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*Feminism and the Liberal Dialect:
John Stuart Mill on Women's Rights*

In 1869 John Stuart Mill decided that the time had come to publish his essay *On the Subject of Women*. He had completed the piece in 1861, but guided by a sense of tactics and a sense of history, he waited for the time when his views would gain the widest possible hearing.¹ Mill had been elected to Parliament in 1865. He had insisted, in his rather diffident but forthright campaign speeches, that he intended to advance the cause of women's suffrage if the voters sent him to the House. In 1867, Mill introduced an amendment to Disraeli's Reform Bill, changing the wording of the Act from 'man' to 'person'. The amendment did not of course pass, but it did attract a respectable number of votes, 80 in all.² In 1869, Parliament did pass a bill admitting female ratepayers to the municipal franchise. An extensive petition campaign for the suffrage had been mounted by the National Society for Women's Suffrage, an organization with which Mill maintained close connections. An impressive number of signatures had been enlisted; names of weight and reputation stood high on the list. Mill was very heartened by these events. The cause of women's suffrage would soon emerge victorious.³ The time had come to release his theoretical polemic to the world.

Mill's reputation as a foremost liberal cultural critic and social thinker was by that time well established. The essay became a subject of passionate controversy. It attracted both high praise and vehement hostility. James Fitzjames Stephen marshalled both his best and worst arguments against the piece. Scandalized, casting about for the right epithet, Stephen told his readers that "indecent" was too strong a word to characterize Mill's "... prolonged and minute discussions about the relations between men and women, and the characteristics of women as such". The essay was in any case, "... unpleasant in the direction of undecorum..."⁴ *Blackwood's Magazine* angrily castigated Mill, calling the tone of the essay, "... insolent towards the whole human race..." — an insult to both men and women.⁵ On the other hand, Mill received approving comments from respected personalities in North America and the Continent as well as in Britain. Requests for permission to translate the essay followed soon after from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Russia and even from Japan.⁶

Suffragist organizations considered the publication of the essay a landmark event. Forty years later, the American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt was still to call it “. . . the most complete statement of fundamental principles which the woman’s movement has produced.”⁷ Encomiums and invitations to speak poured in from the powerful suffragist organizations in the United States. One scholar, in an evaluation of the essay’s influence, insists that we ought not to exaggerate its importance. The theory Mill enunciated did not influence the character of the movement for women’s rights in the same way as Marx’s theories influenced the communist movement. Its impact was by any measure considerable though. There are countless personal testimonies to its persuasive power.⁸ *Blackwood’s Magazine* saw Mill as the chief figure in the women’s rights movement.⁹ Mill brought to the essay a philosophic depth and analytic power unequalled in any previous advocates of the cause.

The significance of the essay, from the point of view of intellectual history, lies in its comprehensive philosophic approach. Mill addressed himself to fundamental premises. He placed the whole question of women’s rights within the wider contexts of liberal social thought and insisted that liberal values led inexorably to the advocacy of women’s rights. Liberal values and theoretical presuppositions form the powerful superstructure of the essay – the values of individualism and moral autonomy, meritocracy, the fragile balance between freedom and social restraints, liberal environmentalism, the vexing question of whether a science of human nature was possible – these questions form the pervasive theoretical background of the essay. Moreover, Mill’s concern with the question of the rights of women was not a sudden and relatively compartmentalized enterprise. As we shall see he had raised the issue again and again, from his youthful writings to the compositions of his senior years.

The historical and theoretical importance of *On the Subjection of Women* is thus undeniable. In the light of this, it is astounding to discover that the essay has been virtually ignored by scholars.¹⁰ It has been relegated to an obscure half-life in Mill’s theoretical career. No attempts have been made to use the essay to expand our understanding of Mill’s liberalism. By the same token, no one has examined the essay in the light of Mill’s other theoretical writings, to see whether the essay is consistent with positions taken elsewhere, or whether its conclusions are untypical of the main line of Mill’s thought. Does the essay reveal inner ambiguities and tensions? Does Mill speak differently in his private letters, or in the unpublished early essay on marriage and divorce? What does the essay tell us of English liberalism, or at least the brand of it that Mill articulated? Were its views on women’s role liberating, in keeping with modernist values, a breath of fresh air in a musty

scandalous reality? Or were these views punctuated by ambivalence and blind to many realities? It is to question such as these that I shall try to supply an answer.

II

The most radical claim of *On the Subjection of Women*, was that science now challenged the dictum that women's nature was innately different from men's nature. "What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulations in others . . . no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relations with their masters; . . ." Women were in a state of radical psychological thralldom. Women's personal identity was not the outcome of a free act of self-creation; it was shaped by outside forces, by the hands of their masters for the convenience of their masters. Men have done this by, ". . . representing to them [women] weakness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will in the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness." Mill insisted, furthermore that the "apparent differences" between men and women could be "nearly all" explained by the influence of circumstances, or the environment.¹¹

The most unqualified statement of this principle had appeared over twenty-five years earlier, in Mill's *Logic*, in the famous Book VI where Mill developed and refined the heavily environmentalist psychological theories inherited from his father. Here he argued that empirical observations of the differences in the character and behaviour of men and women were not a final datum. These observations were instead, to be referred back to the "Laws of Mind". By this route we would come to see that specific circumstances produced, on the whole, corresponding character types. Some day we would understand which particular circumstances had shaped women's nature. This would enable us to counteract these influences, so that, ". . . their [men and women] differences of character are either removed or totally altered."¹²

What pushed Mill in this radical direction was, I think, the dialectic of liberalism. At the heart of the liberal program lay the values of individual autonomy. The great glory of modernism was the autonomous conscience, a conscience that was to move to a mature understanding of the moral basis of its own actions, a conscience no longer seeking the guidance of priests, of charismatic authority or of paternalist authority in any of its forms. There is no question that Mill believed that at present and probably in the future, most consciences would not achieve autonomy; a multitude of external social

pressures and restraints would be necessary to keep human instincts in check. All this was a concession to human weakness though; not all persons could rise to the level of maturity called for by the rigorous ideal of autonomy.¹³ Mill's goal was, however, to expand the sphere of autonomy as much as possible. The goal of social life was to substitute, as far as possible, internal for external controls. One of the ways to achieve this was to insure, "... the liberty of each to govern his conduct by his own feeling of duty, and by such laws and social restraints as his own conscience can subscribe to." Mill argued that for women society was instead a relentless tyranny, forcing her into the uniform role of wife and mother, suffocating her under the imperatives of passivity and self-effacement, denying her the right to think for herself, make her own judgments, find her 'true self', a self buried under the debris of a personality controlled by social expectation. The dialectic of autonomy required its universalization. One could not preach autonomy for men, while conveying to women the message that shaping an internalized conscience was irrelevant to her function in life. As it was, society simply imposed one model of duty upon women, and applied severe sanctions against those who were not willing to conform to this model.¹⁴

The demands of the program of autonomy were wide-ranging. Women were denied the vote, indeed any role in the public spheres of life. One of the key tenets of liberalism was that obedience to law was to be the result of free assent. The modern ideal of citizenship involved the notion of obedience to rules sanctioned by individual conscience. This right was denied women; they were allowed no effective opinion in the great public concerns of life. Moreover, one of the great dictums of Utilitarianism was that we were, each of us, the best judge of our own interests. But this meant that we were all to be empowered to bring these interests to bear in the political arena.¹⁵ Women were of course denied this course of action.

The finest flower of individualism was the heroic conscience, the ability to rise above the ordinary play of human motives, of self-interest and the desire for the approbation of others, to "... a self-forgetting devotion to an idea: . . ."¹⁶ This, Mill tells us, is what it means to have "a confirmed character."¹⁷ This rare possibility too was closed off to women. She had been taught to find her sole interest in private life, in the welfare of her family; she had been taught to take her identity and importance from the achievements of her husband; she had been taught the high virtues of deference and self-effacement, not independence. Her identification with the weak and the helpless was wholehearted and overflowing, but she did not understand the imperatives of principled self-assertion. She had been made at once both too private and selfish, and too self-abnegating for that.

While the great thrust of modernism has been towards an ethos of self-determination, women have been schooled in the virtues of obedience. The marriage vow – ‘to love, honor and obey’ – reflected harsh legal realities. If conflicts occurred in a marriage, a wife was legally bound to the decisions of her husband. Separation or divorce were not among her options. She could not earn an income, and her husband remained the legal guardian of their children. He could employ the force of law to compel her to return. Any property the bride brought to the marriage or acquired after marriage, belonged solely to the husband.¹⁸ The whole force of social sanction required that she defer to her husband’s wishes.

This ethos extended its writ into the most intimate and private realm of conduct, the realm of sexuality. No matter how estranged she felt from her husband, the weight of law and custom demanded that the wife yield to his sexual desires. The pathos of this situation was heightened by the fact that in the Victorian canon, men were thought to be creatures of strong sexual impulse, while women’s sexual desires were believed to be relatively weak, a by-product of a more spiritual affection or a function of the desire for motherhood. Sexual desire was the badge of egotism and self-assertion, characteristics incompatible with the feminine virtues. Thus sexuality too was a realm in which the scenario of deference and self-abnegation played itself out.¹⁹

In a society whose great goal was self-reliant individualism, self-reliance was no part of women’s nature. For a philosophy whose *beau idéal* was individualism – the autonomous conscience, the ability to reason for oneself, self-reliance – women, as they had been shaped by society, had become an anomaly. They were in fact much like the needy poor, the object of those private charities run by women of the middle and upper classes. Here, among those innocent of self-respect, incapable of self-help and self-reliance, women’s cup overflowed with pity; she recognized herself.²⁰

The condition of women was a “. . . relic of the past . . .”, inimical to the “. . . course of history . . .”²¹ Modern society has left the society of Estates far behind. The accident of birth was no longer the main determinant of a person’s destiny. In that shadowy ‘world we have lost’ prior to the great conquests of modernization, individuals were first of all members of groups – the gild, the village, the family, a religious polity. Human identity revolved around a sense of membership. Life was not about expanding the realm of free choice, but was lived in a sphere of inherited rights and obligations. The great release of human talents and energies that was the pride of modern society, depended upon an expanded sphere of free choice – in matters of vocation, in deciding where one lived, in marriage, human associations,

thought and opinion. Free choice sharpened self-reliance; the energies released by self-reliant individualism pre-supposed a large area of voluntary action. And here again women were required to be content with their place and station in life, to accept the accident of birth as the great fatality ruling their lives.

It was these liberal sensitivities that made Mill a relentless enemy of those views that posited innate differences between men and women. These views were “contrary to liberty”; they robbed life of the possibility of “. . . all change of destination or purpose”²² But here another theme plays itself out in Mill’s thought – the dialectic of liberal environmentalism. Mill’s great hopes for the improvement of mankind were rooted in his belief in the efficacy of the new sciences of human nature – and most notably the Association Psychology developed by his father. Mill’s great hopes in this realm were based upon a Promethean view of the efficacy of rational knowledge. We were close to the time when scientific knowledge would provide unambiguous, universally accepted casual laws with regard to human action. The great paradigm of this knowledge came from the hard sciences, and the unassailable consensus that had developed around Newtonian physics. Once a similar consensus was established in psychology, we could begin to use this knowledge for the improvement of mankind. Mill looked forward to the day when a consensus among “. . . all thinking and instructed persons . . .” about the correct science of human nature, would carry such weight that the multitude would “. . . defer to their opinion.”²³ At that point, universal assent would enable society to apply this knowledge to the melioration of human nature.

According to the tenets of Association Psychology, the human mind was susceptible, “. . . by a sufficient use of the external sanctions and of the force of early impressions, of being cultivated in almost any direction . . .”²⁴ The Laws of Association or the laws, “. . . according to which one mental state succeeds another . . .” were an early version of Learning Theory.²⁵ Character was shaped by the frequency and intensity of the early impressions graven upon the mind. Mill’s use of the term sanctions goes back to a second theory – Bentham’s psychological hedonism – which stressed that since humans were motivated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, behaviour could be molded by the judicious application of four sanctions – the physical, moral, political and religious sanctions. The moral sanction, for example, was the approbation or disapprobation our actions evinced among our fellows.²⁶

The laws of mind were general laws, and general laws are not susceptible to practical use. Thus the next task of science would be to develop a “Science

of Character” or “Ethology”. Ethology was to provide scientific knowledge of the effects of specific circumstances upon the formation of character. This was to be done by deducing, on the basis of our knowledge of the laws of mind, the consequences of particular circumstances upon the formation of character, and then verifying our deductions by seeing whether they accord with the data of empirical observation; it could also be done by correlating our data about specific character types to the special circumstances in which these types appear, to see whether these circumstances provide a sufficient explanation of the type for which we wished to account.²⁷

It is not hard to see that Mill’s theories rested upon a dogmatic environmentalism. Anything not explainable in terms of the theory was to be explained away. Aspects of character not explainable by circumstances could be written off as, “. . . differences of bodily organization, . . .” but were not to be employed to challenge the basic principles of environmentalism. Mill did leave space in his psychological theory for non-environmental influences. He tells us that there are, “. . . differences in the kind or in the intensity of the physical sensations as must necessarily result from differences of bodily organization, . . .” Those especially susceptible to “vivid impressions” will have a special relish for the “beautiful” and incline towards “moral enthusiasm”, while those of a “mediocrity of sensibility”, will incline towards “a love . . . of abstract truth, with a deficiency . . . of fervour . . .”²⁸ Here were the seeds of an explanation of the difference between the rational male and the emotional female, rooted in native organic differences. Mill was of course not interested in developing a theory that would chart the complex interplay of heredity and environment. Concessions to the theory of innate characteristics were not permitted. Instead Mill applied the principles of Ethology to the question of the special intellectual and moral characteristics of women. He concluded that the low level of women’s intellectual achievement as well as her superior moral nature, her special capacity to live her life for others, were all the outcome of external causes, what we would now call socialization.²⁹

Mill had formulated his position on this issue in the 1840’s, in an exchange of letters with Auguste Comte. Comte had applied his wide-ranging and subtle mind to a root and branch defense of the viability of paternalist social relationships. He realized that traditional views about the family and about women’s special nature, could no longer be defended by Biblical injunctions based upon the story of Eve’s creation out of “. . . one of Adam’s extra ribs.”³⁰ Comte became one of the first social philosophers to put his arguments about men’s and women’s natures and social roles, on a scientific foundation. He tried to show that the more emotional and altruistic nature of women was rooted in the anatomy of the brain. Comte accepted Gall’s theory

that the affective and intellectual faculties could be localized in the organs of brains, and that anatomical experiments showed that women's intellectual faculties were less developed than men's, while their affective faculties were far more developed.³¹ Comte also appealed to the evidences of biology, which showed that organic differences in the muscular, cellular, nervous and cerebral systems of the two sexes, all increased as we went further and further up the scale of organic evolution.³²

The arguments between Mill and Comte on women's nature became increasingly testy and acrimonious. Mill's habitual politeness soon gave way to irritability, partly because Comte treated him in the condescending manner of a straying disciple who would soon see the light. Mill's impatience had other causes. The issue went beyond women's rights; what was at stake were the fundamental tenets of the rational Enlightenment.³³ Concessions on any front would weaken the forces of progress. The argument about innate and acquired traits in human nature was being played out in the realm of ethics, where the defenders of an anti-liberal religiously oriented ethics raised the banner of innate ideas against the Utilitarians, who were oriented towards an ethic of moderate hedonism and self-interest.³⁴ Others were arguing for the resistless facts of innate human instincts, rooted in organic life, proof against the efforts of humanitarian reform.³⁵ Mill identified the general position that appealed to innate traits in human nature, with the conservative reaction against the values of the liberal Enlightenment. What this meant was that Mill was locked into a theoretical position from which there was no escape. In the *Logic* Mill was engaged in a debate which those who would challenge liberal environmentalism; in the letters to Comte, Mill was engaged in a debate in which positions soon became hardened; *On the Subjection of Women* was a polemical piece calling for unambiguous argument. Even if Mill had doubts about his ultimate position on the nature of women, as we shall see he did, these doubts had to remain implicit and unacknowledged.

The dialectic of Mill's liberalism drove him towards a critical attitude to the relationship between the sexes on another score as well. As a liberal Mill was wedded to a contract theory of human association. The ultimate sanction for all human association lay in the happiness of the individual as a single individual. Association found its chief legitimacy in what it achieved for the individual, for the individual's rights, interests, happiness, and for the development of human faculties. Society was not prior to the individual, nor was it to be an arena for individual self-sacrifice and unilateral obligation. Mill extended the contract theory to the realm of marriage and was an early believer in the freedom to dissolve marriage and obtain civil divorce, though he thought it impolitic to publicize these views while the battle for the suffrage was yet to be won.³⁶

On one occasion in *On the Subject of Women* Mill describes marriage in the metaphors of a business partnership with its watchful understanding about mutual rights and the limits of obligations.³⁷ In the early unpublished essay on marriage and divorce that Mill wrote for Harriet Taylor, as a sort of private effort at dialogue, he stressed the voluntary and spontaneous character of the love relationship: “. . . renewed and renewing at each instant by free and spontaneous choice.”³⁸ The view that marriage was a contract, ensuring rights and limiting obligations, pervades Mill’s writings on the woman question. Mill’s writings, as well as his practical work, aimed at ensuring that married women were to be entitled to dispose of any earned or unearned income they received, and that the professions as well as the education necessary to enter the professions, be open to women.³⁹ It was only when women had the prospect of economic independence that she could marry and remain married as an act of free choice and that she could have her rights within marriage respected.⁴⁰ Again Mill emphasized that the liberal program was in keeping with the whole thrust of modernism. The modern understanding of justice meant specifically: “. . . the respect of each for the rights of every other, and the ability of each to take care of himself.” Human associations – the most personal as well as the impersonal ones – were to be pervaded by the spirit of individualism. Women, as well as men were to measure their most intimate association by the standards of justice – whether their rights were well guarded, whether they found a sphere for individual development, whether their options for personal independence were open.

Thus women were to be encouraged to live for themselves, rather than for others. A life of steady self-abnegation and self-sacrifice was an offence against the modern conception of justice.⁴¹

Measured by the standards of liberal values, the state of women in nineteenth century England was a scandal. This was true for yet another reason. According to the canons of liberal individualism, personality was to be fostered to the habits of rationality. Rationality prepared one for the executive professions – medicine, the law, politics – where the greatest good of society was served. Moreover, only those trained to the uses of rationality could grasp enough of the sciences of human nature, society, government and enough of Utilitarian ethics, to make free and independent decisions about human conduct, to go beyond habits of deference and obedience, the signposts of human immaturity. In this realm too women have been denied the possibilities of “rational freedom.” Women have received, “. . . an education of the sentiments rather than of the understanding” Thus their faculties lie dormant; the “higher social functions” are closed to them; their sphere of activity is “extremely circumscribed”. Woman has become a doll, an ornament, the badge of her husband’s high achievement. Mill’s low valuation

of the feelings was confirmed in his critique of the socialization of women. Denied the opportunity "...to think and do something considerable themselves...", women find their pathetic compensations in employing sexual attractiveness to manipulate men and in erecting passive feelings, a life lived for – and through – others – in reverberation with the feelings of others – to the rank of a high virtue.⁴²

Thus by the standards of liberalism, women's nature was a sorry thing. Mill finds little that is positive or redeeming in the conventional image of women's personality and destiny. There is then, substance to the view that Mill's argument can be summed up in the yearning that, "... if only women were men in petticoats, ..." ⁴³ Women, as we know them, have had their true nature "...greatly distorted and disguised;..." Life has become for them: "...an unremitting restraint of the whole of her natural inclinations..." ⁴⁴ This is where the dialectic of liberalism led Mill. Society would benefit immeasurably if women were more like men; women were stunted, child-like beings.

III

But, the bold deductions that liberalism pressed upon Mill, were not always translated into a practical program. If liberalism drove Mill into an attitude of contempt for women's conventional social role, the practical conclusions Mill drew from his own arguments, were relatively modest. William O'Neill has insisted that nineteenth century feminism rather hastily abandoned the revolutionary program suggested by some of its adherents. It was clear that a frontal assault on the whole question of women's traditional role in society, on the question of divorce and 'free love', would lead to splendid isolation and political failure. In fact the vast majority of feminists believed – on the conscious level at least – that their program was compatible with the conventional Victorian understanding of women's role in society. Most of the causes feminists agitated for – temperance, labour legislation for women and children – were 'maternal' causes. Women shied away from the bold assertion of their own rights and interests, and consistently maintained a tone of "selfless altruism", in keeping with the Victorian view of the feminine personality.⁴⁵ All these themes find their echo in Mill's stance on the woman question. We shall see though, in analyzing Mill's views on this subject, that the matter is not as simple as O'Neill makes it out to be. The theme of feminine self-assertion, the thrust towards the expansion of individual rights, towards a widened sphere of free choice and towards the claims of individual happiness and self-fulfillment, remained an underlying reality, even within the scenario of feminism 'maternal' causes. We are face to face with an exceedingly complex reality.

First of all, much of Mill's concern was directed to the problems of single women. J.A. Banks and Olive Banks in *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*, have charted the dramatic rise in the population of single women – or “surplus women” – in the English middle class between 1850-1870.⁴⁶ This problem was created by the differential mortality rate among men and women, and by a considerable male emigration. Moreover, as living standards among the middle class rose and gave rise to more extravagant patterns of conspicuous consumption, males tended to put off marriage till they reached an income level appropriate to their class aspirations. In the pre-industrial era, when productive tasks were centered in the home rather than in the factory, and when the extended family was the primary social unit, a multitude of socially useful tasks were available to unmarried women within the bosom of the extended family. This was no longer the case, and single women of the middle class experienced themselves as “. . . a kind of exrescence on the surface of society, . . .”⁴⁷

Granting women access to the vocations and to higher education was then, a solution to the problem of surplus single women. Mill insisted that most women would always prefer marriage, and that the most suitable division of labour within marriage was one in which the husband earned the income and the wife supervised the house and raised the children. He even insisted that women who have the cares of a family, have “. . . a worthy outlet for the active faculties.”, though we had heard before that women's sphere of activity was “extremely circumscribed.”⁴⁸ Mill claimed that the liberal program was not meant to be a challenge to family life, which was in any case “. . . so essential to humanity . . .”⁴⁹

Opening the professions and higher education to women would have another effect though. It would raise the level of sophistication of future mothers and enable them to fit their children better for the world. It would also foster love within marriage and render marriage more equitable, since a woman would not be constrained to persevere in an abusive or loveless marriage if she had the opportunity of self-support. Thus though Mill affirmed the importance of the role of wife and mother, he hoped to afford women more autonomy within the parameters of these roles. At the same time, Mill limited the range of his program by insisting that his prescriptions applied only to the “select few”. Only wives with “. . . faculties exceptionally adapted to any other pursuit, . . .” would be able to pursue their vocations while married.⁵⁰ Mill does not mean to offer us a vision of universal self-realization, of rich but dormant talents and capacities among great numbers of women, finally finding a sphere for development and activity. The theme of liberal elitism casts its shadow over this issue. What struck liberals was the paucity of talent and intelligence distributed among

the human species, not its wealth or abundance. The “. . . main occupation of the great majority of women.” – would remain fixed in its conventional channels.⁵¹

The rising standard of living among the English middle class from 1850-1870, led to new patterns of consumption, and to a new understanding of the role of wife and mother. The middle class now aspired to gentility. In the new genteel life-style, wives were to be the badge and ornament of their husband's worldly success. Women were to become ladies of aristocratic leisure, stylishly frivolous, idle and ornamental. This meant abandoning the life of household drudgery, and this was made possible by the cheap, plentiful supply of servants. The women of the middle class were no longer to cook and clean and attend to the physical needs of their children. Wet-nurses came into increasing use in what Banks and Banks have called the “Flight from parenthood . . .”⁵² But this meant that women were no longer the great mainstay of the home, they had traded this high function for the frivolous and idle life of stylized leisure. She had traded her vital role of earth-mother for that of a decorative accessory to life.

Much of feminist agitation and some of Mill's key arguments about the condition of women, are a reaction to the new ideal of gentility. Mill did not reject the new standards of gentility, but he wished to alter their content. *On the Subjection of Women* addresses itself to the daughters of the middle classes who – in the poignant personal confession of one of Mill's correspondents – spend their days, “. . . killing time in small daily parcels with little frivolous amusements or at most with foolish petty pretences of work.”⁵³ What Mill offered these women was not a return to the domestic virtues, but a new role of companion and helpmate to her husband. But this meant that the maternal virtues were now to be sublimated within the wife-husband relationship. In the words of Kate Amberly, an early ally of Mill, women were to trade, “. . . the inferior position of a squaw or for the better sort a harem princess . . .”, for the more worthy calling of “. . . a helpmate to man, an improving and equal companion . . .”⁵⁴ And Mill insisted that if a woman loved her husband, “. . . her natural impulse will be to associate her existence with him she loves, and to share *his* occupations, . . .”⁵⁵

The new ideal of companionate marriage, as Mill formulated it, harbored several antithetical elements in a sort of uneasy tension. First of all Mill insisted that only relationships between equals were legitimate and ethically sanctioned. Relationships of inequality had no ethical content. Mill thoroughly de-legitimized the virtues of paternalism; paternalism meant the rule of force; it was a blank-check for bullying and exploitation.

Companionate marriage involves two persons alternately "...leading and ... being led..." Companionate marriage meant the mutual assimilation of "tastes and characters."⁵⁶ A mutual shaping and molding took place, enriching both partners. In a striking early letter to Carlyle, written several years after he met Harriet Taylor, Mill insisted – in a dramatic insight that found its echo almost a century later in both Jungian and Freudian theory – that "first-rate" people were a blend of feminine and masculine characteristics. Rich personalities combined the best of the so-called feminine and masculine virtues. Conventional sex role differentiation no longer applied at the airy heights of human achievement. Those men who were able to assimilate the feminine element into their personalities were more 'whole', more integrated, than those who recoiled from this possibility, their masculinity threatened.⁵⁷

Mill's relationship with Harriet Taylor was in some ways a paradigm of these theories. Harriet Taylor was a strong, independent and unconventional personality, with decisive and considered views about the larger issues of life. She maintained her unconventional relationship with Mill while married to another man, a very bold act for a woman in Victorian England. We know that Mill submitted his manuscripts to her critical judgment and often altered his text in accordance with her opinion. We know that he relied on her views for many of the large and small decisions he took in the course of his life.⁵⁸

But in spite of his encomiums to her intellect, Mill's most comprehensive account of their relationship, in the *Early Draft* of his *Autobiography*, recasts her role into that of the 'Eternal Feminine' in some ways indistinguishable from Dante's Beatrice, or Auguste Comte's Clothilde. Her inclinations, he tells us, are "peculiarly feminine." Her best qualities are her "...loving reliance on the love and care of others..." rather than "...self-help and self-assertion..." Just as woman's special character of passivity and self-surrender helped the more combative and self-assertive male soften and transcend his harsh nature, so Mill tells us that, "With her... my faculties... became more and more attuned to the beautiful and the elevated... especially in human feeling..."⁵⁹ Mill had insisted, in his early unpublished essay on marriage and divorce, that married women would only overburden the labour market if they pursued vocations. As it was, wives had a noble calling: "The great occupation of woman should be to beautify life: ...and to diffuse beauty, elegance, and grace, everywhere". Thus, their "natural task..." is "...accomplished rather by *being* than by *doing*".⁶⁰

By Mill's account, Harriet Taylor's intellectual influence on his opinions and writings was twofold. Her influence moved both in, "the region of ultimate aims" and that of "the immediately useful and practically attainable..."⁶¹ She inspired him with her hopes and enthusiasm for reform, and she brought to their intellectual dialogue her feminine intuition for the concrete, the possible, the resistless fact. She both humanized and disciplined his bent for abstract speculation. As Mill had written to Comte, the lust for speculation often takes men into an unreal shadowy world where abstractions replace reality: "... while women are always oriented towards real beings, their happiness, their suffering."⁶²

Mill argued in his tract, that the laws enjoining obedience to husbands two poles. Woman is both the 'Eternal Feminine' lavishing her maternal graces upon her husband. But while passive and giving, she is also active and autonomous, capable of independence, of living for herself if need be, capable of large and critical views about the great issues of life. Was ever a more difficult burden cast upon women!

Much of the feminist program was rooted firmly in Victorian pre-suppositions about women's nature. It is not at all difficult to come to the conclusion, at least from our perspective a century later, that the similarities between feminist and anti-feminist views, between say Mill and Ruskin or Newman, are more striking than the differences. For in spite of Mill's insistence that woman's nature was "artificial", and "greatly distorted or disguised", much of his writings were directed towards upholding the rights of maternity and towards fostering the pure and selfless love that was women's great gift to civilization. Here the liberal insistence that these feminine virtues were small graces compared to the virtues of self-assertion and the life of self-development, receded into the background. So much of the feminist struggle in the nineteenth century revolved around the rights of women as the mainstay of the home in the face of a male imperium characterized too often by exploitation and a unilateral sense of proprietorship. As a writer hostile to Mill saw so astutely, much of Mill's essay *On the Subjection of Women* is taken up with a plea to the law "... to defend the weak"⁶³

Mill argued in his tract, that the laws enjoining obedience to husbands, were a warrant for abuse and male brutality. For example, according to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, husbands could initiate divorce proceedings on the grounds of adultery, while a wife had to prove cruelty and desertion as well as adultery before she could initiate divorce proceedings. The law was a blank check for male self-indulgence.⁶⁴ Moreover, in the event of a separation or divorce, the father became legal guardian of the children.

Guardianship of her children did not even fall to the mother in the event of her husband's death; this had to be stipulated in the will of the deceased.⁶⁵ In a newspaper article jointly written by Mill and Harriet Taylor, they pointed to the fact that even where the rights of maternity were enshrined in law, enforcement was lax. A recent case had horrified consciences. A young girl had committed suicide after her "gentleman seducer" had taken possession of their child, born out of wedlock. According to law, the girl was the legal parent of the child. But the law was a dead letter in the affairs of 'gentlemen' and the daughters of the poor.⁶⁶

In a letter to Isabella Hooker the militant American feminist, Mill explained the grounds for his stand on the prior rights of maternity. He pointed to ". . . the infinitely closer relationship of a child to its mother than to its father . . ." as a reality . . . full of important consequences with respect to the future legal position of parents and children."⁶⁷ It is in Mill's unpublished writings — in the *Early Draft* of the *Autobiography*, the early essay on marriage and divorce and in his letters — rather than in his published polemics — that Mill's reflections upon the significance of maternity are expressed in their most unqualified form. In the unpublished draft of his *Autobiography*, Mill implied that only when women traded their role of 'squaw' and household drudge for the more commanding one of strong maternal influence, could they then decisively shape the personality of their children.

It was through the virtues of love and selfless giving that mothers trained "the affections" of their children, ". . . and through the affections, . . . the conscience, and the whole moral being." Character was shaped through the subtle processes of empathetic identification. Because they were the recipients of altruistic love, children identified with their mother. Thus she was able to make ". . . her own character pass into the child; . . . [to] love what she loves, venerate what she venerates. . . ."⁶⁸ The things that she gives her children, the husband cannot. Mill's reflections on these processes were deeply personal, much of what he said appears in his account of his own upbringing, and the harrowing experience of being raised and educated primarily by his father. Men are trained to combativeness and self-assertion; they must be strong; they are fitted out to struggle in the world. They must then, starve the feelings. They educate sternly; they are judgmental. Mill's *Early Draft* of his *Autobiography* is a plaintive cry for the graces of maternal love.⁶⁹

What Mill lacked, only his mother could have given him. In a painful self-analysis, Mill speaks of his deep sense of psychic isolation, his feeling of being cut-off from humanity, his inability to communicate with others, his

inability to love.⁷⁰ The liberal's suspicion of the feelings, the emphasis on critical reason, on foresight and prudential controls, now gives way to a profounder understanding of personality. It is maternal love that unlocks the well-springs of human sympathy, of altruism and sociability, of caring and giving. The grace of maternal love enables us to love one another.

Ironically, maternal love helped breed autonomy, rather than dependence. The stern and demanding father, who gave to his children because he regarded them as his property, recast his children into copies of himself. Mill's conscience spoke to him in his father's voice. Life became for Mill an agonizing scenario of Oedipal rebellion, guilt and remorse. Maternal love helped strengthen autonomy because it stirred the impulses of protectiveness in sons.⁷² Feminine passivity and helplessness evoked male courage and prowess. Mill ends his encomium to the maternal virtues with the touching and eloquent words: "These things . . . are better and greater than all the rest."⁷³

One of the overriding themes of *On the Subjection of Women* is the demand that the law protect the weaker sex against the stronger. While Mill insisted that modern civilization rendered the greater physical strength of males an increasingly insignificant datum in the general affairs of life, a dominant theme of Mill's essay is, ironically, the fact of physical strength and its role in the relations between the sexes.⁷⁴ It was not only physical strength that was at issue. Mill cast the male character in the image of unrestrained brutishness and egoism, whose only check and restraint was to be found in "penal sanctions". Mill's condemnation of male brutishness was vehement and unqualified: ". . . how vast is the number of men . . ." he tells us, ". . . little higher than brutes . . ."⁷⁵ Women on the other hand were practised in the control of impulse. As Mill had written to Comte: since women were schooled in the habits of self-renunciation, they were better able to submit their passions to the imperium of reason.⁷⁶ Liberalism set great store upon the ability to place impulse under the judgment of reason.⁷⁷ In this sphere women, not men, were the higher beings. Male egoism and self-assertion had much to learn from feminine altruism and self-renunciation. Mill now drops the image of a feminine nature "greatly distorted and disguised." Woman's nature is cast in the mold of the 'Eternal Feminine', the bearer of the civilizing virtues.

The struggle for women's rights was a struggle largely played out at the domestic hearth. At issue were the rights and the integrity of the weaker sex in the face of the male inclination to see women as extensions of his ego, as part of his property, his "belongings."⁷⁸ One area of struggle was the issue of

wife abuse or wife beating, particularly, of course, among the working class. Mill and Harriet Taylor devoted several newspaper articles to this question. The scandal of wife beating horrified many. It was a typical 'maternal' cause, and attracted many women from allied causes, such as the Temperance Movement.⁷⁹ Politics makes strange bedfellows; on one occasion Mill found himself pleading the case of a policeman imprisoned for one month at hard labour for using a truncheon to strike a man who was beating his own wife — probably the only case on record of a liberal defending a policeman.⁸⁰ Mill reports another case of a magistrate who had released a man imprisoned for beating his wife, with a warning to the poor woman to be careful not to provoke her husband again.⁸¹ But even when magistrates were more sympathetic, women were reluctant to testify against their husbands. After all sentences were relatively short, and she would soon be under his power again. The feminists were determined that physical abuse be made grounds for separation, with the husband responsible for the wife's maintenance. This was made law in 1878. At issue in the question of wife abuse were the rights of the weaker sex against male impulsiveness and pugnacity. Clearly many magistrates saw wife abuse as a regrettable by-product of robust male virtues, against which they were not prepared to place sanctions.

According to Mill the scenario of male brutishness and feminine purity played itself out most dramatically in the realm of sexuality. Mill's reflections on sexuality are a paean to women's higher nature. Here we are no longer exposed to liberal analysis about how males, actuated by the interests of domination, have fostered an unnatural and degrading innocence and passivity upon women. Now woman is the agent of the higher life. The goal of feminism is not to make women over into 'men in petticoats', but to place men under the imperium of women's higher moral standards. "I think it most probable", Mill wrote to Lord Amberly, "that this particular passion [sex] will become with men, as it is already with a large number of women, completely under the control of the reason." The goal of feminism was: ". . . the greatest amount of chastity and happiness for men, women, and children".⁸²

Women were inclined towards love in its "highest form" rather than its "lowest form". In his early essay on marriage and divorce Mill analyzed the historic origins of the indissoluble marriage bond, the prohibition of divorce. This prohibition was commanded by the interests of women. It arose from the need, "to *bind* sensualists." Male egoism and self-assertion made men sensual and fickle. For women, the prospect of keeping the marriage tie alive by a sensuality reverberating to her husband's desires was, "disgusting in the extreme". What women sought in marriage was not sexual satiety, but

children and a home. Woman's sexuality was submerged by altruism and by her propensity to live for others. The relatively weak thrust of her egotism and selfishness, made her immune from sexual desire. Her interests could only be insured by the prohibition of divorce.⁸⁴

Mill's views on the Contagious Diseases Act provide us with another document of his attitude towards sexuality. The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 was passed to deal with the problem of widespread venereal disease among the Armed Forces. According to the Act any woman suspected of being a prostitute could be bound over in court for periodic medical examinations and compulsory treatment. Mill was opposed to the Act, and gave evidence in 1870 before a Royal Commission investigating the situation.⁸⁵ Mill's wrath was directed to the men who consorted with prostitutes, and he insisted that they be submitted to the trials of compulsory treatment, not the women. In addition, men in the Armed Forces found to have venereal disease should be subjected to legal penalties. There is evidence that the Act was a benefit to prostitutes and markedly improved their physical state, but this was none of Mill's concern. He considered the Act a violation of civil rights. It lent itself to the abuse of power and made it easy to victimize the innocent.⁸⁶ But the central issue was that the Act sanctioned illicit lust. It was just as wrong and absurd as providing "... stomach pumps to drunkards." In the case of illicit lust, "... legal precautions taken expressly to make that kind of indulgence safe are a licence to it."⁸⁷

The campaign against the Contagious Disease Act was led by the formidable Josephine Butler. Agitation against the Act was a two-edged sword. For while the movement wished to extend the imperium of the feminine virtues, it was made up of women boldly discussing sexual matters in public, and thus the movement diluted the image of female innocence. Mill seems to have been extremely uncomfortable with this turn of events. He insisted that the London National Society for Women's Suffrage dissociate itself from the agitation against the Act. He spoke of the want "of good taste" and the lack of "... consideration for the feelings of others." among those agitating for repeal of the Act.⁸⁸ Perhaps this was because Mill shared the widespread assumption that feminine chastity was guaranteed by fostering innocence among women. Chastity was not the outcome of woman's powerful will, exercising its sway over powerful impulses. Feminine chastity was the finest jewel of feminine innocence, "a remnant of the innocence of Paradise" bestowed upon women. Women were naturally repelled by anything "wanting in delicacy or modesty: . . ." But women were exceedingly vulnerable, and when innocence was lost, their chastity lay in the balance. Hence women had to be protected from the terrible realities of the world.⁸⁹ Obviously liberal theory inhibited Mill from drawing these

conclusions, at least explicitly, but his actions in connection with the agitation against the Contagious Disease Act, suggest what was just below the surface of his mind.

IV

What are we to make of all this? First of all, we can pinpoint two antithetical themes in Mill's feminism joined in an uneasy union. Mill fought for the right of women to enter preserves formerly limited to men—public life, the professions, the serious world of the executive virtues. Mill also fought for the imperium of the 'feminine virtues', the rights of women in their role as the mainstay of the domestic hearth. But even while celebrating feminine self-sacrifice and chastity, Mill carved out a widened sphere for feminine self-assertion, and for the rights of individual personality.

Mill could protest as often as he liked that access to education and the vocations would make women better wives and mothers. This was clearly not the only outcome of widened opportunities. Women were being offered another option besides marriage, an option challenging the monolithic social sway of the married state. For Mill questioned the invidious status hierarchy that prevailed among single and married women. In some of his writings, single women seem to have made the more self-reliant choice, the choice involving greater strength of character, than married women.⁹⁰ No longer was the spinster to be an object of benign humour. Mill was legitimizing women's ambitions on the larger stage of public life, ambitions at odds with the Victorian virtues of feminine self-abnegation. Moreover, when Mill insisted that women able to hold their own in the world, would feel freer to disengage themselves from an abusive or loveless marriage, he was affirming the rights of the feelings, the rights of spontaneity and self-realization, against the ethos of self-renunciation and obligation. No longer was it the case that woman's ". . . highest duty is so often to suffer and be still."⁹¹

Even his most Victorian affirmations — in a striking dialectic — point beyond themselves to other realities. Mill insisted that women were innocent of sexuality, and here he was pulled towards the view that feminine innocence of sexual realities was to be fostered. In this realm at least, women were too vulnerable to be allowed to be free agents. But if women were uninterested in sexual gratification, then they could only be martyrs to male lubricity; women were sexual victims.⁹² But to claim that women were victims was to recognize an injustice, a state of exploitation. Thus although the image of feminine self-abnegation was affirmed, and Mill even insisted that the path to a just state of affairs lay in male self-abnegation, what lurks beneath the surface is the claim to individual happiness, an avowal of the prior rights of the individual in the face of crushing social demands. Not a few

revolutions have been born out of the desire to bind all to the restrictions suffered by the many. Universalizing chastity was one way of creating a community of equals.

Still and all, the evidences of Mill's ambivalence on the woman question, are striking. One of the great themes of *On the Subjection of Women* is that women's nature is artificial and distorted, the unhappy outcome of male manipulation. After developing this theme, Mill proceeded to outline a picture of women's nature, such as men had shaped her, overflowing with respect and esteem. Women's special mental capacities were a perfect complement to the male's. Women's intuition for the practical and their greater capacity for sympathy, were a salutary counterweight to the tendency of males to mistake abstractions for reality. In the course of this discussion Mill goes so far as to qualify his doctrinal environmentalism, making astonishing concessions in passing to the principle of organic differences between males and females. We learn that "... it is possible, and probable, that the nervous temperament (as it is called) is inherited by a greater number of women than of men." Later on Mill tells us that, "It would not be surprising . . . if men on the average should have the advantage in the size of the brain, and women in activity of cerebral circulation."⁹³ This would explain the greater nervous susceptibility of women. Mill kept his options open.

It was reflections such as these that led one of Mill's correspondents, George Robertson, to a shrewd insight into Mill's ambivalence. Robertson told Mill that he had made such an emphatic case for the complementary quality of male and female intelligence, that one could but conclude that the differences between the male and female character should be fostered. In response Mill admitted his uncertainty. He told Robertson that it was not clear whether the differences between males and females "... are not partly at least natural ones, which would subsist in spite of identity of training."⁹⁴

Mill was not sure what he wanted of women. Was woman's altruism, her propensity to live *for* others, the mark of an abject tendency to live *through* others? ⁹⁵ Or was female altruism the badge of superior virtues, as Mill sometimes insists? ⁹⁶ Did the imperatives of self-renunciation promote rare virtues among women, not least of which was their pronounced ability to "... submit passion to reason"? ⁹⁷ Or was self-renunciation the emblem of a childlike dependence? ⁹⁸ Were women to be encouraged to enter the executive occupations, or would this violate their natural tendency towards those occupations "... which partake most of the beautiful, or which require delicacy and taste" ⁹⁹ If we cannot predict how women's

nature would unfold when women no longer had to conform to the narrow exigencies of the feminine role, how do we know that: “. . . when women are free agents their weight is sure to be on the side of an adjustment of social difficulties not by a fierce conflict but by a succession of peaceful compromises.”¹⁰⁰ Were women to become more aggressive and self-assertive, or was society to be graced by their “softening influence”?¹⁰¹ Thus if the liberal fiat was that the rights of individual self-assertion were to be extended to women, Mill was not quite prepared to pay the price demanded by this new ideal.

Mill was able to avoid a face to face confrontation with these ambivalences because of the heavy elitist tone of his program. Since his program applied only to the “select few”, his liberalism could at times, be most unqualified. Because the ‘select few’ could afford to hire servants to do all the household work, vexing questions about the sexual division of labour could be avoided.¹⁰² The sphere of women’s work and male tasks did not need to be redefined. If only the ‘select few’ were to be emancipated, and if, “. . . the great majority of women” were to continue to do ‘women’s work’, Mill could be generous in extending the gifts of liberal individualism to women.¹⁰³ He could in fact do more; he could evade his habitual ambivalences, at least to some degree. Elitist liberalism enabled Mill to give free rein to one of the poles of his ambivalence, his studied contempt for women who chose the path of self-renunciation and dependence. Most women, he insisted, would chose the conventional path out of laziness. How much more simple it is to preserve a female monopoly over ‘women’s work’, rather than to carve out new roles in a competitive world, exacting in its standards of success and failure.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, only women of “higher natures” will wish to purchase the independence enabling them to end a loveless marriage; “. . . women in general . . . are more easily contented . . .”¹⁰⁵ When measured by the creed of liberal individualism, femininity was a pitiable ideal. The dialectic of liberalism ran its course by consigning most women to the home, at the same time stripping the role of wife and mother of all compensating prestige and importance.

The evidences of Mill’s ambivalence are abounding. It is revealing that in none of his other works aside from *On the Subjection of Women*, did Mill ever refrain from expressing unqualified and decisive views with regard to the ultimate facts of human nature. Mill had advised caution in this regard in the *Logic*, since the sciences of human nature were still in their infancy, though he hardly ever heeded his own advise.¹⁰⁶ Thus, for example, the essay on *Nature* is a root and branch critique of the ‘Rousseauist’ conception of natural man, the notion that human nature would be creative, loving and

self-regulating but for the frustrations and restraints imposed upon humanity by society. There Mill managed to be quite certain about the ultimate facts of human nature, prior to the effects of socialization. What is “natural” is not love and creativity, but inner chaos, laziness, indiscipline, and rampant egoism.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in the essay *Utility of Religion*, Mill tells us how society transforms egotism into sociability and tames the natural indiscipline of personality. One great socializing force, for example, is early education, effected through parental commands. Mill goes on to reiterate his beliefs about the radical malleability of human nature: “The power of education is almost boundless; there is not one natural inclination which it is not strong enough to coerce and, if needful, to destroy by disuse.”¹⁰⁸

In *On the Subjection of Women*, Mill was far more qualified. There Mill insisted that we could not know what women’s original nature was until “. . . women’s nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men’s . . .”¹⁰⁹ Mill’s agnosticism about women’s ultimate nature was uncharacteristic of him, and was a strategy enabling him to avoid resolving his ambivalences on the subject of women. Furthermore, according to Mill, human nature cannot “choose its direction freely”; the sphere of freedom is a limited one. Human nature is, to a large extent, tamed by the fiat of society. Mill’s injunction that woman’s nature be allowed freedom “to choose its direction” was uncharacteristic of him. In all other cases, Mill was a pronounced interventionist, and stressed the vital role of society in shaping human nature. But this way, Mill was able to evade an unqualified answer to the irksome question of what model, what role, women should be socialized to.

I think what we are face to face with in Mill’s writings are the inner antitheses of liberalism. Liberalism provides women with two contradictory messages. It opens the gates of equal educational access to women, and then consigns them to the home. It allots to women the role of wife and mother, and then proceeds to despoil that role of much of its prestige and significance. The spirit of liberalism is a cautious one. While raising high the banner of individualism, liberalism has also spoken for the necessity for social constraints, and for the conventional disciplines that check personal spontaneity. Liberalism insists upon the preservation of family life, and upon customary restraints in socializing children. But the cautious side of liberalism is antithetical to other liberal values — especially the values of individual autonomy. If Mill usually tries to find the Archimedean point, the precise point at which the claims of individualism and the claims of society are evenly balanced, in his writings on the woman question, the attempt at balance has become a precarious tight-rope dance.

Thus Mill's advocacy of divorce is qualified by the remark that bearing children transforms marriage into an "indissoluble" tie. Moreover, unconditional access to divorce can produce a destructive social climate. Individualism can too easily degenerate into a rampant egoism in which, "... all sense of any peculiar duties . . . attaching to the relation between the sexes is worn away: . . ." ¹¹⁰ Little girls and boys are to be schooled to equality. At the same time the family is to remain, "... a school of obedience for the children, of command for the parents." The relationship between husband and wife is to be the great paradigm of "... a school of sympathy in equality . . ." However: "The mere fact that he is usually the eldest, will in most cases give the preponderance to the man: . . . There will naturally also be a more potential voice on the side . . . that brings in the means of support". ¹¹¹ The salutary social benefits of a benign paternalism could not be lightly cast away. Mill's resort to conventional social restraints, tempered his advocacy of individualism.

Perhaps we can recognize in all this that familiar half-way house many of us live in. Mill was never more correct than when he predicted that, "... the great amount of unhappiness even now produced by the feeling of a wasted life . . . will be even more frequent, as increased cultivation creates a greater and greater disproportion between the ideas and faculties of women, and the scope which society allows to their activity". ¹¹² What he did not say was that this was a dilemma he himself had been unable to resolve.

NOTES

¹ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, intro. by Wendell Robert Carr (Cambridge, 1970), vi.

² John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London, 1924), pp.239-41, p.258.

³ John Stuart Mill, *The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill*, 4 vols., XIV-XVII, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, eds. Francis E. Mineka and Dwight N. Lindley (Toronto, 1972), XVI, p.1382. XVII, p.1535, p.1575, p.1584.

⁴ James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (Cambridge, 1967), p.190. For the contemporary journals, see: *The Edinburgh Review*, p.130 (1869); *The Westminster Review*, p.90 (1870); *Saturday Review*, (June 19, 1869 and February 12, 1870); *Fraser's Magazine*, (November, 1873); *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CVI (September, 1869).

⁵ "Mr. Mill on the Subjection of Women," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CVI (September, 1869), p.310.

⁶ *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1648. For the list of contemporary translations, see: Keitaro Amano, *Bibliography of the Classical Economics*, III, Part 4 *John Stuart Mill* (Tokyo, 1964), pp.340-42.

⁷ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, foreward by Carrie Chapman Catt (New York, 1911), v.

⁸ Carr, "Introduction", xxiv-xxv.

- 9 "Mr. Mill on the Subjection of Women", p.312.
- 10 Carr's introduction and Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (New York, 1970), pp.88-108, are the only current studies of the essay. Aside from the polemics in Mill's own day, I have found nothing else. Millett considers Mill a singleminded advocate of women's rights.
- 11 Mary Woolstonecraft, *The Rights of Women* and John Stuart Mill, *On the Subjection of Women* (London, 1929), p.238, p.233, p.292.
- 12 John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 2 vols., 7th ed. (London, 1868) II, p.449.
- 13 John Stuart Mill, "The Utility of Religion", *Essential Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Max Lerner (New York, 1961), pp.406-12, p.416.
- 14 *Subjection*, p.312, p.232, p.235.
- 15 *IBID.*, pp.299-300, p.234.
- 16 "Utility of Religion", p.416.
- 17 *Logic*, p.425.
- 18 *Subjection*, p.295, pp.247-48. For Mill's role in the agitation for a Married Women's Property Act, see: *Later Letters*, XVI, p.1413. Michael St. John Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (New York, 1970), p.500.
- 19 *Subjection*, p.248.
- 20 *IBID.*, p.304.
- 21 *IBID.*, p.233.
- 22 John Stuart Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill*, 2 vols. XII-XIII, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Francis Mineka (Toronto, 1963), XIII, p.739.
- 23 John Stuart Mill, *The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Urbana, 1961), pp.187-89, quoted in Richard L. Schoenwald ed., *Nineteenth Century Thought: The Discovery of Change* (New Jersey, 1965), pp.20-21.
- 24 John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis, 1957), p.39.
- 25 *Logic*, p.435.
- 26 Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York, 1948), Chap. iii.
- 27 *Logic*, Book VI, Chap. v.
- 28 *IBID.*, pp.441-42.
- 29 *Subjection*, pp.284-93.
- 30 John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte, *Lettres Inédites de J.S. Mill a Auguste Comte: Avec les Réponses de Comte et une Introduction*, ed. L. Lévy - Bruhl (Paris, 1899), pp.279-280.
- 31 Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, trans. by Harriet Martineau, 2 vols., 2d ed. (London, 1875), II, pp.112-13.
- 32 Mill and Comte, *Lettres*, p.232, p.277.
- 33 *IBID.*, p.260; *Logic*, pp.442-43.
- 34 *Utilitarianism*, pp.37-39.
- 35 *Logic*, p.443.
- 36 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1751.
- 37 *Subjection*, p.255.
- 38 John Stuart Mill, "Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce," *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. Alice S. Rossi (Chicago, 1970), p.74.
- 39 *Later Letters*, XIV, p.500. XV, p.787. XVI, p.1418.
- 40 "Marriage and Divorce," p.77.
- 41 *Subjection*, p.302, p.232.

- 42 *IBID.*, p.268, p.311, p.304, p.237, p.299, p.313.
- 43 "Mr. Mill on the Subjection of Women", p.321.
- 44 *Subjection*, p.274, p.306.
- 45 William L. O'Neill, "Feminism as a Radical Ideology," *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (Illinois, 1968), pp.276-85, p.296.
- 46 J.A. Banks and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool, 1964), pp.27-35.
- 47 "Marriage and Divorce", p.72.
- 48 *Subjection*, p.314, pp.264-67.
- 49 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1638.
- 50 *Subjection*, p.299, p.265.
- 51 *Later Letters*, XVI, p.1274; *Subjection*, p.299; "Marriage and Divorce," p.75.
- 52 Banks and Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning*, p.66, p.73.
- 53 *Later Letters*, XIV, p.378.
- 54 Bertrand Russell and Patricia Russell eds. *The Amberly Papers*, 2 vols. (London, 1937) II, p.299, quoted in Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, p.498.
- 55 "Marriage and Divorce", p.77.
- 56 *Subjection*, p.253, p.259, pp.309-11.
- 57 *Earlier Letters*, XII, p.184
- 58 For a judicious account of Harriet Taylor's influence on Mill, a subject of much controversy, see: John M. Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto, 1968), Chapt. iii.
- 59 *The Early Draft*, pp.197-99
- 60 "Marriage and Divorce", pp.74-76
- 61 *Autobiography* (New York, 1924), pp.132-33, quoted in Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind*, p.60.
- 62 *Lettres*, pp.239-240.
- 63 "Mr. Mill on the Subjection of Women," p.316.
- 64 Constance Rover, *Love, Morals and the Feminists*, (London, 1970), p.42.
- 65 *Subjection*, p.248; *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1640.
- 66 *Morning Chronicle*, October 28, 1846, p.4.
- 67 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1640.
- 68 "Marriage and Divorce", p.76.
- 69 *Early Draft* pp.183-85.
- 70 *IBID.*, pp.183-84; F.A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor; Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage* (London, 1951), p.34.
- 71 *Early Draft*, 185. For the evidences of Oedipal rebellion, see: A.W. Levi, "The 'Mental Crisis' of John Stuart Mill", *Psychoanalytic Review*, p.32 (1945), pp.86-101; Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Other John Stuart Mill", *Victorian Minds*, (New York, 1970).
- 72 *Subjection*, pp.300-01.
- 73 "Marriage and Divorce," p.76.
- 74 *Subjection*, pp.222-23; "Mr. Mill on the Subjection of Women," p.316.
- 75 *Subjection*, p.302, p.252.
- 76 *Lettres*, pp.265-66
- 77 John Stuart Mill, "Nature", *Essential Works of John Stuart Mill*, pp.389-97.
- 78 *Subjection*, p.253.
- 79 W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation*

(New York, 1965), p.34, pp.155-66. See: *Daily News*, February 5, 1850 p.4; *Morning Chronicle*, March 13, 1850 p.5; March 26, 1850 pp.4-5; March 20, 1850 p.4; March 31, 1850 pp.4-5; *Sunday Times*, June 2, 1850 p.2; *Morning Chronicle*, August 28, 1851 p.4; *Morning Post*, November 8, 1854 p.3.

80 *Later Letters*, XVII, pp.1677-78.

81 *Morning Post*, November 8, 1854 p.3.

82 *Later Letters*, XVII, 1693, W. Acton, author of a widely read Victorian marriage manual, blamed Mill for providing wives with another excuse to evade the duties of the conjugal bed. "This spirit of subordination has become more intolerable – as the husbands assert – since it has been backed by the opinions of John Stuart Mill." W. Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life, Considered in their Physiological, Social and Psychological Relations*, (London, 1875) 6th ed., 142-43. quoted in Banks and Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning*, p.55.

83 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1693.

84 "Marriage and Divorce", pp.70-72. These sound like strange utterances coming from someone with advanced views about divorce. Mill was in fact far more ambivalent about divorce than he was willing to admit. He feared that the possibility of divorce would weaken the imperatives of family obligation and self-renunciation in women. While advocating more liberal divorce laws, Mill hedged his program with sanctions against women who made their own happiness the ruling force in their lives. He argued, in a revealing passage, that the legal possibility of divorce must be coupled with strong social sanctions, especially against women who change partners, "on light grounds." *IBID.*, p.82.

85 *Later Letters*, XVII, pp.1789-90; Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, pp.501-03. For the history of the Act, see: Rover, *Love, Morals and the Feminists*, Chapt. ix and E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke, "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease", *Suffer and be Still* ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington, 1973), pp.91-99.

86 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1681.

87 *IBID.*, XVII, p.1790.

88 *Ibid.*, XVII, p.1818, p.1835, p.1895.

89 Peter T. Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict", *Suffer and be Still* ed. Vicinus, pp.156-61.

90 *Later Letters*, XVI, pp.1273-74; *Subjection* p.267.

91 Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis (1845), quoted on title page, Vicinus, *Suffer and be Still*.

92 *Subjection*, p.248; John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 2 vols, II-III, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), II, pp.371-72.

93 *Subjection*, pp.274-75, p.277, p.281.

94 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1635.

95 *Subjection*, pp.304-06.

96 Mill and Comte, *Lettres*, pp.239-40.

97 *Ibid.*, pp.265-66.

98 *Subjection*, p.232.

99 "Marriage and Divorce", p.77; *Subjection*, p.268.

100 *Later Letters*, XVII, p.1838; *Subjection*, p.273.

101 *Subjection*, p.300; *Later Letters*, XVI, p.1344.

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- 102 "Marriage and Divorce", pp.74-75
- 103 *Later Letters*, XVI, p.1274.
- 104 *Subjection*, p.267.
- 105 "Marriage and Divorce", pp.69-71.
- 106 *Logic*, pp.413-14.
- 107 "Nature", pp.390-97.
- 108 "Utility of Religion", pp.406-12.
- 109 *Subjection*, p.273.
- 110 "Marriage and Divorce", pp.80-81
- 111 *Subjection*, p.256.
- 112 *IBID.*, p.316.

