feminism, and sharing in the conventional attitude that lesbianism was a 'personal' issue separate from that of the public status of

women, they tried to dodge the issue by ignoring the lesbianism of some members and supporting institutions.

Rita Mae Brown resigned from NOW in January of 1970, stating that

Lesbian is the one word that can cause the Executive Committee a collective heart attack. This issue is dismissed as unimportant, too dangerous to contemplate, divisive or whatever excuse could be dredged up from their repression. The prevailing attitude is..."Suppose they (notice the word, they) flock to us in droves? How horrible. After all, think of our image."⁴

While more open to discussions of lesbianism and to a lesbian presence, radical feminists also disappointed the lesbians. This disappointment took two main forms: first, the heterosexual feminists developed an analysis of oppression and highlighted issues which seemed to focus on relations between men and women as sexual and life partners, which led lesbians to wonder where their problems fit with those of other women; secondly, many lesbians found themselves treated as prospective sexual partners and instructors by women who were simply curious about homosexuality and hoped to experiment without commitments or attachments. The combination of these reactions by liberals and radicals led the lesbians to

begin analysis of the relation between their position as women and their status as lesbians.

The Woman-Identified Woman

In 1970, at the height of the debate within feminism over the "lavender menace", a group calling themselves Radicalesbians wrote a paper discussing the implications of lesbianism for feminism. At the second Congress to Unite Women, held at the beginning of May 1970, "The Woman-Identified Woman" was distributed and discussed, and the result was a completely new ground for discourse about and understanding of lesbianism.

The centerpiece of "The Woman-Identified Woman" is its answer to the question, "What is a lesbian?" The answer is not to be found in psychology textbooks.

A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society - perhaps then, but certainly later - cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with

everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society - the female role...To the extent that she cannot expel the heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her - in which case she cannot accept herself - and coming to understand what this sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and necessary for it to do so.⁵

In describing themselves thus, the members of Radicalesbians hoped to convince their audience of two points. The first is that of political unity. Both lesbians and heterosexuals were painfully aware of the presence and effectiveness of "queer-baiting" in the women's movement; such baiting was what had given rise to the 'lavender menace' argument in the first place. Such attacks served two purposes; they increased public suspicion and dislike of feminists, and they kept feminists divided among themselves, with 'straight' women fearful lest the lesbians make them 'look bad,' while lesbians became angry and alienated from the women's movement. Therefore, the Radicalesbians hoped to find a common ground within feminism for all women by providing

a theoretical counter to accepted understandings of lesbianism.

The second point is treated theoretically in the paper, but the strategic implications were immediately evident. "The Woman-Identified Woman" was written by radical feminist lesbians, and their analysis shows their roots. The core of radical feminism is the idea that the oppression of women is "fundamental", that is, that this oppression is "causally and conceptually irreducible to the oppression of any other group"⁶. In contrast to those who analyze sexism or 'patriarchy' as a product of capitalism or pre-liberal attitudes, radical feminists argue that the oppression of women by men is the paradigm and the root of all other oppressions and inequalities. Radicalesbians utilized this analysis to suggest that the oppression of lesbians is the direct result of the oppression of women, and that it most clearly reveals the contours of that oppression, insofar as the lesbian is the ultimate pariah of male society; not only a woman, but a woman-loving woman, a woman unattached to a man, a being bereft even of an auxiliary identity. "For feminists the main educational value of lesbian baiting has been its exposure of the very clear connection in

men's minds between being "unfeminine" and being independent. Being called unfeminine is a comparatively gentle threat informing you that you are beginning to waver, whereas being called a lesbian is the danger signal - the final warning that you are about to leave the Territory of Womanhood altogether."⁷ 'Lesbian' is repeatedly contrasted to 'real woman' in the popular mind, and since the only apparent difference is one of "sexual orientation", the Radicalesbians concluded that, in this culture, "the essence of being a "woman" is to get fucked by men"⁸. Thus the radical feminist focus on sex and sex roles was joined with the issue of 'sexual preference' to produce a common base for lesbians and heterosexual women.

The new analysis carried within it something more than coalition, however. The conclusion of "The Woman-Identified Woman" is that the basic structure of control over women is that of sexuality, and in particular the requirement of heterosexuality. This is the structure that must be rejected if women are to become whole beings.

Radical feminism's early analysis suggested that the oppression of women was intimately related to their roles

- that sex oppression was basically the oppression of sex role-bearers, and that this could be eliminated through the abolition of such roles and the eventual appearance of the 'androgynous' person - that being freed from arbitrary and stunting expectations and definitions. This analysis did not attack heterosexuality as an institution, but only the 'unnecessary' divisions between men and women that made one's choice of partner and sexual patterns socially significant⁹. Early radical feminists lived in a world of endless possibilities and protean selves, and all limits - physical, psychological, social, legal - were equally oppressive. Freedom lay in being able to decide for oneself what and who one was, what choices were appropriate or fulfilling, rather than being told by cultural representatives what being a woman was about.

With the introduction of lesbianism as a central issue, however, radical feminism found itself under pressure. The agendas of lesbians and of heterosexual women are indeed different. Lesbian feminists were not, by and large, content to assert that one's choice of sexual partner should be irrelevant to the quality of one's life or one's participation in society. Though

many lesbians indeed asserted, as did Martha Shelley, that "I personally don't care who other women are sleeping with, as long as someone I like is sleeping with me"¹⁰, the earlier experience of disapproval and discrimination had left many lesbians suspicious of such fine statements.

I am personally sick of liberals who say they don't care who sleeps with whom, it's what you do outside of bed that counts. This is what homosexuals have been trying to get straights to understand for years. Well, it's too late for liberalism. Because what I do outside of bed may have nothing to do with what I do inside - but my consciousness is branded, is permeated with homosexuality. For years I have been branded with your label for me.¹¹

The consequence of the historical fact of branding was the need for a theory that could deal, not only with some ideal future, but with the past; a theory that would allow lesbians to feel at home somewhere in the present by explaining rather than overlooking their difference. Radical feminism's focus on sex roles seemed to speak to the experience of gays, but the sexism on the part of gay men suggested to lesbians that the problem ran deeper than that. Increasingly, the issue of sex-roles gave way to that of sex itself. While most were reluctant to say

that men per se were the problem, all agreed that men as constituted by heterosexist society were, indeed, the enemy. Men - by nature, by convention, somehow - are the problem.

Not the least of the advantages of this treatment of men is its elimination of a constant, nagging question among feminists: the question, "But what about men?" The answer can now be given straightforwardly: men must take care of themselves. The priority for women, the truly revolutionary call of feminism, must be for the union of women. Rather than looking over their shoulders, trying to drag their men with them, and limiting their feminist activities to what will not destroy their relationships with men, women are now called upon to focus on women, to renounce the privileges that are part of involvement in the dominant culture, in favor of the freedom and new identity to be found in the company of women. This new life requires withdrawal from the larger system on as many levels as possible - economic, spiritual, emotional, physical. There is nothing to be gained, and everything to be lost, by collaboration.

Separatism, then, is the order of the day. This strategy directly exposes the needs of lesbians for

identity and community. Most broadly, we can describe these needs as threefold. First, the negative interpretation and valuation of lesbianism must be overcome; second, lesbians need to deal with the marginality of their existence and participation in society; and third, a sense of history must be developed so that each woman does not need to create a universe of meaning anew. "The Woman-Identified Woman" was the first in a series of theoretical and historical statements attempting to eliminate alienation by locating lesbianism within a positive framework - a framework that is conducive to personal esteem and to supportive relationships with others. That framework is lesbian-feminism.

The Lesbian-Feminist

A lesbian-feminist is not simply a lesbian who is also feminist; not all lesbians qualify, nor do all feminists. The core of lesbian-feminism is the position that sexism and heterosexism are "hopelessly intertwined", that the oppression of women and lesbians is "the prototype for all other oppressions, since the oppression of women and of lesbians crosses boundaries of

race, class, and age"12. There is, too, the radical feminist view of the personal realm as political; "the lesbian-feminist perceives herself as a woman who realizes the political nature of her choice to commit herself to sexual and emotional relationships with women and to bond with them in her life."13 The lesbian-feminist is in a privileged position; over heterosexual feminists, she has the advantage of consistency between theory and practice; over 'non-political' lesbians, she can claim the superior awareness of the revolutionary nature of her sexual choice. These claims were in fact made immediately - "If you can't find it in yourself to love another woman, and that includes physical love, then how can you truly say you care about women's liberation?"14 - and they remain a centerpiece of lesbian-feminism.

It is thus clear that lesbian-feminism rests on the radical feminist collapse of the political realm. Feminists have shown that the personal world, that world left untouched by liberal political theory, is in fact political, that is, riddled with power relations. By bringing this to light, radical feminists hope to loosen the hold of these power relations over women by countering them, by invading their space with the

discourse of freedom and forcing them to justify themselves or perish. However, the perception of the relation between public and private too often spills over into the rejection of any theoretical position that retains a distinction between the realms. This has the effect both of challenging all private relationships and, perhaps more dangerous, of making the 'normal' sphere of politics epiphenomenal, that is, making it only the result of the power dynamics existent in the larger society, incapable of being a locus of any real change.

This collapse of politics results, then, in the perception of one's sexuality as a matter of politics, not just at the level of implication - certain relations may lead one to make particular alliances, to view one's public interests in a certain way - but at that of expression. By sleeping with women, lesbians express their commitment to a world that values women, and, conversely, heterosexual women reveal themselves as torn, half-hearted victims not entirely to be trusted. One's body and its desires become a more reliable guide to one's loyalties than words or public deeds. In this perception, radical lesbian-feminists ally themselves with the pattern of thought which Charles Taylor has

labelled 'expressivism'. The central features of this reaction to the Enlightenment picture of humans can be summed up as 1) anti-dualism - the rejection of any division between mind and body; 2) the valorization of freedom, which is seen as being "synonymous with self-realization", as the central value of human life; 3) a quest for union with nature; and 4) a drive for unity with other humans.¹⁵ Such a view rejects any distinction between public and private acts, seeing them all as equally expressive of self. In acting, in thinking, in willing, in desire, we reveal ourselves as that which we are.

The rejection of the public/private split, so essential to feminism's insights, has its roots in the perception that the barriers between family and community, economy and state serve to veil power as much as to protect individuals; or, rather, serve to sanction or overlook non-public power. This is precisely the point at which liberal psychoanalysts' ability to 'defend' the homosexual broke down, and the rejection of the distinction provided the opening for women to problematize and challenge their 'private' oppressions. However, the expressivist goes beyond problematization

and critique; in her total rejection of any such split, she removes any ground for a more critical reexamination of the relations between public and private structures and action, of the gaps and spaces as well as the connections.

In their expressivism, radical lesbian-feminists are in greater agreement with their old opponents than with liberal sympathizers. The hysterical reaction to homosexuality rested in part on this same belief that sexuality is expressive of one's social being. When she says that she is "disloyal to civilization", Adrienne Rich agrees that her existence is pointed toward the destruction of a culture and a history that has destroyed women. Rather than transcendence of the old categories, however, what we see in lesbian-feminism is what Nietzsche would call their reversal. The lesbian-feminist and the conservative psychiatrist are in agreement as to the facts; the issue is one of valuation.

In The Will to Power, Nietzsche states that "values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values"¹⁶. However, rather than direct battle for moral hegemony, what we today witness is the proliferation of evaluations, each reflective of a

particular power base, a local discourse within which the needs of that community are expressed. The growth of the lesbian community is directly related to the reevaluation and reinterpretation of lesbian existence. Just as psychiatric language may be seen as the voice of science in the search for truth and/or as the discourse of social control of bodies, so may lesbian-feminism be understood simultaneously as the reflection of a particular understanding of the position of women, as the theoretical formulation of lesbian identity, and/or as the new logic of inclusion/exclusion, with its own foci for control. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive; indeed, any understanding or theory contains the logic of demarcation, and all control beyond brute force is predicated on some vision of the actual and the good worlds. The denial of any will zur macht on the part of theorists serves today only as the opening for their opponents' critique, while the rejection of all justifications for controls and limits leaves us bereft of any conceptions of authority or meaning. Either denial is an invitation to nihilism.

One of the fundamental contributions of Nietzsche is his insight into the dynamic of nihilism in the West.

This dynamic has its root in the search for a meaning that transcends the phenomenal world - the quest for metaphysics. Metaphysics is driven by the need for meaning and the inability to accept a world of Becoming, of constant change and struggle. The opening move of metaphysics, then, is to posit a meaning that is invulnerable to flux, and to deny the claims of the world: it begins "when one has posited a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events, and a soul that longs to admire and revere has wallowed in the idea of some supreme form of domination and administration (--if the soul be that of a logician, complete consistency and real dialectic are quite sufficient to reconcile it to everything)."17 Underneath such grand theory lies the urge to deny will, to relieve the individual of personal responsibility for coming to terms with the world.

In the years since the concept of the 'woman-identified woman' emerged, a particular strain of lesbian-feminist analysis has developed which engages in this sort of metaphysical totalization. The desire to see the world as a seamless (if corrupt) whole has resulted in the revival of ontological dualism - a new

Manicheanism, if you will. Freed from the perception of common cause with other groups and the need to get along with them, lesbian-feminists such as Mary Daly, Janice Raymond, and Sally Gearhart have accorded men the status of ontological oppressors, depriving them of any possibility of fundamental change.¹⁸ That most of these thinkers have emerged from Catholic theological schools is perhaps no accident; while affording the possibility of an alternative to the poverty of liberalism, Catholicism also carries within it the impulse to understand the world in unitary terms. Just as the early Church had to face Manicheanism, so we now have to understand the temptation to divide the world in order to understand it.

The new ontology divides the world into men and women. Men, it seems, are irredeemable; they may struggle to break their own bonds, but in so doing they are fighting their own nature as much as they are opposing society. The battle is too hard, the fight too exhausting, to expect any to win. Jean Elshtain has noted that "the radical feminist portrait of man represents, in some ways, an inversion of misogynist views of women".¹⁹ The portrait is of a being diseased by

nature, infected with what Ti-Grace Atkinson labels "metaphysical cannibalism". This cannibalism is characterized by "the need men have for the role of Oppressor" in order to fill their inherent void.²⁰ This is extended by Daly, who characterizes men as "demons", sadists who live off women's blood.²¹ Nothing short of re-creation can change that.

Women, on the other hand, are fundamentally "biophilic" and nurturing, allied with nature and the earth against the necrophilic male world. In keeping with the goals of expressivism, women strive for union with nature and one another; women do not divide themselves, body from spirit; women, like other animals, wish only to live free and in harmony. They are, however, capable of degeneration from their natural state of virtue. If this were not the case, all women would recognize and act on their sisterhood. Just as the psychiatrists needed to explain how the aberration of homosexuality is possible in a being 'naturally' heterosexual, lesbian feminists find themselves called upon to explain this misalliance and collaboration. Much lesbian-feminist scholarship is devoted to examples and explanations of the ways in which women are perverted by men, made to see men's battles and

rules as their own.²² Women who do this are 'male-identified', defining themselves in terms alien to themselves and their true interest. Male-identification is lesbian-feminist false consciousness, alienation from oneself.

The reclamation of one's female energy, of 'gynergy' if you will, requires a thorough-going examination and rejection of the male, necrophilic elements in one's internal and external worlds. The recognition by contemporary theorists, philosophers and students of society of the fundamental role of language in the structure of our worlds is matched in lesbian-feminism, and this recognition has made the construction of alternate discourses and languages central to the project of building a home. Mary Daly's two most recent books, Gyn/Ecology and Pure Lust, engage deliberately and painfully in a process of re-defining and re-naming the world around her: "Since the language and style of patriarchal scholarship cannot contain or convey the gynergy...I invent, dis-cover, re-member words."²³ She shares in this with many other lesbian-feminist scholars and poets; this project is seen as crucial.

The New Lesbian

A central word in all this is, not surprisingly, the term 'lesbian'. Since the publication of "The Woman-Identified Woman" and the creation of a lesbian vanguard, the question of who or what a lesbian is has been present. The question is not merely a matter of theoretical clarity. In most of America, the word 'lesbian' is clearly understood, whatever stereotypes and valuations are attached to it. A lesbian, to most English-speakers, is a woman who engages in sex with women; a homosexual woman. It is on the basis of this definition that male gay-rights activists proclaim common cause with lesbians; the definition locates the problematic difference in the choice of sexual partner.

This definition, however, does not serve the needs of the newly-conscious group of women who do not see any common cause with male homosexuals and who face isolation from other women. Lesbian-feminists cannot settle for equal rights in a male-identified world; their project is to build a woman-identified, woman-loving world, and to do this they must deal anew with the perennial issues of social theory. Engaging in a radical process of

"cultural reconstruction", lesbian-feminists must start from the ground up.

This process of reconstruction has, as stated earlier, three components; reevaluation of lesbianism, explanation of the status of lesbians in the contemporary world, and historical location of a community. Recent research into women's history supports this by providing a sense that, in fact, this 'community of women' has always existed, but has been overlooked by heterosexist historians. The project of 'herstory' is to reveal that community so that contemporary lesbians will not be alienated and isolated, suffering from the constant need to begin communities and originate identities. By discovering earlier 'resistance' to heterosexual imperatives, lesbians can provide themselves with both analysis and history, a 'cultural etiology' of sorts, a positive ground for self-understanding and meaning. The sense of aloneness, of negativity that is so central to being significantly different in society is relieved by replacing the society with one which affords positivity.

Within the new community, everyone is a lesbian; however, that does not make lesbianism irrelevant. In keeping with the nature of reversal, lesbianism is

essential. A lesbian identity is now the price of admission to the 'women's community', the proof of trustworthiness. Sexuality remains the final test of one's loyalty to civilization.

There are two problems with this. The first is that of exclusion. If the claim that lesbianism is somehow privileged is to be credible, theorists have to deal with the embarrassing evidence of non-feminist or anti-feminist lesbians, with those lesbians who live in butch/femme roles and relationships, and with those who like men. The valorization of lesbianism seems inevitably to lend support to these women's choices, but they are completely unacceptable to the new lesbian feminist. The other problem is that of inclusion. Particularly when looking to the past, one can never be sure about the nature of the relation between any two women. Many women whom contemporary lesbians would like to claim as ancestors and models present either ambiguous evidence of sexual activity with other women, or no evidence at all; and yet their inclusion seems essential. How can these problems be resolved?

The answer has been to redefine the word 'lesbian' so as to include those women that seem to provide posi-

tive models while excluding those who do not. A phenomenon that initially seems bizarre takes on meaning when it becomes clear what is at stake. "It would be misleading to suggest that the issue is one of definitions alone...It concerns the living of lesbian lives and the kind of social and political interpretation that we as women bring to our lesbian existence."²⁴ It also concerns the demarcation of the community, both historically and in the present.

What, then, is a lesbian? There have been several prominent definitions, all shades of a new color. A widely cited and popular one is that of Blanche Wiesen Cook in her article, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman".²⁵ In this piece, she defines lesbians as "women who love women, who choose women to nurture and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently". She explains that "lesbians cannot be defined simply as women who practice certain physical rites together...physical love between women is one expression of a whole range of emotions and responses to each other that involves all the mysteries of our human

nature. Woman-related women feel attraction, yearning, and excitement with women."²⁶

What is most striking in this definition is the feature that it shares with most of the new definitions. This is the derogation of sexuality or sexual behavior as a defining characteristic of lesbianism. While retaining a focus on women, the new definitions unanimously reject the 'clinical' concept as itself sufficient. What is central to lesbianism now is, not the act but the emotion; or, rather, not the sexual act but the verbal, emotive and political acts. Far from being sufficient demonstration of one's loyalties, lesbian sexuality may now in fact confuse the issue; Adrienne Rich argues that sexual lesbians who have otherwise bonded with men have subverted the cause of women.²⁷ While she sees a "nascent feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner"²⁸, this content can only be "realized" through conscious women-identification - the adoption of lesbian-feminism.

The Radicalesbian description of the lesbian in terms of rejection of social roles rather than those of desire found fertile ground among feminist lesbians, whose prior experience of persecution for sexual choices

made them quite willing to downplay or ignore this feature in favor of some other ground for self-understanding; "Lesbian cultural feminists' insistence that lesbianism is an issue of "radical female friendship" rather than sexual preference reflects an unwillingness to admit that within the larger culture lesbianism is viewed as a "perversion."²⁹ However, such a simple explanation of the shift does not do justice to the full complexity of the issue. Definition is a process of location, of the investiture of meaning, and this meaning goes beyond its motivation as well as extending past the words themselves. In speaking of the truth of propositions, Hans-Georg Gadamer stresses that it is a matter neither of "factual correctness and congruency", nor solely of "the context in which it stands", but rather rests on "its enrootedness and bond with the person of the speaker in whom it wins its truth potential"; that truth "can be disclosed only if one traces its history of motivation and looks ahead to its implications".³⁰ The same may be said of definitions; they are 'true' to the extent that they resonate in us and make sense of the world, and this is a matter both of motivation and of (perhaps unseen) implication.

What, then, does the 'non-clinical' definition of lesbianism disclose? What is its bond to those who adopt it?

In their rejection of a definition based on sexual behavior, lesbian-feminists have drawn on and expanded the critique of genital, 'goal-directed' sexuality developed by the neo-Freudians after World War II and popularized in the 1960s by Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.³¹ This critique connected exclusive, genital sexuality with capitalism, and called for the return of the 'polymorphous perversity' characteristic of infantile sexuality. The assault on genital sexuality became combined with the critique of instrumental reason developed in the Frankfurt School and framed the calls for cultural revolution characteristic of the post-1950s West.

In feminist circles, this analysis took the form of an opposition between male and female natures, masculine and feminine values and modes of relation. Men are instrumental, competitive, compulsively aggressive, and slaves to a goal (orgasm)-oriented sexuality; women are nurturant, cooperative, beyond linear/logical thinking. This is reflected in their sexuality; as Alice Echols

describes it, within radical feminism "women's sexuality is assumed to be more spiritual than sexual, and considerably less central to their lives than is sexuality to men's. For instance, Adrienne Rich describes female sexuality as an 'energy which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself.'"32 In contrast, "male sexuality is driven, irresponsible, genitally oriented, and potentially lethal...Men crave power and orgasm, while women seek reciprocity and intimacy."33

It is simple enough to see in this the return of pre-feminist dichotomies between men and women, and this is indeed dangerous; however, that is not the central point here. Our concern, rather, is to see, not simply how the redefinition of lesbianism depends on and reinforces distinctions between the sexes, but to examine its implications for 'the living of lesbian lives'. The motivation for redefinition - the establishment of positive identity, community, and history - can be evaluated only after the discernment of its consequences for the actual self-understandings of lesbians.

Christopher Lasch has argued that the social and conceptual oppositions of masculine/feminine, instru-

mental/holistic, and isolated/related are in fact two sides of the "legacy of primary narcissism", which seeks to deny the fact of dependence on a world beyond oneself. He asserts that both sides "reject psychological maturation in favor of regression, the "feminine" longing for symbiosis no less so than the solipsistic "masculine" drive for absolute mastery."³⁴ Seen in this way, such choices fail to open up the room for us to develop as unique, conflict-ridden individuals trying to live with others, and so leave us in continual danger of threats to our selfhood, our personhood, by those who approve of us as well as those who do not.

That something of this is latent in the redefinitional process was seen by Barbara Gittings quite early. In a critique of "The Woman-Identified Woman", she argues:

She is pictured as an unhappy by-product of a sexist cultural set-up. She is supposed to be continually at war with sexism and male supremacy, yet guilty for not meeting society's expectations...she can gain "maximum autonomy" only after identifying with other people - the batch of human beings who happen to be female - and joining in a collective search for an authentic selfhood...In sum, the lesbian needs a different sense of self and can't be trusted to come up with it on her own without benefit of group-think...The contorted theory of woman-

identified woman is about as realistic and helpful as the old psychoanalytic theories that also claimed that the lesbian was a faulty outcome of a faulty set-up and needed reconstructing.³⁵

Whether or not one agrees with this somewhat polemical presentation of the problem, it does point to some real issues for the 'lesbian community'. In looking at psychological issues presented in the Los Angeles lesbian-feminist community, Sherry McCoy and Maureen Hicks have noted that "the sometimes visionary politics of feminism have contributed to our making unrealistic demands on each other"³⁶.

To many women, the community became an entity with a life of its own. As such it held the power to pass judgment and, as a new-founded home for the homeless, it took on a mighty significance. Women who had been struggling with their sexual and personal identity found that "lesbian" and "dyke" were positively valued identities within this new community, and they joined in giving each other support...As long as we vowed homage to the beliefs and values officially espoused by the community as a whole, we were able to experience a common magical union.³⁷

Thus the problem that emerges is not simply that women are still being characterized as loving, nurturing, virtuous beings, in contrast to rapacious man; the

fundamental problem is that, as lesbians, they are no less subject to what Heidegger would call "subjectivizing" than they are at the hands of the psychiatric establishment. The essence of the subjectivizing impulse is the refusal to "let beings: be", but rather to let them "be valid - solely as the objects of its doing."³⁸ What has been accepted in lesbian-feminism is, not the lesbian, but the Lesbian - the politically/sexually /culturally correct being, the carrier of the lesbian-feminist consciousness. The community that is defined by this valuation is indeed a home, but it is not the home of free, adult human beings. The problem is not the act of separation, the moment of separatism; some such space is clearly necessary for many women, as a welcome antidote to ubiquitous male power and presence. The problem lies in the grounds and terms of this separation. A separatism that is grounded on the metaphysical difference between male and female essence, and that characterizes those essences as radical lesbian-feminists have done, leaves little or no room for the development of diverse, individual patterns of relationship with the larger society. The legitimate drive for community degenerates into unmediated unity, a unity that carries

as its twin an excessive fear of difference. It is this moment, this metaphysical turn in lesbian-feminism, that is its central weakness.

Lesbian-feminism has developed in response to political and psycho-social disenfranchisement. In this context, it was immediately perceived that some notion of community was needed to counter this silence. What is only now becoming clear is the cost of simple unity, unmediated by individual differences. Such unity can only be achieved through the imposition of certain categories and the denial or outright rejection of any other possibilities. Some imposition, some definition, is of course indispensable to our understanding and communication; however, a discourse that does not admit the possibility of alternative discourses or new categories that challenge the old is a discourse solely of domination, not that of politics. The first necessity for politics must be the recognition that others exist independently of oneself, and that these others are no less 'real' or 'valid' for that.

The painful perception of the limits of a naive liberalism which arose in the 1960s resulted in a romantic reaction which focused on destroying the high walls

erected between public and private, and this reaction has suffered from the same deficiencies as have other romantic movements. Some of these deficiencies are the collapse of the public sphere and the compensatory 'politicization' of all relationships and values; the introduction of the notion of a pre-political community, a natural unity that might somehow be regained; and the withdrawal from larger society and polity in the effort to remain pure. While all of these are understandable reactions to an alienating world, they cannot be taken as sufficient solutions to the problem of lesbian or female identity and status. Just as the unreflective appropriation of Rousseau led to the Terror, just as the modern philosophers of the will have too often been used in the service of anti-liberal and anti-democratic movements, so too the blanket rejection of American liberalism has led lesbian-feminists into the tyranny of transparency, the world of black and white without shadows or nuance. That this was not intended is certain; that it must be corrected is equally so. The search for a home must stop short of narcissism if liberty is to exist for whole human beings, just as liberty must stop short of social disintegration and

individual alienation if we are to have a home. The challenge is to find the ground that can be shared among individuals; it remains to be seen whether lesbian-feminism can accomplish this.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a thorough history of the early lesbian-feminist movement, see Toby Marotta, The Politics of Homosexuality (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), chapters 9-11.
2. The most extended treatment of the treatment of women in these movements is Sarah Evans, Personal Politics (New York: Vintage, 1979).
3. Frank Kameny, quoted in Marotta, op.cit., p. 67.
4. Quoted in Marotta, op. cit., p. 235.
5. Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman", in Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, eds., Radical Feminism (New York: Times Books, 1973), pp. 240-41.
6. Alison M. Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), p. 12.
7. Anne Koedt, "Lesbianism and Feminism" in Radical Feminism, p. 247.

8. Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman", *ibid.*, p. 242.
9. For a classic statement of early radical feminist thinking about sex differences, see Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).
10. Martha Shelley, "Lesbians in the Women's Liberation Movement", Second Wave 1,1 (Spring 1971), p. 32.
11. Martha Shelley, "Gay is Good", Gay Flames Pamphlet no. 1.
12. Sherry McCoy and Maureen Hicks, "A Psychological Retro-spective on Power in the Contemporary Lesbian-Feminist Community", Frontiers 4,3, p. 66.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Rita Mae Brown, "The Shape of Things to Come", in Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch eds., Lesbianism and the Women's Movement (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), p. 70.

15. See Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), ch. 1.
16. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), sec. 14.
17. *Ibid.*, sec. 12.
18. For discussion of this point and its problems, see Jean Elshtain's discussion of radical feminism in Public Man, Private Woman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 204-209.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
20. Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism: Declaration of War" in Amazon Odyssey (New York: Links Books, 1974), p. 55.
21. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 31; Pure Lust (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 2.
22. See Daly, Gyn/Ecology, *op. cit.*; Kathleen Barry, Female Sexual Slavery (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice

Hall, 1979); while these are examples, some such theme may be found in most works by lesbian-feminists ; this is not surprising, given the weight that the argument bears in discussions of female solidarity.

23. Daly, Pure Lust, p. 30.
24. Jacquelyn N. Zita, "Historical Amnesia and the Lesbian Continuum", in Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi, eds., Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 161.
25. Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman", Chrysalis 3 (1977), pp. 43-61.
26. Ibid., p. 48.
27. Quoted by Judith Schwarz in "Questionnaire on Issues of Lesbian History", Frontiers 4, 3 (Fall 1979), p. 6.
28. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon

- Thompson, eds., Powers of Desire (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), p. 201.
29. Alice Echols, "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-83", in Carole S. Vance ed., Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 50-72.
30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel" in Reason and the Age of Science, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 44.
31. Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959).
32. Rich quoted in Echols, op. cit., p. 60.
33. Ibid., p. 59.
34. Christopher Lasch, The Minimal Self (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), p. 246.

35. Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin, "Lesbians and the Gay Movement" in Ginny Vida, ed., Our Right to Love (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978, p. 151.
36. McCoy and Hicks, op. cit., p. 66.
37. Ibid., p. 67.
38. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 228.

CHAPTER FOUR
SADOMASOCHISM: THE CHALLENGE OF DIFFERENCE

All great social and political changes generate further movement. Some of this development will be in the nature of reaction, attempts to restore a conceptual and political status quo. Just as much activity will result from the extensions of the new thought and discourse, and their interaction with the existing world. Yet another source of growth is the reaction of those within a movement to its inevitable limitations and restrictions. Each of these challenges serves to deepen our understanding of the largest dimensions of the new thought by revealing its assumptions, its tendencies, and its strategic location in society. Within the new discourse, it may be difficult to ascertain the true character of any new issue; reaction may pose as revolution, fulfillment may be perceived as a threat, according to one's understanding of the nature and goals of the movement. It is at this point that the individual finds herself pressed to define her own understandings of and aims for her community.

Lesbian-feminist discourse about sex has arrived at this place. At the beginning of the movement, issues of

sexuality were conceived of and discussed in terms of partner choice. The need to form a positive understanding of lesbianism found a home in feminist discussions of sex and gender oppression and the role of personal relations in maintaining larger social and political inequalities. The insight that we must examine all aspects of our lives if we are to see what Marilyn Frye has called the 'birdcage' of oppression, that network of 'minor' barriers that composes a system of immobilization, was bound to the lesbian experience of silence and fear to produce a systematic analysis of the relations between lesbian oppression and that of women as a whole.

This analysis retained the primary bifurcation between heterosexual and lesbian, but it gradually shifted both the valence and the meaning of lesbianism. Lesbianism now had less to do with sex, and more to do with emotional commitments. This shift was the result of pressures both theoretical and practical. The early hostility and fear toward lesbians on the part of heterosexual feminists was disarmed by the relocation of lesbianism with the pre-existing discussion of female separatism and difference, whereby lesbianism was

presented as the fulfillment of feminist theory. In order to make this claim to a suspicious audience, however, lesbians needed to minimize sex and emphasize attachment; Alice Echols has noted that "the homophobia, and, to a lesser extent, the anti-sex attitudes within certain elements of the movement precluded lesbian-feminists from promoting lesbianism as a sexual rather than a political choice."¹ Lesbianism became 'safe' by becoming something other than what it had been, a creature no longer of physical desire but of political desire - the desire for equal, non-oppressive personal relationships.

Standards for acceptable sexual behavior have been derived from the conceptions of woman held by the primary theorists of lesbian-feminism. The portrayal describes women as passionate, yet not genitally-focussed; passion for women is more a general life force than particular sexual desire. Women's sexuality, in this view, is diffuse, tender, committed, and reciprocal. As relations between women, then, and particularly woman-loving women, lesbian sexuality is sharply contrasted to both heterosexual and homosexual male sexuality. Mary Daly's contrast between "biophilic" sisterhood and "necrophilic"

"male monogender merging" extends to sexuality; while female passion aims at recognition and celebration of Self and Other, male desire requires conquest and annihilation for its satisfaction.

The consequences of this thought became apparent by the mid-1970s, and the tension has escalated steadily since then. The first result of the demand that sex and intimacy be egalitarian and 'correct' was denial and repression. Unsure of their desires and their implications, lesbian-feminists generally deemphasized the importance of sex in women's lives. While this strategy fit comfortably with the need for acceptance and a sense of historical continuity with non-sexual woman-bonded women, it imposed a great stress on individual lesbians at the most personal, most complex, and least understood point in their lives. In reaction, many women chose to not have sexual relations at all. Others worried, as did heterosexual feminists, about the meaning of their desires and fantasies. A movement that began by addressing the problems of a minority defined by sexuality was rapidly approaching the point where community acceptance required as much repression and concealment of one's sexuality as before.

In 1976, the first sounds of rebellion were heard. In an article entitled "Cathexis", Barbara Ruth announced that she was a lesbian-feminist who was also a sadomasochist. Other women followed her lead, and by 1980 sadomasochism was a serious and divisive issue within the lesbian-feminist community. Every journal, every newspaper, every local lesbian-feminist group has been the site of furious argument and polarization. Every side accuses the other(s) of bad faith, of dogmatism, of self-serving motives, and of destruction of the women's movement.

Pleasure and Power: The Dilemma of Sexuality

The basic question of the debate has been, is lesbian sadomasochism consistent with feminism? Such a question is intriguing partly because it is so unexpected. Sadomasochism is a practice that has found few public defenders. It is, as Gerald and Caroline Green describe it, "the last taboo"². Its emergence as a topic for debate, and especially as a topic capable of splintering the lesbian community, suggests that something radical has happened, not only to our ideas about

sexuality, but to our expectations for public discussion and evaluation of personal behavior. What is intriguing is not the question itself (though certainly that is interesting), but rather, the matter of its emergence. Why should sadomasochism be an issue for feminism? Why is this an issue for lesbian-feminists now? What does the rise of this debate reveal about the roots and tendencies of lesbian-feminist theory? These are the more fascinating, more deeply troublesome questions that must be grappled with.

It is not at all surprising that the anti-pornography women, and many others, have not seen a connection between feminism and sadomasochism. "Given prevailing ideas of appropriate feminist sexual behavior, S/M appears to be the mirror opposite. It is dark and polarized, extreme and ritualized, and above all, it celebrates difference and power."³ The image of female sexuality developed by lesbian-feminists leaves no room for such a desire; to even conceive of finding pleasure in such a mode is to betray one's female soul, to fall victim to male thinking and desire. In order for the question of feminism to be asked at all, then, something must have given way.

To understand the polarization that has developed, it is necessary to examine the other prominent feminist discourse on sexuality in the late 1970's and 1980's. That discourse is the one surrounding pornography. A focus on male predation and violence has become the ground upon which heterosexual and lesbian feminists could meet. It allows lesbians to attack heterosexuality in language that finds acceptance among heterosexual feminists, making a secure place for lesbianism by exposing the danger of men. By claiming the shared status of victims of male rage and lust, women can overlook or deny the differences among themselves that have been so painful.

However, such a strategy has problematic consequences. Carol Vance asks: "If women organize around their oppression by and through differentiation from men, should they not maintain a united front, stressing their shared and unifying characteristic, femaleness?"⁴ The "fear of difference among women" that she perceives, and the inability to work through or with that fear, result all too often in the theoretical denial of relevant difference. The anti-pornography movement has derived its energy in part from its ability to

command the loyalties and perspectives of many diverse women. Still, there is a price for such unity.

The first cost is that of overemphasizing sexual danger. Vance notes that, far from liberating women to be themselves, the anti-pornography movement "restates the main premises of the old gender system: the dominant cultural ideology elaborates the threat of sexual danger, so the anti-pornography movement responds by pushing for sexual safety via the control of public expression of male sexuality. . . the focus continues unchanged in that sexual pleasure for women is still minimized and the exploration of women's pleasurable experience remains slight."⁵ In keeping with this, the leaders of the anti-pornography movement have repeated the lesbian-feminist rejection of talk about "sexual liberation", seeing in it only "the patriarchal trick of 'relaxation of taboos'".⁶ Women, it seems, are sexually ensnared within patriarchy; while the restrictions of male-dominated morality are odious, even worse is the abandonment of those restrictions in a quest for pleasure. Such a quest can only lead to destruction, to male domination, whether physical or psychic.

The second cost is the consequence of this emphasis. Within an embattled atmosphere, these women simply cannot afford to appreciate diversity or any politics that assumes it. Appeals for the recognition of differences among women - whether they be differences of class, race, sexual preference, or any other - are translated in this context into threats against a movement, elements that would splinter and destroy the true, the central, the most important unity. The result has been described in Chapter Three; the inability to differentiate, to account for irreducible multiplicity among women, leads only to political isolation and individual conformism. The threat of community expulsion and withdrawal of validation serves to keep lesbians in place just as surely as does the charge of pathology.

The feminist discourse of the 1970's succeeded in removing lesbianism from the realm of the pathological, but only by recasting it in less sexual terms and concurring in other social judgments about sexual deviance. Within the lesbian community, however, much discussion was devoted to the idea of desire, of passion, of female sexuality as a source of strength and joy. Secure in the knowledge that lesbian desire was life- and

growth-affirming, women were exhorted to reclaim their bodies and pleasure.

Confession and Conformity

In this context, lesbian sadomasochists began to talk about what they did. The history of lesbian-feminism had endowed them with two basic beliefs that made this not only desirable, but necessary. First was the idea that one's sexuality is a political matter, part of a seamless web of the expression of self. Second was the reliance on community evaluation for one's identity and behavior that has been so problematic for contemporary lesbians. In reaction to a hostile society, lesbian-feminists created a shelter and a framework for the development of a self not at war over its sexuality. Gayle Rubin describes the impact of this early community:

I did not experience the full force of homophobia. On the contrary, to be a baby dyke in 1970 was to feel great moral self-confidence. One could luxuriate in the knowledge that not only was one not a slimy pervert, but one's sexuality was especially blessed on political grounds. As a result, I never quite understood the experience of being gay in the face of unrelenting contempt.⁷

With this sense of mandate for their sexuality, lesbians began to talk about sex. Specifically, they adopted a practice that is known as 'coming out' - revealing one's sexual preference to those around one in order to break the silence and presumptions that reinforce conformity. Coming out makes the possibility and actuality of difference more visible, with the aim of enhancing both the awareness of others and the self-esteem of the one coming out. "The open avowal of one's sexual identity", explains John D'Emilio, "whether at work, at school, at home, or before television cameras, symbolized the shedding of the self-hatred that gay men and women internalized, and consequently it promised an immediate improvement in one's life. To come out of the 'closet' quintessentially expressed the fusion of the personal and the political that the radicalism of the late 1960's exalted."⁸

Marie France states that "Coming out is predicated on three assumptions: that sexual practice has to do with personal identity, that the two are one and the same, and that voicing one's identity is the best way of 'knowing' it".⁹ These assumptions lie at the heart of both gay

liberation and lesbian-feminism. They are understandable; as noted in Chapter Two, the sense that sexual practice reflects, indeed manifests, one's essential identity not only lies at the heart of modern psychiatry but is basic to our contemporary way of thinking about sex and sexual difference.

The third assumption also has a long past in Western societies. Michel Foucault has suggested that the confession is a central element in Western life:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. 10

In making this point, Foucault is concerned to show us that the techniques and aims which we see as central to freedom serve instead to constrain us through their elicitation and publicization of our most private selves. The confession plays a central role in this constraint; originally treated as an obligation, it has become a necessity, the necessity of revelation.

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation.¹¹

Central to this necessity is the belief that the intent of power is negative; that is, we are bound to the idea that power demands that we be silent, that we repress the truth and constrain ourselves, and, conversely, that our liberation requires defiance of this command. These beliefs form the base, not only of Christian confession, but of psychoanalysis and other psychologies, and of most modern social and political theory. They lie at the base of feminism; the descriptive phrase 'the personal is political' quickly became prescriptive, enjoining constant, minute analysis of our lives. "If what we are talking about is feminism then the personal is political and we can subject everything in our lives to scrutiny. . . . If we are to scrutinize our human relationships, we must be willing to scrutinize all aspects of those

relationships. The subject of revolution is ourselves".
12

This scrutiny is precisely what lesbian sadomasochists set out to do. In Coming to Power, a book edited and published by Samois, a lesbian-feminist s/m 'support group', Katherine Davis writes that

We must reexamine our politics of sex and power. The challenge of talking personally and explicitly about all the ways we are sexual, and about how our sexuality differs, is not so much destructive as it is corrective, and necessary. . . . We must talk about what we do as much as who we do it with. . . . We must have precisely the same dialogues about the texture of our sexuality as we have been having about classism, racism, cultural identity, physical appearance and ability. 13

Why must we have these dialogues? Davis explains that

anti-S/M attitudes are embedded in many areas of lesbian-feminist ideology. As S/M lesbians, we say that our experience contradicts many of those closely held theories, and that this examination of our experience is a feminist inquiry. . . . Those of us who have been working actively in the movement for many years are being labelled anti-feminist, mentally ill, or worse. Lines are being drawn and we find ourselves, quite unexpectedly, on the 'other' side. We are being cast out, denied. We become heretics¹⁴.

What must be explored further is the premise, implicit in her argument, that the answer to attitudes of

disapproval is to talk, to expose oneself precisely at that point of censure. This premise is based on the belief that the disagreement is a matter of ignorance and fear that must be, can only be, countered with the truth. Absent is the idea that some areas of life may be subject to inherent, intractable disagreement. The tenor of Davis' remarks, and of most s/m writings, suggests that any disapproval, any hesitation is illegitimate and oppressive. The celebration of individual choice, such an important part of lesbian struggle, here becomes a demand for inclusion in the community on the individual's terms.

Community Definition and the Meaning of Feminism

To understand what is at stake in the s/m debate, we must remember the motivations behind lesbian-feminist theory. One of the central functions of and aims for lesbian-feminism has been the establishment of a new community, a new locus for the production of meaning and identity in the lives of lesbians. In perceiving this need, lesbian-feminist theorists initially rebelled against the individualism that would force each person to

define herself in isolation from others. In response to the barrenness of a civilization that now offers only what Philip Rieff has labelled "negative community", lesbian-feminists have sought to heal their alienation through the construction of "positive communities", those able to cure "through the achievement by the individual of his collective identity".¹⁵

In distinguishing positive from negative communities, Rieff explains that

positive communities are characterized by their guarantee of some kind of salvation of self; and by salvation is meant an experience which transforms all personal relations by subordinating them to agreed communal purposes; negative communities are those which, enabled to survive almost automatically by a self-sustaining technology, do not offer a type of collective salvation, and in which the therapeutic experience is not transformative but rather informative.¹⁶

Rieff goes on to note that, while "advanced industrial communities are no longer culturally positive", moderns have not given up on the foundation of new positive communities. This can be seen in the rejection by Adler and Jung of the austere vision of Freud; it is also prominent in Marxism. Running through modernity, as a counterpoint to the development of science and analytic

modes of understanding reality, is the constant thread of this quest for a semblance of integration in a disintegrating world.

This same quest is evident in lesbian-feminism. Although it presents a powerful analysis of the status of women in general and lesbians in particular, the strongest appeal of lesbian-feminist thought lies in its promise of a new Jerusalem beyond the diaspora of sexual slavery. For contemporary lesbians, feminism is the language of explanation, legitimation, and, ultimately, redemption. Because gay liberation does not effectively analyze the status of women, even those women who identify primarily with the gay movements recognize a debt to feminism. The power of feminism for lesbians has lain in its ability to link an analysis of gender oppression to critiques of the social construction of sexuality so as to provide a new set of understandings and meanings for lesbians.

When lesbian sadomasochists set out to discuss and legitimate their sex, then, feminism was the language of choice. As Amy Hoffman explains, "Lesbians who enjoy S/M sex have spoken about their desires and fantasies in

feminist terms because historically feminism has given women a way to analyze sex and power."¹⁷

However, the opponents of sadomasochism have denied this connection. While agreeing that feminism has a distinctive perspective on sex and power, they argue that that perspective is inimical to any practice that celebrates, magnifies, or is based upon power differentials: "Whatever the cause, the acting out of sadomasochistic desires is contrary to feminism, just as dominant/submissive role playing outside the bedroom is contrary to feminism."¹⁸

When two seemingly contradictory positions such as these claim the same authority, it becomes clear that the confusion is not simply over the issue that is being discussed, but rather is concerned with the basic terms of the argument. What is at stake is, not simply the evaluation of a particular sort of sexual activity, but the meaning of 'feminism' itself.

This has been the nature of 'feminism' since its inception. In its adoption by adherents of different theories and commitments, it has meant slightly different things to each person. This confusion is due to the 'essentially contested' nature of feminism's central

values. As a theory of women's oppression, feminism has always pointed toward some non-oppressive possibility; and yet, not all agree on either the nature of the oppression or the notion of freedom. Alison Jaggar has argued persuasively that this problem is inevitable, in that "contemporary feminists necessarily take over the interest of their predecessors in freedom, justice, and equality."¹⁹ Because these values are central to feminism, feminists cannot avoid the controversies and struggles that have always surrounded them.

The issue of sadomasochism has become a central forum for debate over these values within the lesbian-feminist community. Bat-Ami Bar On explains:

The practice of sadomasochism has surfaced as an issue for the women's community because it brings fragmented feminist lessons about sexual repression and sexual abuse into conflict with each other. . . . the feminist struggle for sexual liberation has become polarized with the struggle to end sexual violence and domination. Each debating party holds on to one or another feminist lesson as though it encompassed all there is to feminist knowledge²⁰.

What are these lessons? They revolve around notions of freedom and the status of consciousness. While many

feminists would agree with Johanna Reimoldt that "feminism can be defined as the belief in the right of women to self-determination"²¹, the nature of self-determination is not clear. The struggle for sexual choice and dignity, so crucial to early radical feminism and lesbian feminism, led many women to see issues of sexuality as the bedrock of oppression and freedom. Within this struggle, the central value was choice - the real ability to choose the uses of one's body, for pleasure as well as work. This focus on choice issued from a liberal individualist view of persons and society as described in Chapter One. Adherents of this view have translated self-determination into the ability to do "'right as us lest' ('just as we please')." The "simple command of the Goddess" that they see as the heart of feminism is, "'So that you harm no one, do what you will.'"²² Such women posit a connection between the oppression of gays and lesbians and that of unsatisfied or abused heterosexual women on the basis of the repression of desire in service to patriarchal, sexist imperatives. In opposition to these demands, they have "insisted on the importance of subjectivity - how it feels to be oppressed, the truth about women's individual

lives, our feelings, thoughts, biographies, pains and pleasures."23

Continuing in this understanding of feminism, sadomasochists have argued for the primacy of subjectivity within feminism. They see no reason why they should not be included within the feminist community, with their understanding of their sexual practices as definitive; contemporary lesbians and gays do not accede to heterosexual demands that they renounce or hide their sexuality, but rather have advanced new interpretations of that sexuality as superior to that of the psychiatric, legal, and religious authorities who had dominated the debate. The central claim of feminism, they argue, has been the superiority of the individual woman's understanding and interpretation of her experience and desire. To repudiate this by condemning sadomasochism and denying its practitioners full membership within the lesbian-feminist community is to repeat the oppression of gays that is validated by medicine and religion.

This simple view of sexual choice has come under scrutiny as women began to focus, not on the need for pleasure, but on the reality of danger, and the need to

combat it. Theorists such as Susan Brownmiller, Susan Griffin, Kathleen Barry and Andrea Dworkin elaborated on the network of fear and domination surrounding women's sexual lives and thus, in a society which sees women largely in merely sexual terms, their whole lives, public as well as private. This trend in lesbian-feminism focussed, not on pleasure, but on power, arguing that "true sexual freedom will be possible only when we break the connection between sex and power, when there is no power component in sexual interactions."²⁴ By 'power', they mean not only force, but all the mechanisms of control and domination that lead women to narrow their choices, to see as desirable that which is against their interests, to substitute the imperatives of men for their own desires. Sadomasochism, with its polarization of roles and its celebration of inequality, appears to be the epitome of the sex/power relation, and thus complicitous in the continuance of women's oppression.

In response to this, sadomasochists have argued along two lines. The first suggests that power is what we make of it; that is, that one cannot infer from the express words and actions of the participants what the meaning and valence of the exchange may be. Thus, a

consensual s/m encounter is completely different from a beating or actual degradation, and the use of power in the two situations is actually contradictory. The second argument, however, runs deeper. This is the suggestion that power is an inevitable component of human relations, and thus that acknowledgment and proper use of power is a more viable, more 'feminist' strategy than the denial of all power relations. The earlier lesbian-feminist vision of female purity has given way to an acceptance of the conflicts and imperfections even among 'woman-identified women'.

This difference in theoretical understanding is outstanding in the writings of the two camps in the sadomasochism battle. The shared meanings of words such as oppression, alienation, and freedom within early lesbian-feminism have broken down as the two concerns of sexual pleasure and sexual danger have diverged. The language of pleasure is necessarily based on the perceptions and feelings of the individual; the enunciation of danger has been forced to transcend, often to contradict, those perceptions and feelings. Still agreed on the basic premise that lesbian oppression is the result of the oppression of women, and thus that

significant analysis must revolve around the category of gender, the two camps are adumbrating notions of oppression and freedom that directly oppose one another. These notions in turn rest on contradictory conceptions of the self and its constitution that reflect the disputing intuitions of modern Americans in general.

In rejecting the analysis of the sadomasochists, their opponents had to challenge first of all the sovereignty of subjectivity. While one's thoughts and feelings were essential, they argued, a social theory must be able to go beyond, to explain and critique those thoughts and feelings. Their criticisms of the simple focus on subjectivity have been those made by Brian Fay of simple interpretive social science. In Social Theory and Political Practice, he argues that the necessary reference to individual meanings and understandings cannot be a sufficient basis for unraveling social systems.(cite) His objections to simple interpretation are four: first, as he says, "such a social science leaves no room for an examination of the conditions which give rise to the actions, rules and beliefs which it seeks to explicate, and, more particularly, it does not provide a means whereby one can study the relationships

between the structural elements of a social order and the possible forms of behaviour and beliefs which such elements engender."²⁵ Second, such an interpretation cannot account for, or even discuss, "the pattern of unintended consequences of actions"²⁶, since it cannot refer beyond the intentions and expectations of the agents. A third problem with this model is that it "provides no way for the social scientist to understand structural conflict within a society, that is, it offers no method of analysing the contradictions which might exist between certain actions, rules, and common meanings, or between these and their causes or results."²⁷ And finally, one must go beyond the understandings of the participants if one is to explain historical change. All of these elements are necessary if we are to truly have a theory; and, without a theory, we find ourselves mere curators of the past and present, antiquarians of ourselves. A central element in the anti-sadomasochism arguments has been the insistence on going beyond the self-understandings of the participants in a sexual encounter in order to grasp the 'constitutive meanings' that construct the encounter and infuse it with value.²⁸

In stressing subjectivity, sadomasochists are responding to the imposition of identity and history upon lesbians that has been effected by psychoanalysis, by religious dogma, and by philosophers, as well as by the state. This imposition has been continued even in the service of feminism by the construction of standards of membership and explanations of lesbian existence and identity within the lesbian-feminist community, as seen in Chapter Three. Further, the insistence on public discussion of issues earlier considered private mandated that sadomasochists talk about what they did. As sadomasochists found themselves outside of the boundaries of their new community, they fell back on what seemed certain and real - their bodies, their pleasures and desires, and their honest thoughts.

In justifying these pleasures and desires to a hostile audience, lesbian sadomasochists have relied centrally on the fact that their sexual relations are consensual, that they are not instances of violence and abuse because they are freely chosen and because it is understood that the masochist always has the option to stop and to define what may be done. It is also argued as a result of this that what is going on may be best

understood in terms of play, of imagination and fantasy rather than 'reality'. No one, they argue, has a right to limit another's consensual sex, and no one has the authority to portray their activity as violence or abuse because they fail to understand the drama involved.

Alienation and Authenticity

The rejection of these arguments has been the basis of extensive writing about the limitations of liberalism. The leading opponents of sadomasochism are primarily academics, either teachers of philosophy and women's studies or graduate students, and their education has included the history of political thought. They are uniformly contemptuous of consent arguments made within a 'patriarchal' society, denying that such a society affords the possibility for meaningful choice. Jan Raymond argues that "consent to so-called lesbian sadomasochism can derive its 'meaning' only from their status as victimized peers, one of whom merely role-plays the part of the powerful"²⁹. And Robin Ruth Linden suggests that "the psychological reality of 'consensual' sadomasochism is so abstracted from the actual social and

historical conditions that shape human relationships and erotic desire as to be virtually meaningless"³⁰.

These women also reject arguments about play and fantasy, on two grounds. The first point, presented most cogently by Susan Leigh Star, is that we are in fact unable to choose our contexts and meanings as we might fancy, and that to imagine that we can is to engage in 'objective idealism'³¹. The second argument, made by Julia Penelope and cited by many others, is that fantasies per se are anti-feminist; "the more we rely on internal fantasies during our interactions with other wimmin (sic)", she says, "the less we are relating to each other as wimmin." This prohibition extends even to ourselves; "To the extent that we rely on fantasies for our masturbation, we have objectified our own sexual feelings." And Audre Lorde rejects the appeal to play in terms consistent with those used for pornography when she says that "even in play, to affirm that the exertion of power over powerlessness is erotic, is empowering, is to set the emotional and social stage for the continuation of that relationship, politically, socially and economically."³² Thus, in a replay of the debates over pornography, the fantasy argument is considered defective

both because of its attempt at 'compartmentalization' of desire and because of the 'intrinsically degrading' nature of fantasy. Fantasy, it is charged, is incompatible with authenticity, with the integrity of a life which is lived in the light of truth. In this view, conflict within oneself is not a matter of the inevitable, tragic nature of life that gives rise to politics; it is, rather, a sign of sickness, a wound within the self to be healed. To be authentic- to be a person - is to maintain a unity between consciousness and desire, reason and will and appetite; and for such a one, to tolerate the diversity implicit in politics is to sin.

When he suggests that "authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion"³³, Lionel Trilling points to a recurring problem for ideals of authentic personhood. These ideals serve, not so much to tell us how to live, as to condemn the ways that we do live without guiding us in transformation. To be authentic is to be real - but how are we to know what is real? The sadomasochists argue that they are being real, they are being true to themselves rather than repressing real desires. In order to respond to this, their

opponents have had to portray these desires as inauthentic, as a slippage from personhood that must be conquered. Thus, when Robin Ruth Linden says that "sadomasochism is firmly rooted in patriarchal sexual ideology, with its emphasis on the fragmentation of desire from the rest of our lives and the single-minded pursuit of gratification", she must conclude that "the recent interest by some women in sadomasochism is testimony to the profoundly alienated and objectified conceptions of erotic desire"³⁴ with which we are all burdened. To be a woman and to do or desire these things is so clearly contradictory as to obviate any further discussion. In fact, further discussion is impossible, except among those who already share the premises; the notion of authenticity is vague enough to provide no basis for argument between the truly opposed. It is particularly unpersuasive to those being called inauthentic; the elegant prose of alienation and objectification has been paraphrased by Johanna Reimoldt as "the argument of the Idiot-Woman", who "cannot sanely choose because she has been too warped and brainwashed by her society, poor thing, to know what she's doing. The fact that she is so warped is in turn proved by the fact

that she has chosen this behavior".³⁵

In rejecting the arguments of the sadomasochists, radical lesbian-feminist writers have identified liberalism with the arguments made, to the point of suggesting that sadomasochism "is not a deviation from the philosophical origins of liberalism but a realization of them."³⁶ This is so both because of liberalism's tendency to abstract choice from the actual social context, and because of the utilitarian liberal's focus on individual happiness, which they identify with callousness. Not only do they have the right to define sadomasochism as violence, they have the obligation to demystify it, to "place responsibility on the aggressor, thus allowing women's experience to be named, described, and acted upon"³⁷.

Lesbian-feminists who object to sadomasochism are now facing the charge of narrow-minded arrogance, and are using all the theoretical equipment of the Hegelian revolution to counter it. Refusing to rest with medical or other judgments that have traditionally included lesbianism on the list of pathologies, these writers have had to formulate arguments out of what they perceive as the ground of feminism. At every point, however, they

are faced with the challenge to somehow distinguish their arguments from the 'mystifications' and 'ideologies' of those who have considered them deviant. Linden's point about the unknown background to any desire and choice may be used as effectively against lesbians in general as against sadomasochists (or heterosexual women, those other 'victims' of patriarchy). In using the argument that we all feel and desire things that must be resisted for our larger good, the lesbian-feminist must explain why lesbianism is not one of those choices that must be renounced. In turn, sadomasochists must be challenged to describe more fully how a libertarian position can deal with issues of social and sexual power abuse. An extreme position may offer the comfort of consistency, but in this case it seems to lead to the elimination of the possibility of community in the search for pleasure. The dilemma of a situated, non-alienated freedom is what the issue of sadomasochism has brought to the fore, and no simple response will do it justice.

Conclusion

What, then, are we to make of the sadomasochism debate? Is it, as Kathleen Barry and others have suggested, a ploy of the left to weaken radical feminism from within? Is it, as the lesbian-feminist sadomasochists would have it, just another frontier in the battle for liberation from ignorance and intolerance, another newly freed field for dialogue and understanding? Or is it, indeed, a child of lesbian-feminism, but a child of its defects rather than its strengths?

The arguments of the sadomasochists are, indeed, largely liberal material; underneath the talk of community, the language of radical analysis and redemption, lies the Hobbesian acceptance of power and the Lockean focus on contract as the ground of human relations. In their talk of sexual 'exchanges' and 'encounters' bereft of any context, the sadomasochists are indeed guilty of, not only objective idealism, but a denial of the reality of any community underlying political structures. Or perhaps, not a denial, so much as a failure to understand; one can easily imagine these writers to be ignorant both of social theory and of the

force of affectional, community ties in their own lives. It is this failure that makes them such targets for their opponents, who identify such naivete with liberalism.

And yet, this is not a naive liberalism. Rather, what seems to be occurring is a recognition of the price of simple, 'authentic' unity, and a determination to maintain a core of autonomy beyond social deconstruction and reconstruction. The totalist impulse in lesbian-feminism, that which seeks to explain and prescribe every aspect of life, is being answered, not by another counter-explanation, but by a refusal to explain, to allow oneself to be explained. The high walls of privacy being built by the sadomasochists serve to insulate, not merely against the state or male society, but against interpretation. "I am what I say I am", they say; not because they reject the possibility of a hermeneutic of consciousness and sexuality, but because they distrust the effect of any such hermeneutic.

The sadomasochists have grown up within lesbian-feminism, and have participated in discussion and activities which have exposed liberalism to the light, which have questioned the smooth surface of consent and choice, the lines between public and private. They know

that the surface and the lines of our lives are not drawn as they seem to be by liberal theory; if they did not, they would not treat social ostracism as equivalent to political oppression. Both sides offer themselves as equipped to provide superior understandings of heterosexuality, of 'patriarchy', of men and women. How, then, can the sadomasochists refuse an authority beyond subjectivity in the one privileged area of lesbian sadomasochism? And how can their opponents back away from the full implications of their critique? Are both sides, perhaps, merely hiding behind a liberalism they do not believe, as Glenn Tinder has suggested of students in the 1960's who retreated "to liberal breastworks when confronted with conservative opponents who understood the significance of their styles"³⁸?

While the privatized, often hyper-individualist arguments of the sadomasochists are not the product of feminism as much as a general legacy of Americans, what is clear is that lesbian-feminism does mandate a sort of self-exposure, as well as the sense that one's life must be lived as a whole, either good or bad, either for freedom or against. With this sort of pressure, sadomasochists have cooperated both in talking about a

part of their lives that many would rather not hear about, and in feeling 'oppressed' when others voice their displeasure. For in a tight community such as lesbian-feminism has developed in the past, disapproval does indeed amount to excommunication. The normalizing aim of confession works precisely by calling to light that which has been hidden, and then chasing it, rooting it out, and returning to check on it. In the first years of lesbian-feminism, that strategy was effective; but the charges of parochialism that surfaced from women of color, from lower-class women, and from 'pre-feminist' lesbians have left an opening for others to rebel against the judgment that follows upon confession.

Any change in the situation will take time, if it comes at all. Behind the debate among lesbians lurk always the facts of continued governmental persecution or lack of protection of gay men and women in many areas, which make unity seem so essential. Rubin has said that "the real danger is not that S/M lesbians will be made uncomfortable in the women's movement. The real danger is that the right, the religious fanatics, and the right-controlled state will eat us all alive."³⁹ It is this awareness that makes sadomasochists clamor for inclusion;

it is this that makes them so dangerous to feminists who do not want any association with them. Whether open inclusion of sadomasochists and their demands will hurt or help feminism cannot be foreseen; what is certain, however, is that simple rejection and silencing is no longer available to those lesbian-feminists who want s/m to disappear. Further, attempts to do so can only be based on the weakest, least thoughtful aspects of lesbian-feminism. This prospect should at least give feminists pause.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER FIVE
LIBERALISM AND THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITY

"Before I compliment either a man or his generation upon having got rid of their prejudices, I require to know what they have substituted for them."

-John Stuart Mill

What, finally, are we to make of lesbian-feminism? How might the development of lesbian-feminist theory and its particular issues illuminate the problems of society and politics? Does analysis of this development shed any light on the fortunes and misfortunes of liberalism? What is to be gained by reading lesbian-feminism as political theory?

The first lesson we can learn from lesbian-feminism is the extent to which relations of power manifest themselves in and through language. The struggles for a positive self-understanding and a sense of historical community have been conducted as a struggle to re-define and re-describe lesbians and lesbianism. This process has been at least partially self-conscious. When gays and lesbians rejected psychoanalysis as the relevant discourse for their identities, they did so not because

psychoanalysts opposed their political or civil liberty (though some did oppose it), but because they believed that psychoanalysis was incapable of expressing a conception of their lives that did justice to their agency and dignity. Whatever Freud's own opinions may have been, his discourse has operated as one of the paramount 'individualizing' forces in 20th century America. The simple liberalism of the American psychoanalysts could be seen to function, not as a liberatory force, but as a blind behind which power could move freely into the bodies and minds of a deviant population. As a discourse of laws and sovereignty, liberalism could not address the dangers posed by a normalizing discipline such as psychoanalysis; liberal justice has been too strongly wedded to juridical theory to (adequately) account for the problems of inclusion and dignity. It is this narrowness, and these problems, that have made liberalism so unpalatable to the taste of many moderns.

The relation of power to language is not unique to psychoanalysis, however. The development of lesbian-feminism is a story of the conscious use of language as a weapon in struggle. This, then, is our second theme: identity formation, inevitably bound as it is to the

location of community membership, is a matter not only of ontology but also of strategy. The development of lesbian identity has appeared in the academic world on the level of philosophical argument. But this philosophy has arisen from and must be geared to the concrete needs of lesbians. Arguments and definitions are proposed less with an eye to eternal truth than with a view toward their concrete implications for community membership and political strategy. The formation of a 'lesbian identity' was achieved, first, through the normalizing influence of psychiatry in the last century, and then through the development of a gay and lesbian urban subculture in the 20th century.¹ The re-formation of that identity under lesbian-feminism has been argued for in terms of truth. But in fact the issue has been power; or, rather, the issue has been truth and power.²

The first choice in the new strategy was the rejection of psychoanalysis; the second was the decision to ally with feminists rather than gay men. The result of these two moves, first seen in "The Woman-Identified Woman", was the production of a new truth about lesbians - the truth that lesbianism is a matter of politics, of rebellion, of love for women in a misogynist world. This

truth simultaneously reflected the choices made by these lesbians and structured the choices for identity for them and later thinkers, casual or rigorous, about what their difference 'meant'.

The quest to get at the meaning of lesbianism reflects the continuing reification of lesbian lives under the sway of lesbian-feminism. After rejecting liberalism for its obliviousness to questions of social identity and power, lesbians needed some way to claim the right to exist. Under the sway of the modern belief that actions are symptomatic of being, these women began the search for their essence and its meaning. Because their oppression had been located around their choice of women, it seemed obvious that this choice was what needed legitimation.

The result, however, was dismaying. In constructing the new lesbian, lesbian-feminists did not deal with the problem of difference. Rather, they erased it by valorizing and moralizing lesbian sex. The conjunction of lesbianism and radical feminism resulted in a new understanding of what lesbianism was about, what women were like, and what and who the problems were. Confident in their status as victims/survivors/resisters of

patriarchy, lesbian-feminists brushed aside the self-understandings of other lesbians as 'male-identified', structured by power rather than informed by truth.

At this point, the issue of lesbian sadomasochism came to expose two problem areas for lesbian-feminism. The first is the problem of difference, particularly sexual difference, and the second is the question of speech. The confident distinction between truth/freedom on the one hand, and power, on the other, associating truth with speech and power with silence, led to the belief that freedom simply required speaking the truth about oneself, thus breaking the wall of silence and repression that was seen as central to lesbian (and women's) oppression. This belief was bolstered by the reification of the lesbian, which ensured that any words spoken, particularly about sexuality and desire, would be liberatory and empowering. When lesbian sadomasochists began to speak, however, those lesbians who did not approve could find no room within feminism for their inclusion. Neither could they tell them not to speak without becoming the new oppressors. The totalizing nature of radical lesbian-feminist thought guaranteed that some group would pose such a challenge. And that

same nature ensured that the response would be made in another normalizing depth-language, as insidious as the one they had fought to escape. The political lesson we may learn from this, then, is that the real danger facing us is not one of doctrine nor of behavior, but more fundamentally of the impulse to totalization, to power/knowledge, that is endemic to modernity.

For it is clear that these problems - of identity formation and community location, of the relations between language and power, and of the threat posed by modern discourse in all its varieties - are the problems facing all contemporary thinkers in the West. Lesbian-feminism is often deceptive on this point, because a fundamental belief of most of the prominent theorists is that they are doing something new, something unique, something totally at odds with 'male' history and philosophy. The belief in an ontological difference and opposition between men and women leads them to ignore or deny their common involvement with non-feminist thinkers. What we are witnessing in lesbian-feminism is a new Enlightenment, another attempt to make words mean what we want them to mean and to shed the confusion and evil of the past. It is crucial, then, that we heed the lesson

of that earlier Enlightenment, and not take this one solely at its word.

The Status of the Subject

One of the persisting problems for liberalism has been its inability to relate its ideals of liberty, tolerance and dignity to the real decisions and policies of common life. The level of abstraction required to maintain a consistent stance of liberalism renders one either isolated from others in the attempt to 'live one's principles' or forced to explain the variety of exceptions and qualifications of the principles that arise in everyday life with actual others. Neither Kant nor the British liberals ended up with an actual defense of individual diversity; liberty and dignity depended upon meeting the requirements of rationality in one's being and privacy in one's actions. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, the central values of the Enlightenment required the discipline and self-discipline of the rational subject. It was only the peculiar internal discipline of the subject that made external, political and civil liberty consistent with the demands of social

organization. It was the valorization and extension of such liberty that blinded individuals to the price paid by subjection to the disciplines required in modern schools, factories, and corporations.³

William Connolly has examined Foucault's work on the modern construction of a disciplined subject as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment vision of "the free, rational and responsible agent capable of consenting freely to rules, of being guided by long-term interests and principles, and of being punished for deviation from those norms to which it has voluntarily consented."⁴ The conclusion that he draws, however, is not that we must immediately reject the subject and subject-centered morality. He argues that, disciplined as moderns may be, "those who have experienced the affirmative side of modern freedom, self-consciousness and citizenship (the subject at the level of political life), invariably seek to retain and extend this experience."⁵ His point is that, suspect as modern disciplines may be, their positive side is such that even those who feel the subjection are reluctant to reject the positive in order to eliminate the negative. We cannot hope merely to erase the modern self in favor of some more 'authentic',

less disciplined being. If we acknowledge that some order is essential, and inevitable, then "the development of a subject-centered morality may turn out, when compared to other conceivable alternatives, to be the most salutary way to foster order through the consent and endorsement of participants."⁶

The long-term project, then, is to reconstitute the subject in a less extreme, bifurcated manner; it is to understand the subject so as to "enable us to acknowledge . . . others", as Steven White says.⁷ The force of work such as that of Foucault and the deconstructionists lies in the appeal to otherness, to the desire to re-open the world and its possibilities. Such a desire, however, often falls short in action. Anathematizing closure, the deconstructionist finds herself unable to bear drawing lines that she knows to be 'fictive'⁸. White notes that feminism is a particularly active ground for this problem. The reason for this, he says, is "that while, on the one hand, post-structuralism's emphasis on otherness is seen by feminists to be salutary, on the other hand, they, perhaps more than most others influenced by post-structuralism, feel the pull of the responsibility to act in an especially acute way."⁹

Lesbian-feminism certainly has faced this dilemma. The most powerful insights of lesbian-feminism have centered around the myriad and subtle ways that we are constructed, our potential perversities smoothed away; the best, early work of Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich are particularly strong examples. However, this project of uncovering and questioning, which has opened the doors to positive identity for many lesbians, has continually fallen prey to the closure necessitated by the attempt to construct a new community and a new history.

In this closure, many lesbian-feminists have shared the path of those modern communitarians who feel the urgency of the need to combat social disintegration and its resultant violence. The communitarian argument has centered around the flimsiness, the unearthly abstraction, of the liberal self, and MacIntyre, Taylor and Sandel have attempted to portray a 'thicker', 'situated' self that resides inescapably in language and social structures. The implication of their work has been that this situated self, resting on understandings and structures that bind us together below the level of self-consciousness, provide a better ground for discussing political claims and obligations than does the

rational self of contract theory. The motivation of liberalism's opponents is a better life on earth; it is the justification of substantive social commitments and action. The rejection of liberalism is the rejection of a skeleton, an empty frame of society that cannot serve as the basis for any such substantive claim.

The experience of lesbian-feminism, however, can provide us with clues to the endurance of this skeleton of justice. The resilience of liberalism is due fundamentally to its commitment to the preservation of the 'affirmative side' of the modern subject. "The elements particular to modernity may in principle be contestable", Connolly tells us; "but these are contests we are not now in a position to open."¹⁰ Given our limited horizon, given our present constitution as independent subjects and the self-understandings that accord with that constitution, liberalism stands alone in its commitment to individual rights and tolerance of diversity. Communitarianism, both left and right, is constantly pressed to reconcile itself to the premise of individualism so powerful in the United States. Even as they challenge liberalism, American social movements draw on the strength of the liberal appeal to rights and

autonomy. Those who appeal to other traditions are often moving, their voices a powerful contrast to the degenerate forms of individualism to which American society is increasingly susceptible. And yet they cannot entirely dispense with liberal ideals without appearing to exercise a moral judgment necessarily suspect.

Whatever leading theoreticians may believe, many feminist lesbians apparently understand their position and aims in essentially liberal terms, and they will continue to do so as long as the concern for individual determination and rights predominates over that of community and order.

In the United States, the civic republican tradition has always been challenged by the fear that republicans will not act to protect the minority. Every 'consensus' has been haunted by the suspicion that it is incomplete, perhaps even coercive. Called upon to justify their concern in an age increasingly insecure in its metaphysics, liberals such as Rawls returned to Kant and contract theory to draw the lines of justice. As we see metaphysics replaced by linguistics and history, the grounds of contract theory erode once again. The liberal concern, however, lives on, and is fueled by post-structuralist thought. Perhaps, after all,

MacIntyre is right when he casts liberals as covert Nietzscheans (though Nietzsche is still no liberal), at least in the sense that liberals cannot believe in the community (whether linguistic, political, or otherwise-based) sufficiently to turn themselves over to it completely. In the splintering of modernity, the liberal has always been the one to enlarge the cracks in the seemingly smooth walls of community. One cannot be both a genealogist and a metaphysician; one cannot deconstruct and remain a communitarian in the way one was before. As Connolly explains, "genealogy is a radicalization...concentrating on the 'strategies' of power which establish and maintain the most basic unities of modernity while suspending any appeal to rationality or truth to understand these constructions."¹¹

In its current version, liberalism rests upon the construction of a person who has no characteristics that are of public concern beyond those necessary for keeping the peace. As Michael Sandel has put it, this liberal self is "prior to its ends" and "prior to its roles and dispositions", thus assuring "its independence from social conventions, and hence its separateness of person, its individuality".¹² MacIntyre contrasts this to what

he calls a "narrative conception of the self", that is, "a self constituted in part by a life story with a certain telos". MacIntyre's conception (as well as those of Sandel and Charles Taylor) does indeed seem richer and more useful for understanding actual humans than does the thin liberal self. Yet, this is only one among several possibilities. Another choice could be that between the narrative self and the constructed subject of Foucault. This is perhaps the more relevant battle ground in current theory. Both concepts are historically rich, capable of situating persons in actual social circumstances and discussing them on the level of expressed self-understandings and aspirations. The two approaches are directly opposed, however, in their evaluation of those understandings.

The narrative self, as described by MacIntyre, is that self which is inevitably located in a particular social and historical space which gives the meaning to her thoughts, choices, and actions. The aim of his conception is to make sense of the life of an individual. In contrast, Foucault's constructed subject is the creature, not of sense, but of power. His genealogies of social institutions deprive the subject of any capacity

to justify and explain itself and the relations which form it.

The narrative self is bound to the horizons of its age. But this is not the charge to be brought against it by post-structuralists, for any constructed, non-transcendental self shares this same limitation. The problem with the conception of a narrative or expressive self is that it blocks critique even within those horizons. This self is treated as independent of power relations, because the fact of construction is not taken seriously enough. The acknowledgement that we are constituted, which is the first step away from an atomistic liberalism, must be followed by the question: by what or whom are we so built? The answer, 'language', or 'culture', or 'tradition', is hardly an answer unless it is followed by more questions: Who controls the language, culture, and tradition? What interests and purposes are served by the present constitution of the self? The theorists of an expressive self decline to answer these questions. Contrasting the projects of Taylor and Foucault, Michael Shapiro says that

"Taylor's perspective would close questions that Foucault's analysis opens up. Operating

within a notion of discourse as expressive of what is fundamental to being human, Taylor would endorse the self or identity we have been lent...whereas Foucault inquires into how we have been given this self."¹³

Similarly, MacIntyre's narrative self is a useful contrast to the abstract, 'thin' self of liberal theory. But it too fails to answer our needs today. In his return to a vocabulary of tradition and community, MacIntyre is forced to continue the search for the good as something transcending particularities.¹⁴ Not only is he unable to ask the questions concerning power and the self, he is unwilling, for it is precisely against those questions that he is arguing. His whole project is aimed at throwing a veil over the Enlightenment, asking us to behave as though it had never happened. Specifically, MacIntyre hopes to derail the nihilism that he blames for modern bureaucratic domination.

Perhaps it is the facts of MacIntyre's own existence that account for this. Certainly, bureaucratic domination and the irrational violence that is its twin are major problems for modernity. However, he overlooks the fact that many humans today can only locate a tradition and a community by denying themselves a

language, a spouse, or otherwise hiding themselves. We are too far down the road for even most white males to be comfortable with MacIntyre's soothing words of conversation and conflict within tradition. Those who have never been allowed in any community or tradition in the first place may reasonably be even more doubtful.

Power and Community

It is this abiding skepticism that fuels liberalism. Far from being a doctrine of progress, liberalism was, as Sheldon Wolin tells us, "a philosophy of sobriety, born in fear, nourished by disenchantment, and prone to believe that the human condition was and was likely to remain one of pain and anxiety."¹⁵ The product of religious war, liberalism is the true political theory of the analytic of finitude.¹⁶ Its birth presumed two things. First, the eternal truth of God's will was not manifestly evident to humans in any publicly accessible way. Second, relations on earth are relations of power and utility as well as love, that, indeed, we are afforded no certain basis for distinguishing love from

power or utility beyond our conscious, conscientious subjectivity.

Behind the communitarianism of both right and left lies the belief that power is opposed to love and community. This is evident in the writings of radical feminists (indeed, most feminists), as well as in the work of Taylor and MacIntyre. In contrasting (good) community and (bad) power, communitarians have sought to relocate the grounds of community as a way to oppose power; or, rather, they have opposed power in order to establish community.

In contrast, liberals and post-structuralists have both stressed the extent to which community is a vehicle of power. This power operates precisely through the codes that the community endorses, the codes that define identity and action, and it is irremovable from them. If this is so, then the question becomes not how to remove power but how to live with it; not what power is transcendentally legitimate, but rather, what power is necessary for what purposes. The liberal focus on justice and rights is the approximation of these questions. Denying any claim to know the good, liberals have nonetheless been sufficiently moved by the claims of

metaphysics to try to establish a transcendental standard of justice in a hostile environment.

What liberalism promises, then, is a possible line of defense for human dignity in the face of totalizing or normalizing discourse. However, contemporary liberals are mistaken as to the source of this defense which has never, and will never find a sufficient motive in logic and analysis. What is precious, what is needed is the liberal sentiment, that which appreciates, even enjoys, the ambiguity and contestation of public life. The bearer of such a sentiment need not abstract from the particulars of my existence to respect me; neither must she agree that my understanding of a good life is the true, the best, the purest. What she need do is believe that I mean what I say; that is, she must agree to treat me as a being competent to speak of my own desires and motives directly (even if she suspects that I am not). The 'truth' of psychological theories of self-construction cannot be sufficient grounds for the hegemony of these discourses and explanations. Once we acknowledge the extent to which discourses of depth structure function as vehicles of power, we can once again attempt to draw a line between the truth-status of

a description and its implicit demands on policy. The awareness that I am neurotic or unaware of my oppression or in other ways 'defective' should not be allowed to function as a reason to ignore or denigrate my self-understandings and desires.

As they began, lesbian-feminists fought to wrest the understandings and construction of lesbian identity from the grip of those who denigrated the self-understandings of lesbian women. In the process, however, they fell into the trap awaiting all moderns, all subjects of the regime of truth; the trap of counter-reification, of justifying their existence by reference to (new) transcendental standards of what a lesbian is, what she means, and where she fits. But lesbians are not the only ones for whom this trap has lain in wait. The first victims, not surprisingly, were the white bourgeois men who sought a justification in truth for liberal theory. The initial argument of liberalism relied on a constructed man, a being with powers of reason and a propensity for unreasonableness that sanctioned his inclusion in public affairs along clearly defined, neutralized lines. Those who did not fit the criteria simply did not have any place in public life.

The primary challenge to liberal theory has always arisen from the fact that no actual person lives like the (reasonable) liberal man. The communitarian response has been to find what people actually are like, as a way of discovering what we are actually due. The struggles of lesbians over the past thirty years, however, should tell us that 'people' are not 'actually like' anything; and that the experience of oppression has less to do with what we are told we are like than it does with the rigidity with which we are told what we are like, what we mean, and how we should manifest that meaning. The opposite of oppression in this sense is, not truth or respect, but humor or lightheartedness - the humor that comes from seeing all categories, all explanations, all identities as provisional. Such a sense is rooted in the appreciation of ambiguity that is antithetical to all metaphysics, including 'liberatory' metaphysics.¹⁷

A strong implication of this dissertation has been the idea that the truths of our lives are not to be found (exclusively) in our self-representations. By this I mean that not only do we not understand the consequences of our generalized statements, but we do not in fact live the lives that our theoretic representations would

suggest. Far from being a weakness, this is, rather, the strength of human life exceeding verbalization. It has been acknowledged in a partial way by those women who are on the fringes of feminist theory - women of color, working class women, 'sex radicals'. The demand that feminists begin their analysis with the lives of women rather than academic philosophy reflects the sense that feminist theory is yet another white, middle-class outpost, another weapon of assimilation. However, these "underclass" women often imply that, as marginal group members, they have a full awareness of the sources, meanings, and effects of their acts that is denied to members of hegemonic groups. They revive the logic of Hegel's master/slave relation, but forget that the slave's superior consciousness is yet not complete. For the fact of marginality does not make one an expert on the culture, any more than hegemony does.

There is, nonetheless, much to be learned outside the circle of theoretical dominance. In particular, one may learn a different problematic, and different problems. The fears of communitarian philosophers, while not entirely misguided by any means, may be exaggerated by their focus on the words spoken in the culture. The

words of modern liberal culture are bereft of any confidence in a real good, real standards for living, real community. Yet the actions of participants suggest more confidence than the words. This should not surprise us. As actual existent beings, we can no more suspend belief than we can suspend breath. The density of reality, rather than its elusiveness, is what surrounds us. In such a world, what is needed is a history - a genealogy, a counter-memory¹⁸ that opposes the density of reality, the density of interpretation. We do not need to prove that we exist, in the manner of metaphysics - which is, to prove that we have the right to exist. We do exist. We live our lives, inescapably, with existing others. To justify this by defining, by ontologizing, by tracing descent, is to suggest that our present existence is open to dispute.

One of the mediocre strengths of liberalism is its acceptance of this sense of inevitability in reality. The world of the liberal is a world in which, as Isaiah Berlin put it, "human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another".¹⁹ In this world, conflicts can be seen, at least partially, for what they are: conflicts between

humans. A theory that would minimize this reality, by qualifying the ability of one or the other party to truly know its interest or desire, its true identity or community or history, fails not so much because it is wrong as because it draws dangerous conclusions. I may be neurotic, or deviant, or male-identified; however, a liberal will not deprive me of my political liberty because of that, nor will I be excommunicated. My membership is a reality, more fundamental than any justification for or against it. If my membership is not that of a first-class citizen, liberalism puts the onus on my opponents rather than on myself. Metaphysics has been put to use to justify exclusions; that does not mean that metaphysics must be used to justify inclusion. All that is required is the refusal to accept the exclusion.

Political Strategies

Does this mean that all lesbians (or other marginal groups) need ask for is 'a piece of the pie'? In a sense, yes. The pie has been baked by a particular historical configuration of men. The inclusion of other people will of necessity change that configuration - not

because women or non-whites or workers are inherently virtuous, but simply because they are different. The suggestion that assimilation will be total reflects either a lack of confidence in the strength of marginal peoples, or an ahistorical belief in the capitalist, male-dominated modern world. Without sounding facile, I want to suggest that strategies of entry are, at this point, more directly radical than strategies of withdrawal or revolt 20. The creation and support of non-hegemonic cultural resources and community are encouraging, stimulating developments. They will be more so as they decline to reify and discipline their participants.

What exactly does this mean for lesbians? Lesbians, as members of one of the primary 'deviant' classes in society, have attempted to counter the prevailing stereotypes of their lives by a variety of strategies. In the lesbian-feminist strategy, the priority is on the creation of a community and a history that will offer the lesbian a sense of belonging rather than exclusion, positive identity through membership in a group that has a culture of its own - a culture, in fact superior to that denied them. On the other hand a 'reformist'

strategy has focussed on the elimination of institutional and legal barriers to membership in the larger society and on the development of a sense of pride, not as lesbians per se, but as persons who are lesbian.

The second path has been characterized by lesbian-feminists and others as mere assimilation, the denial of one's true self in order to participate. The two strategies, in fact, reflect the conflict that is endemic to modernity: given the current fact of otherness within the self, given the consensus among theorists that contemporary societies exact a high price for stability and order, we are faced, as Connolly has noted, with the choice between a vision "in which the goal is to integrate otherness into more perfect forms of identification with the will of a rational community" and one which suggests that "we should strive to create more institutional space to allow otherness to be".²¹ What I hope to have demonstrated, through examination of lesbian-feminism as a communitarian project, is that the first option is not available to us as we are presently constituted: that otherness is a constant, harassing presence which will not vanish under any political or discursive regime in modernity, and that acceptance of

this fact must be the base for any future politics - for lesbians, for women, for heterosexual white men.

This in turn suggests that the politics of reform has several advantages. First, it does not require one to define and to subjectify one's difference in order to claim rights. Within the lesbian-feminist community, membership is based on standards no less restrictive than in the larger society, and these standards have so far not shown themselves to be sufficiently unproblematic that their restrictiveness should be overlooked. If anything, this community is under more pressure to justify its standards, because it is less diffuse and more intimate than the heterosexual culture surrounding it. The comparison to medieval society is apt in this regard. Excommunication was not simply a matter of losing one's political rights or one's job; it involved the loss of the structure of one's life - friends, Church, family, God. To the extent that lesbians form an insular community, members face similar risks in challenging common beliefs. In contrast, broader-based reform movements may work without insisting that participants adhere to a 'way of life', thus leaving

issues of other differences open to discussion at a less volatile level.

A second advantage is that, while reform movements may appear to gain 'less' in terms of direct identity support than community strategies, they in fact may achieve more. Specifically, mainstream efforts may provide their actors with a strong personal identity that is more resilient than that offered by alternative communities, because it is broader based. A lesbian may indeed find herself capable of alliance and even friendship - even community - with straight women, as well as with men of all sorts, that will prove more personally durable as well as politically effective. The community of lesbian-feminists, to the extent that it ignores the society surrounding it, runs the continual risk of reaction and oppression by that society. It is inconceivable that an attitude of hostility and separation will engender anything other than itself; few of us are in a position to make that worthwhile. This is not a caution against any agitation. It is, rather, a suggestion that such action must be conducted in a spirit of goodwill and hope for common action rather than one that suspects even potential allies. This is

increasingly being recognized by lesbian-feminists who are broadening their politics to encompass both the needs of community and the need for a politics that operates beyond community boundaries.

In line with this consideration, it is worth remembering the debate, described in Chapter Two, between the liberal psychiatrists and their conservative and radical opponents. The conservatives and radicals were united in their perception that the issue of sexuality went beyond personal choice of lifestyle. The simple liberal denial that medical evaluations of sexual difference were relevant to social or political judgments gave way in the face of the agreement of the major antagonists that in fact they were. The reaction of lesbian-feminists to this was to deny the authority of medical discourse, using the negative images of the conservatives as examples of the fundamental misogyny of patriarchal society. The gay rights activists, on the other hand, fought to change the images held by the majority of Americans, and to remove homosexuality from the category of pathology.

The Withdrawal of Meaning from Difference

The history of lesbian-feminism and the insight it offers into the problems of liberalism may afford us an opening into what changes are needed to make a perspective so basic to America as liberalism is not pathological to it. In particular, this history may help us to distinguish the heart of liberalism from its unnecessary appendages and parasitic growths, and to free it from the misunderstandings of both defenders and opponents.

The final ground of the question of liberalism, we have seen, is the question of the self - how it is constituted and how it is to be treated. The basic question that arises from this study is whether sexuality is inevitably so fundamental to social organization as it has seemed, or more exactly, in what ways and for what purposes it may have this status. While the liberals were naive in suggesting that at present sexuality need not be so explosive, they were perhaps pointing in the right direction after all. As long as we agree that "it is sex itself which hides the most secret parts of the individual, the structure of his fantasies, the roots of

his ego, the forms of his relationship to reality"²², and that we cannot live in common with different sexualities, we will be forced to impose 'proper' sexuality on ourselves and others. As we prepare ourselves to question the nature and status of sexuality, we become open to reevaluate the claims of otherness in our lives. It becomes possible to imagine rights as adhering, not simply to the approved subject, but to the self as that which encompasses both subjectivity and otherness.

This will not be mere assimilation; neither will it be simple liberalism. It will, however, draw on the liberal notion of rights, and on the high valuation of individual freedom and dignity characteristic of liberalism. We can safely dispense with such ideas only as long as we trust that our community will never arrive at a truth that requires our subjugation; few of us can be so secure. The way to a decent life seems to be almost the opposite of the communitarian ideal. Rather than find or develop the community within which security and dignity are to be found, we need to focus our imagination again on our differences, actual and potential. Recognition of commonality leads to compassion and care, qualities sorely needed today; however,

without a humble recognition of the fundamental otherness of others, we cannot do them justice as human agents.

Liberalism survived in the past by denying that our differences were so fundamental as to present obstacles to community. It ignored difference, moving to the abstract ground of a 'thin self' deserving of rights. This move has been brilliantly, thoroughly criticized by writers such as Sandel, Taylor, and MacIntyre. The solution will not come, however, from attacking the citadel in the name of our essential embodiment or constitution through language. Such arguments demonstrate that the liberal self is a fiction. They do not speak to that within us which never quite fits the public boundaries, which defies the explanations of social construction. There is, indeed, no one so pathetic as the subject who fits without trouble, without thought, into public parameters. Such a subject is thoroughly subjected, fit only to be ruled. The fact of our social construction must be placed alongside the fact that our construction values individuality as well as community. This cannot be disposed of by appeals to a 'higher self' in which individuality and community are reconciled. The best modernity seems to offer is the

capacity to live with the tension between the two, the proper recognition of difference as well as commonality.

What exactly is the proper recognition of difference? Perhaps at this point I can be clearer by stating what it is not. Relief from the bonds of modernity will not come from the efforts of those groups previously defined by a disciplinary discourse to legitimate 'their' group. This means that groups must resist fighting simply for 'gay rights' or 'women's rights' or 'civil rights' for any group as a group. What must be engaged in is a questioning of the process whereby such groups are defined and formed. The proper recognition of difference does not involve a simple tolerance for 'other' groups, but requires a wholesale reexamination of the lines of exclusion drawn in modernity and a reevaluation of the aims and needs expressed in these divisions. This does not imply that all barriers to desire will be eliminated; as we saw in Chapter Four, the sexual libertarian goal remains flawed by its inability to deal with the facts of social power, even as the libertarians reveal the complicity of lesbian-feminism with the order it hopes to oppose. It seems increasingly plausible that no desire is innate, to

be privileged over others, to be excused from examination while others explain themselves. To the extent that sexuality is a means of control, a channel of social power, all of its forms are equally implicated in the maintenance of order.

The result of this knowledge need not be a microscopic examination into the details of each individual's sexuality. A liberal may draw the conclusion that in fact it is precisely this that commands us to respect one another's privacy, to refrain from confessing or demanding confession, and to seriously reconsider demands that we 'be' hetero- or homo-, perverted or normal, marginal or central. We need to see what is at stake in the categories we have made, and to decide whether we wish to or need to maintain those lines. Is the heterosexual family in fact the 'fundamental building block of society'? How is that changing under capitalism? What exactly does this imply for those who do not find themselves in such a family - and how does the presence of these 'others' impact on that family? Is the centrality of the modern family threatened by the presence of alternatives? Is that good or bad? All these questions need serious examination. We need to

take seriously the possibility that societies may survive, even thrive, with more diversity than that afforded us in modernity.

It is here, ironically, that the liberal comes to her forte. For Foucault tells us that the problem with modern political theory is not so much that it is wrong as that it is irrelevant. In theory, we hear, we have not yet "cut off the King's head". Oblivious to the passing of the age of power as force, theorists absorb themselves in questions of sovereignty and right.²³ And certainly, among moderns, liberals are preeminent in this absorption. Foucault does not tell us clearly what it is that we are to substitute for these conceptions, but his elucidation of the power/knowledge nexus is meant to open a new avenue that will eliminate the obfuscation that results from asking the wrong questions.

Until that time, however, the discourse that is most capable of challenging the disciplinary powers is that of politics. Murray Edelman's point about the 'helping professions' is apt: therapeutic discourse serves to justify actions that otherwise would be protested as tyranny²⁴. In its focus on physical acts and boundaries, liberal political discourse serves to expose the

presumptions behind any language used to justify power. It does, of course, carry its own presumptions and predispositions. The strength of liberal discourse, however, is that it contains a commitment to treat power as power when it is revealed as such, and that its commitment to liberty is of a sort that may be contrasted with commitments to a common good, pride, self-determination, authentic being, or any other, without suggesting that these things are liberty 25. It is the very barrenness of liberal discourse that is its occasional strength as well as its weakness. In forcing us to rise above the distinctions inscribed in social practice and language, liberalism provides a ground for challenging even those upon which it rests. The question then is not what are we to substitute for a barren, pernicious legacy, but rather, how can we infuse it with life and meaning? This is the problem awaiting us.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Vintage, 1980), esp. pp. 42-44; John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority 1940-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
2. In modern Western society, "we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 93.
3. On the connection between liberal humanism and the internally disciplined subject, see Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage, 1979), and Power/Knowledge.
4. Connolly, William, "The Politics of Discourse", in Language and Politics, ed. Michael Shapiro (New York: New York University Press, 1984), p. 159.

5. Ibid., p. 163.
6. Ibid.
7. Stephen White, "Post-Structuralism and Political Inquiry", paper presented at the 1986 meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 1986, p. 9.
8. Ibid., p. 15.
9. Ibid., p. 17.
10. Connolly, op. cit., p. 163.
11. William Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse, second ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 232.
12. Michael Sandel, Introduction to Liberalism and Its Critics, ed. Michael Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984), p. 9.
13. Michael Shapiro, review of Philosophical Papers

- vols.1&2, by Charles Taylor, in Political Theory 14,2 (May 1986), p. 321.
14. See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), p. 205.
15. Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 294.
16. For an extended discussion of the 'analytic of finitude', see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 28-43.
17. "Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? Isn't the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning?" Luce Irigaray, "Questions", in This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 163.
18. On genealogy and counter-memory, see Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca,

- N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-164.
19. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", Four Essays on Liberty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 171.
 20. For a discussion on the differences between revolt and revolution, and the relation of liberation to freedom, see Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), Ch. 1.
 21. William Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness", Political Theory 13,3 (August 1985), p. 375.
 22. Michel Foucault, quoted by Connolly, *ibid.*, p. 373.
 23. See Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures", Power/Knowledge, pp. 102-08.
 24. Murray Edelman, "The Political Language of the Helping Professions", in Language and Politics, ed. Michael Shapiro (New York: New York University Press, 1984), pp. 44-60.

25. "Pluralism, with the measure of 'negative' liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, of peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer, because it does, at least, recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another." Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", *op. cit.*, p. 171.

CHAPTER SIX
DEMOCRATIC INDIVIDUALITY AND THE RENOVATION OF
LIBERALISM

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes).

-Walt Whitman

In treating the problems of liberalism, George Kateb has suggested that "the renovation of liberalism" must be based on a theory of "democratic individuality" that goes beyond "either the Whig tradition or the theoretical consecration of the private life of property-acquisition within the uncitizenly safety of undemocratic rule".¹ What is needed, in his view, is a foundation for liberalism that sees the individual as basic and sacred while acknowledging social construction and the reality of a community beyond the level of contract. This foundation will be neither Kantian nor utilitarian, for neither school has a satisfactory conception of what we are and how we are bound together. The Kantian attempts to ground rights and justice in a soil beyond contract or community, but she does so only by abandoning democracy

as well. The utilitarian, on the other hand, cannot provide an account of individual rights and respect that resists social expediency. What Kateb argues for is "a developed theory of individual integrity" as "the necessary foundation of the theory of democratic individuality."² Such a theory will resist the encroachments of power, whatever its source. This resistance begins with the detachment from existing social conventions that is characteristic of self-conscious creatures. Such detachment does not demand rejection of convention, but does require the acknowledgement that "all social conventions are, in fact, conventions - i.e., artificial; that they are changeable; that conventions have in fact changed through time, and are different from place to place."³ Given the fact of self-consciousness, this detachment is essential for an honest, self-critical life; the only alternative seems to be "justifying old inhibitions on a new basis".⁴ Detachment, Kateb says, is needed to "defend the individual against regulation by any agency that is starkly and publicly distinct from the individual", but also "against regulation by any less specifiable force that seems to permeate society and

threatens to take in the susceptible individual".⁵

To those within the Aristotelian tradition, such detachment bespeaks nihilism. The recognition of the conventional nature of social life and institutions seems to them to suggest that no order is to be preferred over any other. The insistence of liberals that they are not bound to a teleology reinforces this suspicion. However, it appears that both liberals and their critics are mistaken as to the nature of liberalism. The concern for detachment and the recognition of convention are themselves rooted in a conception of human telos that is grounded in the capacity for rational choice. Such a telos requires that we be able to distinguish what is essential to life, what is 'natural', from what is open to debate and judgment. This distinction does not imply that all convention is equal, or inaccessible to reasoned discussion. In fact, such discussion can only be rooted in the recognition that some things are conventional. This capacity to abstract from our circumstances is in fact the fundamental condition of philosophy.

Such abstraction, however, must not be confused with the isolation of the self in a cloister of truth. Resistance to the encroachments of power does not imply

withdrawal from society. Liberals know that all society involves power relations, and they accept that fact without becoming cynical or nihilistic. The position of the cynic is, as always, but the protected face of disappointment. Only by involving oneself in public life on every level can one hope to prevent abuse and usurpation. The practice of critical detachment is not the hysterical separation, the denial of connection, that is so prevalent in contemporary America; it is in fact based upon, and consists in, an understanding of both the solidity and importance of human connection and its dangers.

From this, we can see that the creation of individuality is not a mere matter of possessive individualism, nor of "domestic privatism". The claims of individuality may work against acquisitiveness as well as against friendship, when those become opposed to/ my ability to live a life of integrity. The self that is to be nurtured is not simply given, placed in a social setting, but is also able to, indeed must, transcend the barriers of the given. As such, it will include elements of the 'Other', of the weak and despised as well as the valued. A liberalism built on this foundation will be

grounded on empathy as well as prudence, compassion as well as contract.

Kateb cautions, however, that "empathy cannot abolish distance, only reduce it."⁶ If we accept this statement, we must be wary of any political theory that proposes to base itself too exclusively on empathy. While we clearly need a space for empathy, this space cannot be the only arena for politics. As an enterprise conducted among adversaries and competitors as well as friends and partners, a viable politics requires that we engage both in locating our commonalities and in providing for our differences. Small or exclusive communities are necessary for the provision of roots and security; these must be nurtured and strengthened in the face of their erosion and the increasing bureaucratization of public life. However, the present historical configuration of the nation-state will not evaporate in the foreseeable future, and we need to work for more equitable relations within that configuration even as we nurture local community. These larger relations cannot be built on empathy, but must find their ground in understandings and respect that recognize our differences as well as our commonalities. Attacks on the

liberal state are often attacks on an order that is not based in empathy or compassion. They are attacks on politics as an enterprise conducted by humans who are separated and suspicious of one another as well as connected. Liberal notions of contract, as well as conceptions of government as an arrangement for the accomplishment of limited ends, are denigrated by male communitarians as unrealistic and destructive, and by many feminists as reflective of a masculine reality which is pathologically oriented toward denial of connection.⁷ What all of these criticisms share is the implication that our lives should be seamless wholes, where we can move from 'private' to 'public' and back again with the same goals, same expectations, same selves in each setting. This assumption must be seriously re-evaluated before liberal (or non-liberal) theory can progress.

The communitarian argument rests on the belief that by dispensing with the elements that blind or distort our vision, we will reach agreement on the questions facing us; it is based on what Connolly calls an 'ontology of concord'.⁸ What has not been forthcoming, Don Herzog has written, is "an account of what commitments should bind us, what content the communal attachments that should

transcend our individual projects should have, what exactly the common good should be".⁹ In fact, he argues, the charge of 'incompleteness' is perhaps more accurately directed against liberalism's critics. When we actually get down to substantive ideals and goals, communitarians splinter, when they do not abandon the field altogether. As we saw, lesbian-feminists and conservative psychiatrists have shared a critique of liberalism while maintaining opposite positions on the substantive issue before them. Such disputes are a constant of social life. The liberal position is precisely an attempt to discover what we can and must agree upon; accepting that most issues are not amenable to settled agreement among all members of society, adhering to a 'philosophy of dissonance', liberals try to lay a ground for safe, dignified coexistence.¹⁰

H.N. Hirsch has said that "the problem of contemporary liberalism is not the absence of community, but rather the manner in which liberalism defines the mature, 'deserving' self, and, by so doing, distributes the fundamental rights of citizens."¹¹ Thus, he argues that

...both liberalism and communitarianism might be seen as sharing an inflated (and flawed) understanding of the "unity" of the self - although they define the essence of that self in different terms . . . From such a perspective, both liberal individualism and communitarianism might be viewed as complementary modes of social discipline, betraying, in both cases, the truly ambiguous and anarchic nature of the self.¹²

From this perspective, the antidote to a sterile liberalism is not a community that can mediate between self and other in a more satisfying way, or one that will embody the telos of the individual, but a reformulation of the self that is granted respect and membership in the community. This reformulation will have the specific form of a loosening of claims from a metaphysical hierarchy of personal attributes; it will be grounded on an appreciation of differences that cannot, will not be named or categorized. The problem with liberalism is not that it is insufficient, but that it fails to go far enough; it betrays its fundamental insight of irreducible plurality by reducing that plurality to a list of possible axes of differentiation and deciding which axes are deserving of public recognition. In their quest for a deeper community, American opponents of liberalism have

too often sought to reformulate or rehierarchize the axes. Real change, however, requires questioning the need for, and the appropriate arenas of, such differentiation. By calling attention to the fundamental status of the command to heterosexuality, lesbian-feminists brought to light one of these axes. The work before us, now, is to question the nature and necessity of the hetero/ homo axis in its entirety. Anything less will fail to do justice to the true extent and depth of our multiplicities.

The liberal polity represents a determined effort to find a common ground that nonetheless supports the claims of the individual against the community. To the extent that it has shown itself to be susceptible to capture or exploitation by non-political powers, it must be challenged to change. To eliminate it in favor of a tighter, more authentic regime, however, is to deliver us over entirely to those powers, be they economic, religious, medical, or any other. The twin facts of plurality and power mandate that we acknowledge the limited, controversial nature of any process or policy, even as we seek to defend it. We must develop conceptions of society and economy that do not rely on

the notion of an essential, authentic self for their critical force, and yet provide a ground for opposing impositions and systematic inequalities. Lesbian-feminism's strength has lain in its ability to expose deep structures such as compulsory heterosexuality, thereby reminding us that constructions of self are in fact constructions. Its continuing struggle is to maintain and develop these insights without retreating into essentialism or facile explanations of enduring differences. The need for an identity rooted in a community and a history is real; so also is the need to self-consciously transcend that community in order to complete identity. Individuality must be tied to, and transcend, community if it is to be vital and meaningful. It is to this difficult, central human dilemma that political theory and organization addresses itself. We can be faithful to our existence only if we acknowledge its endurance beyond any politics.

The final issue for theorists now, is no longer the content of theories - it is the activity of theorizing itself, the foundation of theory in certain forms of discourse. The shift of modernity is partly a product of, and partly due to, the shift in philosophy from

ontology to epistemology.¹³ This shift provided a new agenda for political theory, in that theories' groundwork could now lie less on the answer to the question 'what is the right order?' and more on that to the question 'what can we know about the right order?' Liberalism's rejection of earlier teleology is based in its minimal answer to the latter question, just as Aristotle deals with the former. The fact of the primacy of epistemology leaves any return to teleology open to the Nietzschean dismissal - as long as the epistemological question is treated rationalistically, as the definitive question, and one that must be answered in universal terms. To the rationalistic mind, the denial either that the epistemological issue is primary or that an acceptable answer be universal is tantamount to nihilism. Without transcendental standards, it is feared, we will be left with nothing but naked power. By this time, however, Foucault has made us painfully aware that, in modernity, power moves precisely through such transcendental standards.¹⁴ The question for us now is whether the attempt at universals is doomed, or whether there may be a way to frame some standards of morality and justice in such a manner as to increase both self-understanding and

community. Some such project, of a sort not yet entirely clear, is essential if we are to make any progress as political thinkers and actors. A change in attitude towards greater recognition of reality - of the humanity manifest in individuals, beyond statistics and categories - with a corresponding movement in theorizing from a 'scientific' to a 'conversational' mode - these are the avenues to new and fruitful theory.

Michael Oakeshott distinguishes between conceptions of human intercourse as inquiry and as conversation thus:

In a conversation the participants are not engaged in an inquiry or a debate; there is no 'truth' to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought. They are not concerned to inform, to persuade, or to refute one another, and therefore the cogency of their utterances does not depend upon their all speaking in the same idiom; they may differ without disagreeing...In conversation, 'facts' appear only to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; 'certainties' are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other 'certainties' or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas of another order; approximations are revealed between notions normally remote from one another.¹⁵

In conversations there are many voices, some recognizable from experience, others seemingly new and strange. However, all are to be treated equally and

respected for what they are: indeed, conversation "is impossible in the absence of a diversity of voices: in it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another."¹⁶

This idea, however, is constantly imperiled: "For each voice is prone to superbia, that is, an exclusive concern with its own utterance, which may result in its identifying the conversation with itself and its speaking as if it were speaking only to itself. And when this happens, barbarism may be observed to have supervened."¹⁷

The barbarism of modernity lies in the domination of human conversation by two voices: that of 'science' and that of practical activity. Under their sway, the conversation has degenerated into a pair of monologues, interrupted by occasional squabbles over territory. The prime piece of turf, of course, is politics. For whatever may be said about the various sources of meaning in our lives, politics is a constant. However, the nature of politics, its relevance and its forms, are conceived in several ways, each with their characteristic evaluation of that conceived activity.

Conceptions of politics have been a problem particularly for Americans, whose natural law heritage leaves us so suspicious of compromise, of decisions made on a level other than 'principle'. Politics is for us a murky, muddy business, and to label someone or something 'political' is to place it in direct contrast to that ideal of truth or justice that is so potent in the United States. The slogan that 'the personal is political' does not mean simply that our private lives are informed by public understandings, nor that they involve negotiation and compromise; its tone is one of accusation, of exposure. Must that always be the case? There is insight in the slogan and in the awareness that generated it which we must acknowledge and accept. However, when placed in the context of American confusion over the nature of politics and the political, the slogan - and the awareness - may be seen to be fundamentally disruptive of the possibility of that conversation so essential for our human survival and development. The cautions of MacIntyre sound extreme and in some sense misguided in the safe halls of academe. But his portrayal, as well as his predictions, are altogether plausible if we do not break out of the nihilistic trap

laid for us by rationalism. Science, powerful as it is, will not arrive at the 'truth' of humans and their societies, and we cannot afford to accept the claim that it is the only alternative to arbitrary power. Our human conversation must expand to introduce all the voices that inform our lives. Feminist scholarship has begun this expansion by its integration of scientific analysis, historical exploration, philosophical engagement, and literary awareness of the positions and experiences of women in society. It too, however, has often shut the doors against 'suspect knowledges' - those discourses such as psychiatry and psychoanalysis that earlier lent themselves to the destruction of the self-respect of many women. One of the challenges for us now is to re-examine those disciplines and discourses, and to note especially when they provide unwelcome or unintegrated insights. The discovery of a conversational mode will allow us to explore alternative explanations and understandings of our lives without breaking a commitment to psychic and intellectual coherence. Such a project is difficult to describe, and more difficult to engage in. But it must not be regarded as impossible. For the price of failure to enlist in this adventure is the continuance of tired

disputes, both among political theorists and feminists. In pursuing a conversational mode, both groups should find new sources of the energy and understanding that are so desperately needed if we are to survive and live well.

FOOTNOTES

1. George Kateb, "Democratic Individuality and the Claims of Politics", Political Theory 12,3 (August 1984), p. 334.
2. Ibid., p. 335.
3. Ibid., p. 337.
4. Ibid., p. 340.
5. Ibid., p. 342.
6. Ibid., p. 347.
7. For the clearest expression of this viewpoint, see Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985).
8. William E. Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p.
- 10.

9. Don Herzog, "Some Questions for Republicans", Political Theory 14,3 (August 1986), p. 487.

10. In Politics and Ambiguity, Connolly indicts liberalism as one of the theories of concord, while referring extensively to the work of Foucault as an example of the philosophy of dissonance. I believe that our dispute here is not fundamental. He is right to charge analytic liberals, beginning with Hobbes, with betraying the reality of ambiguity in the social world. I think, however, that this betrayal is the more acute precisely because it is not inevitable to liberalism, but is a constant threat to its integrity.

11. H.N. Hirsch, "The Threnody of Liberalism", Political Theory 14, 3 (August 1986), p. 426.

12. Ibid., p.445.

13. This 'epistemological turn' has been treated thoroughly by Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger; however, for relatively accessible discussion of the problem, see Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the

Mirror of Nature, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

14. See Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in Power/Knowledge (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Madness and Civilization, (New York: Vintage, 1965); The History of Sexuality, (New York: Vintage, 1980).

15. Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" in Rationalism in Politics, (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), p. 198.

16. Ibid., pp. 198-99.

17. Ibid., p. 201.

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