Women in Western Political Thought

Susan Moller Okin

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.001

9

John Stuart Mill, Liberal Feminist

The practice of asserting general convictions about humanity and its rights and needs, and denying their applicability to a major segment of the human race, has been by no means confined to the ancients. As we have seen, Rousseau stated his most basic principles in universal terms, and then proceeded to exclude women from their scope. What is even more striking, however, is that, despite the individualist orientation of liberal thought, John Stuart Mill is the only major liberal political philosopher to have set out explicitly to apply the principles of liberalism to women. Before embarking on a discussion of John Stuart Mill's feminism, therefore, it will be illuminating to look briefly at the way some of the earlier liberal theorists disposed of the female half of the human race.[1] Hobbes, Locke, and James Mill will be our examples, although Kant or Hegel—except that the latter's claim to being called a liberal is somewhat dubious—would serve the purpose equally well.

Hobbes's entire political philosophy is founded on the argument that human beings are naturally equal, on account of the fact that they are equally able to kill one another. This is the reason that nature provides no basis for inequality of rights and privileges, and that all authority must be grounded in consent.[2] Explicitly, in his works up to and including *Leviathan*, Hobbes includes women in this argument for equality. Repudiating the claim that, in the state of nature, dominion over children belongs to the father, "as being of the more excellent Sex," he applies

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.002

his own argument about the equal ability to kill: "There is not always that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War."[3] In the bulk of his works, moreover, Hobbes acknowledges that, since "the birth follows the belly," the mother is in fact the original "lord" of her children in the state of nature.[4] Faced with the need to justify the prevalent rule of fathers over their families within commonwealths, however, he explains it in terms of the contingency that "for the most part Commonwealths have been erected by the Fathers, not by the Mothers of families."[5]

There is clearly something lacking in Hobbes's reasoning, here, for his explanation does not answer the problematical question of *how* just half of a race of people, all of whom are equal in what is for Hobbes the most important sense, could come to be in a position to found a commonwealth in which they had dominion over all the members of the other half. In other words, if women are the original sovereigns over their children, how did men become patriarchs while still in the state of nature? In *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, after a certain amount of lip service has been paid to the idea that the mother or the father might logically be the family's sovereign, toward the end of the pertinent chapter of each of these works—though he has provided no reasonable foundation for it at all—Hobbes proceeds to present the family as a strictly and solely patriarchal institution. He says, in fact, that a family consists of "a man and his children; or of a man and his servants; or of a man, and his children, and servants together: wherein the Father or Master is the Sovereign."[6] From this point on, the patriarchal family is the primary social and political unit with which Hobbes is concerned. The mother, with her original sovereignty over both herself and her children, and with no good reason to relinquish either, has disappeared from the story. The only time we hear of her again from Hobbes is when she appears, briefly, in the *Dialogue on the Common Law*. Here, he asserts that not only the family, but

the patriarchal family, is an essentially natural institution —that "the Father of the Family by the Law of Nature was absolute Lord of his Wife and Children."[7] This attempted solution to the dilemma, however, is consistent neither with his insistence that the issue of dominion between the sexes cannot be decided without the possibility of continual war, nor with the fundamental principle of his political theory— that authority is not natural but arises from consent.

The problem that leads to all this inconsistency arises from the fact that Hobbes was not prepared to decide the issue of the equality of the sexes one way or the other. If the basis of his individualism was to be firm, he needed to argue that individual women were equal with individual men, just as weaker men were with stronger ones. His assumptions about the necessity for male dominance in both the family and society at large, however, made him unable to let this argument proceed to its logical conclusions.

Having taken the fatal step of admitting women to that basic human equality upon which his system of politics is built, the only way in which Hobbes could justify their exclusion from political life, and their obvious inequality in contemporary society, was to substitute the male-headed family for the individual as his primary subject matter.[8] But this solution is paradoxical, to say the least, since the tradition of which Hobbes is the founder is supposedly defined by its founding of politics on the characteristics and rights of individual, atomistic, human beings, and its renunciation of natural hierarchies or groups as the fundamental entities with which politics has to deal. Worse than paradoxical, however, the supposed solution is in fact no solution. Given his initial premises of human equality and egoism, there was no way that Hobbes could logically arrive at the institution of the patriarchal family, on which his political structure is based, for this institution depends on the assumption of the radical inequality of women.

Locke's dilemma about women is similar, in that he, too, presents them as men's equals for some purposes, but ulti-

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.003

mately goes back on this commitment. In order to argue against Filmer's case for patriarchal government, Locke claims that male and female parents have an "equal Title" to power over their children.[9] If he can undermine the familial basis of patriarchy, by stressing that both parents have an equal share in what Filmer attributes to the father alone, he has gone far toward demolishing the foundation for absolute monarchy. Locke in fact uses the mother's "equal Title" as a *reductio ad absurdum* to refute the derivation of political from parental authority. For if the father dies, the children naturally owe obedience only to their mother. "And will anyone say," Locke asks, "that the *Mother* hath a legislative power over her children?" When it contributes to his case against absolute government, then, Locke treats husbands and wives as equals.[10]

The logical extension of such reasoning might seem to involve both the repudiation of patriarchalism within the family, and the acknowledgment of women's political rights. But Locke is not renowned as an early feminist, and the reason is not obscure. Although he uses parental equality to combat absolutism in the political realm, Locke peremptorially concludes in other passages that there is "a Foundation in Nature" for the legal and customary subjection of women to their husbands. Though the natural rights of individuals render illegitimate absolutism in the governmental realm, so far as the governance of the family is concerned it is quite justified. Where "the things of their common Interest and Property" are concerned, Locke argues, since husband and wife may disagree, "the Rule . . . naturally falls to the Man's share, as the abler and the stronger."[11]

Thus, when it does not suit his case or the prejudices of his time to promote women's equality, Locke appeals to "nature" to legitimize their subordination to men. With the patriarchal family thus reinstated, the exclusion of women from political rights is implicitly justified by the assumption that, as the head of his family, the father alone can repre-

sent its interests in the wider society. Just as in the case of Hobbes, then, the fundamental subject matter of Locke's political philosophy is not, as it first appears, the adult human individual but the male-headed family.

James Mill's essay, "Government"—influential as a relatively readable version of the Benthamite case for extension of the suffrage—is based on premises at least as individualistic as those of Hobbes and Locke. Together with the utilitarian proposition that the purpose of government is to maximize the pleasures and minimize the pains which people derive from one another, the foundation of Mill's case for representative government is an assertion which he presents as a "grand governing law of human nature"—that all human beings desire to exercise power over their fellow creatures, and that if given the means to do so they will use it without compunction so as to increase their own pleasures.[12] He concludes from these two premises that "unless the Representative Body are chosen by a portion of the community the interests of which cannot be made to differ from that of the community, the interest of the community will infallibly be sacrificed to the interest of the rulers."[13]

Having stated his case, however, Mill sets out to see whether some limitation of the franchise would be possible or even advantageous, and argues as follows:

> One thing is pretty clear, that all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals, may be struck off without inconvenience. In this light may be viewed all children up to a certain age, whose interests are involved in those of their parents. In this light also, women may be regarded, the interest of almost all of whom is involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands.[14]

Thus, having based his entire case for representative government on man's inevitable concern for his own selfish interests, Mill completely ignores his egoistical hedonism in

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.004

order to "involve the interests" of women conveniently in those of men.

Here, as with Hobbes and Locke, the individualist implications of liberalism are severely constrained by the assumption of the inevitable existence and the legitimacy of the patriarchal family. There is, thus, a fundamental ambiguity which pervades not only the writings of these three philosophers, but most liberal thought. Whereas the liberal tradition appears to be talking about individuals, as components of political systems, it is in fact talking about male-headed families. Whereas the interests of the male actors in the political realm are perceived as discrete, and often conflicting, the interests of the members of the family of each patriarch are perceived as entirely convergent with his own, and consequently women disappear from the subject of politics. As we shall see in the following chapter, John Stuart Mill did *not* subscribe to the previous liberal "solution" to this question of the interests and rights of women.

Though not nearly so abstract as Plato or Hegel, John Stuart Mill was a philosopher who was concerned with the broadest and most profound issues affecting the life of human beings in political society. Liberty, individuality, justice, and democracy were his values, and at the root of his whole philosophy was his conviction that the utilitarian goal, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, could not be achieved apart from the greatest possible moral and intellectual advancement of the human race. Thus, for Mill, unlike Bentham and James Mill, one of the principal purposes of societal and political institutions was to develop human potential to the highest possible stage. One of the most intriguing things about his feminist writings, then, is that they are clearly an application of his most dearly held principles to a specific case where he perceived that they were being most flagrantly ignored.[15] His feminism was certainly not a sideline; rather, it constitutes, for the student of Mill, a valuable opportunity to see how he applied

his central ideas. The emancipation of women to a level of equality with men was not, for Mill, aimed solely at the increased happiness of women themselves, although this was an important part of it. It was also a very important prerequisite for the improvement of mankind.

Mill's opposition to the prejudices and beliefs which kept women in a subordinate position in all aspects of social and political life was based on convictions formed very early in his youth, which found expression in many of his works on political and ethical subjects. At the beginning of the work he devoted specifically to these issues, *The Subjection of Women*, he states: "That . . . the legal subordination of one sex to the other . . . is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement . . . [is] an opinion which I have held from the very earliest period when I had formed any opinions at all on social or political matters, and which . . . has been constantly growing stronger by the progress of reflection and the experience of life."[16] Evidence for his continual concern with the position of women is offered by his various biographers and in his letters; he often judged peoples, philosophical systems and periods of history according to their attitudes toward women and their role in society.[17] It will not suffice to confine the following discussion to *The Subjection of Women* alone, since there is in some of his other published works and in his letters, a fuller treatment of some ideas that are rather summarily dealt with in that work. For example, both to guard his own and Harriet Taylor Mill's personal reputations, and in order to avoid endangering the respectability of the incipient movement for women's rights, he played down or omitted his radical ideas about divorce and birth control.[18] Where this occurs, I shall make reference to his more explicit discussions of these subjects, and I shall also point out instances in which Harriet Taylor's ideas, as expressed in her own writings on the subject of women, are significantly different from those Mill himself espoused.[19]

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.005

Alien though Mill's radical ideas about women were to the mid-nineteenth century climate of opinion in general, it is easy to find stimuli to the development of his feminist convictions amongst several of the groups of thinkers with whom he was in contact during his formative years. The Utilitarians, by whom he was educated, were certainly not unconcerned with the issue. Bentham, for instance, though he thought it would be premature to allow the issue of women's suffrage to distract attention from or endanger his broader purposes, did concede the crucial points that existing differences between the sexes had certainly not been shown to be innate or inevitable ones, and that according to the principle of utility women should have the vote on the same grounds as men.[20] As for his father, John Stuart Mill notes in his *Autobiography* that "he looked forward . . . to a considerable increase of freedom in the relations between the sexes, though without pretending to define exactly what would be, or ought to be, the precise conditions of that freedom."[21] On the subject of female suffrage, however, James Mill, in his *Essay on Government*, had greatly offended the other philosophical radicals by suggesting that women might well be excluded from voting without any bad consequences, since their interests are included in those of the men in their families. A violent controversy was produced in Utilitarian circles, by this single, most unacceptable sentence, from which the young Mill tells us that he and his associates, including Bentham, "most positively dissented."[22] It is clear from his use of the phrase in his subsequent writings about women that Mill was particularly struck by the somewhat exaggerated statement in Macaulay's critical attack on the *Government* essay, that the interests of women were no more identical with those of their husbands than were the interests of subjects with those of their kings.[23] The whole controversy must surely have stimulated John Stuart Mill's concern with feminism. In addition, the Utilitarian's mouthpiece, the *Westminster Review*, had established itself as an early champion of the

cause of women's rights. As early as 1824, Mill himself had published in that periodical an article attacking the prevalent custom of regarding morality and personal characteristics in completely different lights with reference to the two sexes.[24]

Mill's feminism also derived inspiration from the early French and English Socialists. He mentions meeting William Thompson, an Owenite who had written a lengthy feminist work in the 1820s. He says that he considers it "the signal honour of Owenism and most other forms of Socialism that they assign [to women] equal rights, in all respects, with those of the hitherto dominant sex."[25] We know, also, from his letters, that he was very interested in the ideas of Enfantin and the other Saint-Simonian *missionaires* who came to London in the early 1830s.[26] Tempered though his admiration was by his subsequently justified suspicions of their fanaticism and charlatanry, he continued to recognize the debt owed them by the feminist cause. In his *Autobiography* he writes, "In proclaiming the perfect equality of men and women, and an entirely new order of things in regard to their relations with one another, the St. Simonians, in common with Owen and Fourier, have entitled themselves to the grateful remembrance of future generations."[27]

Another factor which must have tended to confirm Mill's already strongly held feminist convictions was his connection with W. J. Fox and the Unitarian periodical, the *Monthly Repository*. As early as 1823, when Harriet Martineau contributed on the subject of equal education for women, but especially in the 1820s, when Fox was editor, this magazine published articles advocating female suffrage, a more rational attitude toward divorce, and the correction of the countless other injustices in the treatment of women. In his history of the periodical, Francis Mineka says: "Altogether, the *Repository*'s record on the emancipation of women is a distinctly honorable one. For its day, it was far in advance of common opinion; no contemporary periodical

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.006

so consistently advocated an enlightened policy."[28] Mill wrote for the *Repository* in the early and mid-1830s, and his frequent correspondence with Fox over these years shows that the latter was a distinct spur to his feminist principles.[29]

Finally, we cannot ignore the direct influence on Mill's ideas of the women he met in the intellectual circles in which he moved. Such talented and intelligent, educated and productive women as Harriet Martineau, Sarah Austin, Harriet Grote, Jane Carlyle, and Eliza and Sarah Flower cannot fail to have made their impression on his ideas about their sex and the way it was regarded by contemporary society. Most important of all in this respect, however, was Harriet Taylor.

There has been much dispute about the extent of Harriet Taylor's influence on Mill, and the originality of her contribution to his work.[30] This stems from the divergence between, on the one hand, Mill's enraptured statements about her limitless genius and his claims that a great deal of his later work was in fact based on ideas that were hers, so that she played Bentham to his Dumont,[31] and, on the other hand, the decidedly unfavorable impression she made on their contemporaries, and the hardly startling quality of her own extant writings. I am inclined to agree with H. O. Pappe, who concludes his examination of the evidence by saying that it is only Mill's distorted impression of her abilities that suggests that she was endowed with any qualities of genius. However, it is not necessary in the context of Mill's feminist ideas to go deeply into this controversy, for two reasons.

First, Mill has left us with a very clear statement about his wife's effect on his feminist beliefs. He stresses that she was not the source of his convictions about the need for the equality of men and women, and this statement is borne out by his many letters and several publications on the subject which date from before their first meeting. He says, in fact, that it may well have been his strong views on the subject that initially attracted her to him. However, he

adds that, in the course of their long relationship and eventual marriage, she had played the part of transforming what had been "little more than an abstract principle" into a real appreciation of the practical, day-to-day effects of women's lack of rights and opportunities. She had also, he says, made him aware of "the mode in which the consequences of the inferior position of women intertwine themselves with all the evils of existing society and with all the difficulties of human improvement."[32] Thus, although there is no doubt that Mill was a convinced feminist independently of the influence of Harriet Taylor, both the existence and the difficult circumstances of their relationship must have increased the strength of his convictions, and of his determination to do what he could to have women's many disabilities remedied.

Secondly, it is impossible to tell which of the ideas that Mill and Harriet Taylor expressed on the subject of women originated in his mind, and which in hers, with the possible exception of those they expressed to each other in two short essays on marriage and divorce, very early in their relationship, and those that appear in the earlier essay, *The Enfranchisement of Women*, but not in *The Subjection of Women*, which Mill wrote after Harriet Taylor's death. From this evidence, one derives the distinct impression that her ideas were somewhat more radical than his. She proposes, for example, that once women have been given full civil and political rights, all marriage laws could be done away with, without harmful results. While Mill was in favor of considerable relaxation of the divorce laws, he never suggested that the contractual basis of marriage be abolished. On most issues, however, it seems that their ideas became very much enmeshed on this subject which was so important to them both. Many of the arguments included in *The Subjection of Women* appeared first in *The Enfranchisement of Women*, but this is not sufficient evidence that they were all originally her ideas, since although the pamphlet was published under her name, Mill

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.007

refers to it at least once as written by himself. This may, however, have been in order to avoid the publisher's prejudices. Most probably they worked on it together, or at least were in constant touch about the ideas it contained. As Mill himself says, they came from "the fund of thought which had been made common to us both, by our innumerable conversations and discussions on a topic which filled so large a place in our minds."[33]

Thus, to feminist convictions which Mill held from very early in his life were added the influences of a number of groups of thinkers with whom he mixed or at least had considerable contact—the Utilitarians, the early Cooperative Socialists, Saint-Simonians and Fourierists, and the Unitarian radicals. He had come into contact with a number of women whose qualities strongly contradicted contemporary stereotypes of what women were and should be like, and he had a lengthy and intimate relationship with a woman who had directly suffered the effects of discrimination against her sex, particularly in the form of the marriage laws and the denial of educational opportunities. It is, then, not surprising that he should decide to apply his most basic principles to arguing for the emancipation of women.

In *On Liberty*, Mill eschews any appeal to "abstract right, as a thing independent of utility." In *The Subjection of Women*, too, he feels obliged to answer those who might accuse him of advocating "a social revolution in the name of an abstract right."[34] At times, however, in spite of this protestation, he does come very near to sounding like a natural rights theorist, rather than a simple utilitarian. He refers, for example, to the injustice of denying to women "the *equal moral right* of all human beings to choose their occupation (short of injury to others) according to their own preferences."[35] Despite a few un-utilitarian "lapses" such as this, however, the basic arguments of the work on women, as of *On Liberty*, are made in the name of utility—that is, in the name of John Stuart Mill's version of utility. The appeal of *The Subjection of Women*, too, is to "utility

in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being."[36]

Mill vehemently rejects the narrow, Benthamite conception of human nature, explicitly in the essay on Bentham,[37] but also implicitly in all his other works. "Human nature," he says in *On Liberty*, "is not a machine to be built after a model . . . but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing."[38] Whether Mill's totally unmechanistic conception of human nature means that he cannot be regarded as a real utilitarian is a much debated issue. It has been argued that the emphasis he places on the development of the human faculties, rather than simply the pleasures experienced by a given population, takes him so far away from "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" that he cannot be considered a utilitarian in the Benthamite sense. He certainly did not believe that "pushpin is as good as poetry." However, neither did he give up the greatest happiness principle. The basic reason for this is that Mill was convinced that the moral and intellectual advancement of mankind would result in greater happiness for everybody. Believing as he did that the higher pleasures of the intellect yielded far greater happiness than the lower pleasures of the senses,[39] and that consequently, "next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation,"[40] he could only conclude that an essential means to the greatest happiness was the opening up to everybody of the joys of poetry and the other higher pleasures. The moral development of humanity, too, would lead to ever greater happiness, because to a moral being virtue was not just a means to good action, but a feeling which contributed to his or her own happiness;[41] and also because the decline of selfishness would mean that people would become united in aiming at the greatest happiness of all, rather than just pursuing their own individual pleasures. Thus, Mill's utilitarianism is certainly different from Bentham's, in that

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.008

Mill did not hope to find the answer to the question "Is the greatest happiness presently being experienced?" simply by asking everyone how they are feeling. As he made clear, particularly in the "Socrates and the pig" passage, he did not consider that people were at all capable of knowing how great and profound their happiness could be, if their full moral and intellectual potential were developed.

There is, undoubtedly, a strong current of intellectual elitism running through Mill's thought. While he had criticized Bentham for basing his concept of human nature on his own narrow and unimaginative person, Mill proceeded to reason in the same way. He assumed that the model for humanity was the intellectual and ascetic aesthete that he himself personified. However, once this bias is acknowledged, it cannot be maintained that he rejected the greatest happiness principle in favor of a "greatest human development" principle. The point is that he was quite convinced that only the cultivated could achieve the greatest happiness available to mankind.

The purpose of this digression from the specific subject of women has been to explore the importance for Mill's version of utilitarianism of his concept of man as a progressive, a morally and intellectually improvable being. In *The Subjection of Women* and in those parts of his other works in which he argues the need for women's emancipation, the theme of human advancement recurs frequently. This emphasis is most succinctly summarized in a passage in the *Principles of Political Economy*, where he says: "The ideas and institutions by which the accident of sex is made the groundwork of an inequality of legal rights, and a forced dissimilarity of social functions, must ere long be recognized as the greatest hindrance to moral, social, and even intellectual improvement."[42] There are two other principles that figure very prominently in *The Subjection of Women* and his other feminist statements—liberty, or the opportunity for self-determination, and justice, in the sense of equal consideration or impartiality. Both of these other

concerns, however, are explicitly related to the moral and intellectual advancement of mankind, as well as to the happiness of women themselves.

As is clear from *On Liberty*, Mill was deeply concerned about the value of individual freedom, regarding it as such an important means to happiness and self-development that it could justifiably be sacrificed only to the extent that is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of security and social cooperation. "After the primary necessities of food and raiment," he asserts, "freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature,"[43] and he recalls the joys of emerging from the tutelage of childhood into the responsibilities of adulthood as indicative of the feeling of added vitality that self-determination can give. Thus, freedom is so essential a part of human well-being that Mill concludes "that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[44]

Unlike Rousseau, with his rigidly patriarchal conception of freedom, Mill had no doubts about there being ample scope to apply this strongly held value to the contemporary social and legal position of women. Liberty and self-determination are recurrent themes of Mill's arguments against the gross inequality of the marriage laws and the severe discrimination suffered by women in the areas of educational and occupational opportunity. He states that the most direct benefit he envisages resulting from the emancipation of women will be the added happiness of women themselves, resulting from the difference between "a life of subjection to the will of others, and a life of rational freedom."[45] Whereas a woman at the time he wrote had practically no opportunity of any occupation (outside of unskilled labor and a few of the menial service industries) except that of a wife, in a marital relationship in which she was legally bound to obey her husband and had no rights to own property, it was obvious to Mill that an inestimable increase in happiness would result from giving

hmm

freedom

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.009

women a real choice of how to spend their lives. He was convinced that "if there is anything vitally important to the happiness of human beings, it is that they should relish their habitual pursuit";[46] thus it was essential that all the careers open to men should be made equally accessible to women. Only then would the choice of whether to marry or not be a meaningful one, rather than the only means of escape from the despised dependency of "old maidhood." It was also essential that those who chose to marry should be granted an equal share in the legal rights and responsibilities of the relationship. Although he did not express his most radical ideas on the subject of marriage in *The Subjection of Women*, he says elsewhere that it should be a free contract in the sense of being dissoluble at the wish of the contracting parties, provided that any children who had resulted from the marriage were well cared for. His dissent from the contemporary view of the binding nature of the marriage contract is summed up in his statement that "surely it is wrong, wrong in every way . . . that there should exist any motives to marriage except the happiness which two persons who love one another feel in associating their existence."[47] Any denial of liberty which was not for the sake of protecting some third party from harm was anathema to him.

It was not only, however, for the sake of the added happiness of women themselves that Mill advocates giving them more freedom of choice about how they should spend their lives, but also for the sake of the progress of society as a whole. As he states in *On Liberty*, "the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty, since by it there are as many possible permanent centres of improvement as there are individuals."[48] The extension of education and the opening up of careers to women, freeing them from the bondage of compulsory domesticity, should also have the beneficial effect of "doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity."[49]

In addition to this vast increase in available talent, Mill

considered that freeing women to become educated and to work at a career would have most valuable effects on men. Both the stimulus of female competition and the companionship of equally educated partners would result in men's greater intellectual development as well. Mill was most impressed by the fact that, since men were becoming less bound up with outdoor pursuits and what were regarded as exclusively masculine activities, their domestic lives were becoming more important, and the influence of their wives was therefore continually increasing. Taking the rather pessimistic point of view that any society or individual which is not improving is deteriorating, he stresses the insidious effects that the constant companionship of an uneducated and frivolous wife can have on a man, even though he might previously have had serious intellectual interests. He asks how it could be considered anything but detrimental to a man's development to be confined for a large proportion of his life with a partner whose mind has been so studiously concentrated on trivia, who is utterly ignorant about matters which should be of the highest concern, and who is bound because of the narrowness of her education to consider the immediate and material interest of her family of greater importance than any public-spirited or intellectual aspirations that her husband might wish to pursue. "With such an influence in every house," Mill asks, "is it any wonder that people in general are kept down in that mediocrity of respectability which is becoming a marked characteristic of modern times?"[50] Rousseau's solution to what he perceived as the unfavorable influence of contemporary women—the segregation of the sexes in the wider world and even within the home—was, needless to say, quite repugnant to Mill. Though women in their current state of subjection and lack of opportunity were in Mill's view acting as a constant force against progress, he was convinced that liberating them would reverse this force.

Second only to freedom, in the arguments set out in *The*

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.010

Subjection of Women, is the principle of justice. Just treatment, no less than liberty, is regarded both as essential for the happiness of women themselves and as a necessary condition for the advancement of humanity. Mill's most comprehensive discussion of justice is found in the last chapter of *Utilitarianism*. Here, he deals with the fundamental concept of impartiality, or the requirement that like cases be treated alike, and then goes on to show that the reason different societies have had such different conceptions of what constitutes just treatment is that they have considered different qualities to be grounds for departing from impartiality. As discussed in Chapter 4 above, in Aristotle's theory of justice, citizens, women, artisans and slaves receive entirely different treatment according to what he perceived as their inherent characteristics and their functions in society. Whereas it is, Mill says, crucial to the idea of justice that "all persons are deemed to have a *right* to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse,"[51] different conceptions of what constitutes social expediency have resulted in acceptance by societies of slavery, caste systems, and many other unequal arrangements now considered completely unjust, as thoroughly justified by the requirements of circumstances. Only when social inequalities have ceased to be considered expedient, have they come to be regarded as not only inexpedient, but also unjust. However, people tend to be "forgetful that they themselves perhaps tolerate other inequalities under an equally mistaken notion of expediency,"[52] and a paradigmatic case of this is the subjection of women. Rousseau, of course, is a perfect example of such thinking. Although the inequality of the sexes "is not felt to jar with modern civilization, any more than domestic slavery among the Greeks jarred with their notion of themselves as a free people,"[53] Mill perceived it as an isolated and anomalous instance of bondage in a world whose guiding principle was human equality. "Marriage," he asserts, "is the only actual bondage known to our law; there remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house."[54]

Like entrenched inequalities in the past, however, the unequal position of women was regarded as "natural." "But was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?" Mill asks.[55] The most cultivated intellects of the ancient world, including Aristotle, were sure that slavery was natural; theorists of absolute monarchy claimed that it was the only natural form of government, conquering races that the right of the stronger was natural, and the feudal nobility that their dominion over their serfs was natural. Since the subjection of women to men is a universal custom, it is not surprising that society feels so certain of its naturalness. Mill's awareness of the extent to which nature has been used to legitimize convention is striking. He comments: "So true is it that unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural."[56] However, since he believed fervently that society in its most desirable form was the society of equals, it was essential for him to combat the prevalent claims for the naturalness of the glaring inequality of the sexes. He looked forward to the day when discrimination on the grounds of sex would follow that based on nobility of birth into disrepute and oblivion.

In order to build his case for female equality on what he regarded as the universally accepted principle of just treatment, Mill considered that he was obliged to demonstrate two things. First, he had to contend with the assumption that women are inherently inferior. "The objection with which we are now principally met," he states, "is that women are not fit for, or not capable of, this, that or the other mental achievement."[57] Consequently, he determined to show, against the strong force of contemporary opinion, that the reasons which had always been considered ample grounds for treating women differently from men—that they are naturally inferior, less rational, more emotional—

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.011

were not founded on good evidence, and were probably all false. Second, even when he had demonstrated this to the extent that anyone could at that time, Mill considered it essential, as a utilitarian, to show that doing away with the unequal treatment of women would be expedient in the sense of contributing to the general welfare of society.

In arguing the first of these two claims, Mill had to contend not only with popular prejudice, but also with the violent reaction which many intellectuals of the mid-nineteenth century were expressing against eighteenth-century environmentalism. Many of Mill's contemporaries considered that French educational theorists of the Enlightenment, such as Helvétius and Holbach, had attributed excessive importance to environmental factors in the formation of human character and intellectual capacity. Mill, by contrast, claimed that certainly most, and probably all, of the existing differences of character and intellect between men and women were due to the very different attitudes of society toward members of the two sexes from their earliest infancy, and the vastly different types and qualities of education afforded them. In his fragment on marriage, written about 1832, Mill had vehemently denied any innate inequality between the sexes apart from that of physical strength—and even this, he said, could be doubted.[58] He was, however, so opposed to dogmatism on any issue that he later modified his position to the claim that none of the alleged differences between the mental or moral capacities of the sexes had been proved to be the inevitable consequences of innate factors, though some of them might possibly be.[59] His only dogmatic assertion was that nothing was yet certainly known on the subject: "If it be said that the doctrine of the equality of the sexes rests only on theory, it must be remembered that the contrary doctrine has only theory to rest upon."[60]

What "the contrary doctrine" had rested on for millenia, in fact, was a series of assertions about the nature, and natural qualities, of women. Mill points out that these con-

ceptions of the natural woman often differ entirely from one culture to another. In the Orient, women are "by nature" voluptuous, in England, "by nature" cold; in France, they are "naturally" fickle, but in England constant. This in itself is enough to make one question such dogmas. Clearly, women have been assigned different versions of the female role in these different cultures, and their "nature" has been defined accordingly. Thus, Mill argues, it does not get one anywhere in a rational argument to say "that the *nature* of the two sexes adapts them to their present functions and position, and renders these appropriate to them."[61] He asserts emphatically:

> I deny that any one knows or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. If men had ever been found in society without women, or women without men, or if there had ever been a society of men and women in which the women were not under the control of the men, something might have been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in the nature of each.[62]

Until conditions of equality exist, no one can possibly assess the natural differences between women, distorted as they have been, and men. What is natural to the two sexes can only be found out by allowing both to develop and use their faculties freely. Thus Mill radically dissents from the functionalist definition of women's nature that we have seen prevailing in the works of Aristotle and Rousseau.

In order to analyze the environmental influences on women in contemporary society, Mill returns to his metaphor of human nature as "a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides." What has been called "the nature of women" is so far from being the result of free development and growth that he likens it to a tree that has been reared with one half in a vapor bath and the other in the snow. It is not natural growth, but "forced

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.012

repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others,"[63] with the aim of pleasing and benefiting men, that have made women into the half-stunted, half-overdeveloped human beings that they are. In Mill's view, anyone who took the trouble to consider the very different ways in which contemporary boys and girls were educated, and their very different assigned tasks in adult life, could readily explain a great many of the intellectual incapacities and special moral qualities attributed to women as natural characteristics of their sex. Those, such as Rousseau, who summarily assessed them as "naturally" practical and intuitive, capable in small, day-to-day affairs but lacking in any capacity for rational thought, had only to look at the way girls were trained to cope with domestic trivia, while boys were educated in the classics and the sciences. A woman's mistakes were therefore like those of a self-educated man, who would grasp the common-sense factors of a situation, some of which might elude the theorist, but who was likely to suffer from a lack of knowledge of general principles and of ability to grasp the abstract, conceptual aspect of the problem.[64] One did not need to look further than the vastly different environments of the sexes to explain what were almost invariably assumed to be innate differences in their abilities to reason.

Mill was no more prepared to accept as innate the distinctions drawn in favor of the female character than to accept its allegedly natural inferiorities. He considered the prevalent nineteenth-century claim that women are naturally morally superior to men to be just as absurd as the allegation that they are mentally inferior.[65] Women, like negro slaves, he says, have had scarcely any opportunity to commit crimes, so it is not remarkable nor particularly laudable that they have not often been criminals. Since he believed moral excellence to be "always the fruit of education and cultivation," to which both sexes were equally susceptible, he considered that all such "feminine" qualities as unselfishness and moral restraint could be explained in

terms of women's particular circumstances of dependence on and accountability to others. He concludes:

> I do not know a more signal instance of the blindness with which the world, including the herd of studious men, ignore and pass over all the influences of social circumstances, than their silly depreciation of the intellectual, and silly panegyrics on the moral, nature of women.[66]

Mill also reacted against the prevailing wisdom, which we have seen in the writings of Aristotle and Rousseau, that the moral qualities required in women should be different from those required in men. The piece he had written at the age of eighteen for the *Westminster Review* had attacked the application of moral standards according to the sex of the person being judged. It is in order to have their wives entirely dependent and uncritically devoted to them, he argues, that men have set up an entirely different set of values for them. Thus:

> It is considered meritorious in a man to be independent: to be sufficient to himself; not to be in a constant state of pupillage. In a woman, helplessness, both of mind and of body, is the most admired of attributes. A man is despised, if he be not courageous. In a woman, it is esteemed amiable to be a coward. To be entirely dependent on her husband for every pleasure, and for exemption from every pain; to feel secure, only when under his protection; to be incapable of forming any opinion, or of taking any resolution without his advice and aid; this is amiable, this is delicate, this is feminine: while all who infringe on any of the prerogatives which man thinks proper to reserve to himself; all who can or will be of any use, either to themselves or to the world, otherwise than as the slaves and drudges of their husbands, are called masculine, and other names intended to convey disapprobation.[67]

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.013

In contrast to this virtually universal notion of the qualities proper to men and to women, Mill argues in a letter to Thomas Carlyle that in his experience the best people of both sexes have combined the highest so-called "masculine" qualities with the highest of those considered "feminine." He asks, "*Is* there really any distinction between the highest masculine and highest feminine character?"[68] It may not seem remarkable that Mill's conception of morality and excellence was uniform for the two sexes—until one realizes how vast a weight of historical opinion had asserted the opposite. Mill was the first major philosopher since Plato to have argued that goodness was the same in a woman as in a man.

Stop

In his attempt to refute the prevailing doctrine that women were innately and irremediably inferior in ability to men, Mill felt greatly hampered by the backward state of psychology. The contemporary preoccupation was with the biological sciences, and there was, he thought, a deplorable lack of attention paid to the influence of environment on the formation of the human character.[69] This had led to far too great a reversal of the Helvétian claim, "l'éducation peut tout," to the point where organic characteristics were now supposed capable of explaining everything. Mill's chief adversary, in his battle to win recognition for the importance of environmental factors in the character-formation of women, was Auguste Comte. The substantial correspondence carried on between the two during 1843 contains an important part of Mill's thinking about this aspect of his case for the emancipation of women.[70]

Comte's view was a clear reflection of the confident conviction that the physical sciences were not just potentially capable of solving all human problems, once their findings were applied by the social sciences, but that they had found practically all the important answers already. Thus Comte was sure that biology was already "able to establish the hierarchy of the sexes, by demonstrating both anatomically and physiologically that, in almost the entire animal kingdom, and especially in our species, the female sex is formed for a state of essential childhood, which renders it necessarily inferior to the corresponding male organism."[71] With a pre-Darwinian confidence in the uniqueness of the human species, he asserts that "the organic condition must certainly prevail, since it is the organism and not the environment that makes us men rather than monkeys or dogs, and which even determines our special type of humanity, to a degree much more circumscribed than has often been believed."[72] Thus, it is not simply for the sake of social expediency that women should be subordinate to men; any other arrangement would be biologically absurd. The causes of all mental characteristics were to be found in the physical organism, the brain, and women, with their physically weaker constitution, must therefore be intellectually inferior to men. Comte granted generously, however, that they were compensated to some extent by being endowed by nature with greater delicacy of feeling and sympathy. They were to be pampered, worshiped, even prayed to, in the society Comte envisaged for the future, but to expect them to be capable of any sort of decision-making or political participation that required reasonable or objective thought, was to go against nature in a way that could only be disastrous both for women and for society as a whole.

Mill, who initially acknowledged the gaps in his knowledge of biology which he was vainly attempting to remedy, adopted a tone that seems extremely humble and conciliatory in contrast to Comte's arrogant confidence in his own convictions.[73] He was simply not prepared to accept, however, the claim that biology had produced any conclusive findings on the subject. He admitted the possibility that it might one day be proved that there are certain physiological differences between the brains of the two sexes, but he stressed in answering Comte that there was, as yet, no definite knowledge of the precise relationship between the physical characteristics of a brain and the intellectual powers of its owner. To rely on such an oversimplification as

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.014

the contention that men, being bigger than women, have bigger brains and therefore greater mental powers, was to lay oneself open to the charge that big men are more intelligent than little ones, and whales and elephants more intelligent than either.[74]

Mill was convinced that the sort of reasoning that Comte was engaged in was likely to produce no sound conclusions about the differences between the sexes, as long as the study of the environmental influences on personal development, or ethology, remained so neglected. In *The Subjection of Women* he speaks urgently of the need for the advancement of this science, saying that "of all the difficulties which impede the progress of thought, and the formation of well-grounded opinions on life and social arrangements, the greatest is now the unspeakable ignorance of mankind in respect to the influences which form human character."[75] He was not under any illusions about the difficulty of carrying out such a study, with its problems of isolating causal factors in a sphere in which experimental laboratory conditions are impossible. Despite the difficulties, however, he was convinced that this area of science must not continue to be so neglected, and in the *Logic*, he set out some preliminary ideas for such a science, though he went no further in carrying it into operation.[76] Meanwhile, until that science was well advanced, he argued that none of the intellectual and moral differences between the sexes could reasonably be said to be caused by innate, physiological factors. "No one," he writes bluntly in *The Subjection of Women*, "is thus far entitled to any positive opinion on the subject."[77]

Thus, with knowledge in its limited state, it could certainly not be demonstrated that women were incapable of the same levels of intellectual achievement as men. Such a belief could in no way be regarded as just grounds for keeping them subordinate in society, and denying them all opportunity to show what they could in fact achieve. Further, Mill argues, in many fields women had already

achieved a considerable measure of success, despite the weight of circumstance, lack of education, and force of prejudice which worked against them. Though this was to rest the case on very humble grounds, "when we consider how sedulously they are all trained away from, instead of being trained towards, any of the occupations or objects reserved for men,"[78] he cites the achievements of women such as Mme. de Staël and George Sand in the field of literature, and applied his argument most forcefully to the case of politics, in which women had proved their competence at the top executive level. Here one was not confined to speculation about what women might be capable of if suitably educated; what women had achieved in the political sphere was in itself most persuasive evidence of what they could do. At the top political level, Mill points out, which is practically the only sphere of public affairs to which they have ever been admitted, the great qualities of a proportionately larger number of queens than kings has demonstrated that "exactly where and in proportion as women's capacities for government have been tried, in that proportion have they been found adequate."[79] Citing such examples as Deborah, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth, and Margaret of Austria, he argues that these and other women who have been expert governors or leaders make it quite ridiculous to regard their sex as unfit to participate on all other levels of political life. For their potential in the field has already been demonstrated to be at least equal to that of men.

Of all the spheres of human endeavor, Mill asserts that there are very few in which, however little opportunity they have had to prove themselves, some women at least have not reached a very high level of accomplishment. The fact that they have not, so far, achieved first-class works of genius and originality can, he says, be explained by their lack of the thorough education which is prerequisite to reaching original conclusions once all the first principles in a field are established, by the fact that women are traditionally expected to be always available to minister to the needs

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.015

of men and children, and therefore seldom have sustained periods in which to concentrate, and by the circumstances of their coming, like the Romans after the Greeks, second to men chronologically in all fields of study and art. For these reasons, he regards what women have achieved as conclusive proof of what they can do, but refuses to treat what they have not so far achieved as conclusive proof of anything at all.

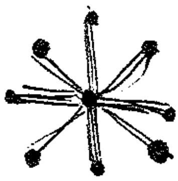
Mill does not consider that he has closed the case for female equality by showing his contemporaries that their grounds for discriminating against women are scientifically undemonstrable, and in many cases contradicted by the facts of history. For, as he points out in the last chapter of *Utilitarianism*, people in general have showed themselves consistently unwilling to admit to the injustice of any social discrimination, until they are convinced that it is also inexpedient. Thus, Mill feels obliged to argue not only that the discriminatory treatment of women has no rational basis in the natures of the sexes, but that it is socially harmful as well, and that to treat women as equals would be beneficial for the happiness and advancement of all. Justice, then, like liberty, is linked in Mill's feminist arguments with the constant theme of the improvement of mankind.

The unjust treatment of women has, Mill argues in *The Subjection of Women*, the detrimental effect that they attempt to gain influence in subversive ways, and to use it for selfish purposes, as happens in other cases in which legitimate access to power is denied.[80] Under existing conditions within the family, he argues, women are forced to resort to cunning and underhand tactics in order to have their wishes fulfilled, when they and their husbands disagree. There exists no motivation to discuss such issues openly and rationally, since the husband is legally constituted as the family's decision-maker. As far as women's political influence is concerned, Mill is sure that the indirect influence they exert, through their pressure on their enfranchised husbands, is bound to be unconcerned with

the welfare of anyone beyond their own immediate families. Thus he, unlike Rousseau, recognizes that the outside world has no hope of winning over the family in the conflict of loyalties that unenfranchised women face. For "their social position allows them no scope for any feelings beyond the family except personal likings & dislikes, & it is assumed that they would be governed entirely by these in their judgment & feeling in political matters."[81] But if they were themselves enfranchised, and thereby given their own legitimate means of influencing the political process, Mill argues, they would in the course of time become far more likely to use these means responsibly and in a more humanitarian spirit. "It is precisely by creating in their minds a concern for the interests which are common to all, those of their country and of human improvement, that the tendency to look upon all questions as personal questions would most effectively be corrected."[82] Convinced by de Tocqueville's impressions of the educative effects of political participation, he is sure that women who were to exercise their political rights would "receive that stimulus to their faculties, and that widening and liberalizing influence over their feelings and sympathies, which the suffrage seldom fails to produce on those who are admitted to it."[83] Thus, by granting women the vote, society would benefit doubly. It would minimize the selfish and narrow influences that many of them already exerted, via their husbands, and it would increase the selflessness and responsibility of the electorate as a whole.

Mill argues, too, that the abolition of the legal inequality of husband and wife would have immeasurable effects on the value of the family as an educative institution. Since he believes that "society in equality is its normal state," and moreover that "the only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals,"[84] he considers that the everyday assumption by men of their superiority over women constantly detracts from the value of their own lives as well as those of their wives, and has very harmful effects on their children. There can be nothing approaching the

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.016



highest potential of human companionship between two human beings, one of whom is convinced a priori of his greater capacities and value, and of the justice of his always taking precedence over the other. What hope, Mill asks, is there for the moral advancement of society, so long as the domestic atmosphere in which all its members receive their earliest moral education is based on such an unjust distribution of rights and powers? Only when marriage were to become recognized by law and society as a cooperative partnership between equals, might the family at last become, for the children, "a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side and obedience on the other." Only then could children be prepared for what he regards as the "true virtue of human beings," that is, "fitness to live together as equals."[85]

In spite of these protestations about equality within the family, however, it is in fact because of John Stuart Mill's assumptions and convictions about the family and its traditional roles that his feminism falls short of advocating true equality and freedom for married women. Mill's feminist writings are, implicitly, concerned only with middle- and upper-class women, and it is the bourgeois family that is his model.[86] Though he rejects the legalized inequalities of its patriarchal form, he regards the family itself as "essential for humanity,"[87] and is concerned to reassure his readers that family life has nothing to fear, but rather much to gain, from the complete political and civil equality of the sexes. Though presently "a school of despotism," once justly constituted, it would be "the real school of the virtues of freedom."[88]

Moreover, Mill argues in favor of the traditional division of labor within the family. While he asserts that women should have a real choice of a career or marriage, he assumes that the majority of women are likely to continue to prefer marriage, and that this choice is equivalent to choosing a career. He states:

> Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions, during as many years of her life as may be required for the purpose; and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this.[89]

In keeping with this mode of thinking, Mill asserts that there is an "infinitely closer relationship of a child to its mother than to its father,"[90] and that "nothing can replace the mother for the education of children."[91] He does not pause to reflect that the qualities of motherhood, just as much as any of the other existing differences between the sexes, might be at least partly due to environmental factors, most particularly to the conditioning that resulted from customary modes of socialization. Again, in spite of his general rejection of the pressures of opinion, he calmly accepts that the sexual division of duties within the family is "already made by consent, or at all events not by law, but by general custom," and he defends it as "the most suitable division of labour between the two persons."[92]

In Mill's early essay on marriage and divorce, this position is put much more dogmatically than later, and in terms which he could not consistently use in *The Subjection of Women*. This, then, is one area in which it seems highly likely that the way he stated his views (though not their substance) was modified by the divergent ideas of Harriet Taylor. For in 1832, having just asserted that "there is no natural inequality between the sexes," he goes on to say that, in a home where there are no servants, it is "good and will *naturally* take place . . . that the mistress of a family shall herself do the work of servants," and "the mother is the *natural* teacher." He concludes, with little attention to their own preferences, that "the great occupation of women

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.017

should be to beautify life . . . and to diffuse beauty, elegance and grace everywhere," since women are "*naturally*" endowed with greater elegance and taste.[93]

By the time he wrote *The Subjection of Women*, Mill could no longer assert that women's domestic role is natural, in so many words, since in that work he clearly recognizes the invalidity and fraudulence of identifying the natural with the conventional and then using appeals to woman's "nature" in order to justify her conventional functions. Despite changes in terminology, however, with "most suitable" and "desirable custom" replacing the appeals to nature, the substance of Mill's ideas remained unchanged. In those days of primitive contraceptive techniques, a high rate of infant mortality, and onerous household chores, it would have been far harder for Mill than it is for us to conceive of the sharing of child rearing and domestic duties. However, it is striking that Mill chose not to question the family and the way it had developed, in any way, or to consider the relationship between the institution of the bourgeois family itself and the contemporary position of women in society. For, clearly, it was no dictate of nature that had led to the formation of the isolated private household, with its "woman's work," and the professional and industrial world of "man's work" outside, and to the vast separation between these two spheres. Mill's assumption of the immutability of the existing family structure, and his failure to discuss its repercussions for the lives of women, constitutes a gap in his feminist thought which the current feminist movement is attempting to remedy.

Mill's acceptance of traditional sex roles within the family places serious limitations on the extent to which he can apply the principles of freedom and equality to married women. First, though he argues in favor of equal property *rights* for married women, these are rights to property inherited or earned by the woman herself, not rights to equal shares in the family income. "The rule," Mill says, "is simple: whatever would be the husband's or wife's if they

were not married, should be under their exclusive control during marriage."[94] Clearly, then, the income of the male earner is his, as much after marriage as before, and Mill does not recognize the anomaly that women's work in the home is unpaid labor. Only in *The Enfranchisement of Women* do we find the assertion that it is not only necessary for married women to be able to earn their own subsistence, but that their position in the family would improve significantly "if women both earned, and had the right to possess, a part of the income of the family."[95] Although in *The Subjection of Women* Mill agrees that married women must be able to support themselves, he explicitly rejects the idea that they should actually do so, regarding such a practice as liable to lead to the neglect of the household and children. It seems, therefore, highly likely that the idea stated in the earlier work is Harriet Taylor's, and it is an example where her thought is considerably more in tune than Mill's with present day feminism. She recognizes, as he does not, the importance to women of continuous economic independence, both within the marital relationship, and in case of its disintegration.

Second, Mill's defense of traditional sex roles within the family amounts to a denial of freedom of opportunity and individual expression of talents to that majority of women whom he assumes would always choose to marry. Though he is so much aware that the care of a household is an incessantly preoccupying duty that he cites it as a major reason for women's comparative lack of achievement in many artistic fields, he in fact condones the continuance of this barrier for most women.[96] His refusal to concede that the tiresome details of domestic life should be shared by both sexes, and his failure to question the social institutions that made such sharing practically impossible are striking in the light of the fact that he recognizes that the principal means by which women would come to be recognized as equals was via success in fields formerly monopolized by men. As he writes to Harriet Taylor, the only way of dispelling

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.018

most people's prejudicial beliefs about women's inferiority is by showing them "more and greater proofs by example of what women can do."[97] If the great majority of women are to remain practically if not legally barred from such achievements, how might these deep-rooted prejudices ever be expected to change?

Here again, *The Enfranchisement of Women* is a more radical document than the work written after Harriet Taylor's death. This essay written in collaboration speaks out more strongly than Mill alone ever did in favor of the married woman's need to have a life and a career of her own, so as not to be "a mere appendage to a man," attached to him "for the purpose of bringing up *his* children, and making *his* home pleasant to him."[98] These were probably aspects of his wife's thought with which Mill did not feel at all comfortable.

John Stuart Mill tried fervently to apply the principles of liberalism to women. He eschewed patriarchy within the family, and the legal and political subordination of women, as anachronisms in the modern age and as gross violations of liberty and justice. However, although a very forward-looking feminist in many respects, he in no way perceived the injustice involved in institutions and practices which allowed a man to have a career and economic independence, *and* a home life and children, but which forced a woman to choose between the two. His refusal to question the traditional family and its demands on women set the limits of his liberal feminism.

PART V

FUNCTIONALISM, FEMINISM AND THE FAMILY

NOV-14-2014 15:35 P.019
TOTAL P.019