

# ‘Political...Civil and Domestic Slavery’: Harriet Taylor Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on Marriage, Servitude, and Socialism.

Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858) and Anna Doyle Wheeler (1780-1848) are philosophers overshadowed by the men with whom they co-authored – John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and William Thompson (1785-1833). Unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, although they both achieved brief notoriety in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they did not establish themselves – particularly to posthumous memory – as figures with their own claim to be included in the canon, though interest in them has increased in recent years.<sup>1</sup> However, both made important, and interesting, contributions to political thought, particularly regarding deconstruction of the patriarchal institution of marriage and the current property regime. They were part of a radical utilitarian *milieu* surrounding Jeremy Bentham, and were also involved with utopian socialism, though it is unlikely that they ever met. Both were feminists, utilitarians, and socialists, and contributed new ideas to these schools of thought. Interesting differences and similarities in their ideas make them worthy of comparison; and the insightfulness of their critiques makes them worthy of contemporary study.

In this article I outline the reasons we should consider both as the co-authors of their more famous male counterparts, and briefly explore the possibility that Wheeler and Thompson were a ‘model’ for Taylor and Mill. My main focus is on comparing and contrasting their claim that marriage was a form of slavery, and the proposals they offered to free women from the domination of patriarchal relationships, in particular how they thought female emancipation would be most truly realised via cooperative socialism.

## 1. Co-Authoring, Contribution and Conscious Modelling.

In 1825 Thompson published *Appeal of the One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political, and thence in Civil, and Domestic Servitude: in reply to a paragraph of Mr. [James] Mill’s celebrated “Article on Government”*. It starts with a lengthy ‘Introductory Letter to Mrs Wheeler’ written ‘to perform ... a debt of justice; to show myself possessed of that sincerity which I profess to admire’ and not be guilty of literary ‘piracy’.<sup>2</sup> Thompson explains that he has ‘endeavoured to arrange the expression of those feelings, sentiments, and reasonings, which have emanated from your mind’. The *Appeal* contains ‘on paper, what you have so often discussed in conversation’ regarding ‘the condition of women...in what is called civilised society’. ‘[T]hanks to the chance of being born a man’, Thompson does not have the same life-experience from which to write, ‘yet can I not be inaccessible to the plain facts and reason of the case’. He is ‘indebted’ to Wheeler ‘for those bolder and more comprehensive views’ which are now so much his that ‘to separate your thoughts from mine were now to me impossible’. Thus, *Appeal* is presented as an ‘arrangeme[nt] [of] our common ideas’ (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, v-vii).

Thompson admits Wheeler had no hand in penning the manuscript of *Appeal*, as ‘leisure and resolution to undertake the drudgery of the task were wanting’ on her part.<sup>3</sup> ‘A few only therefore of the following pages are the exclusive produce of your mind and pen, and written with your own

---

<sup>1</sup> See McCabe, ‘Harriet Taylor Mill’ and ‘Harriet Taylor’; Cory, ‘Rhetorical Re-Visioning’; Jose, ‘Without Apology’; and Philips, ‘Beloved and Deplored’.

<sup>2</sup> I follow Cory (‘Rhetorical Re-Visioning’, 114) in treating Thompson as the Letter’s sole author.

<sup>3</sup> Though see Dooley (*Equality in Community*, 79-80) for why these might not have been Wheeler’s *only* reasons.

hand. The remainder are our joint property, I being your interpreter and the scribe of your sentiments' (Thompson, 'Introductory Letter', vii).<sup>4</sup>

In a similar vein, though detailing a longer relationship, Mill (*Autobiography*, 247) recalls a long-standing 'partnership of thought, feeling, and writing' with Taylor, which began in 1830.<sup>5</sup> In 1833, Mill and Taylor penned matching essays *On Marriage* (Mill, *Marriage*, 35-49; Taylor, *Complete Works*, 17-24).<sup>6</sup> Taylor also published (anonymously, but her authorship seems to have been an open secret) *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) – the notes for it, along with other notes which bear more resemblance to *Subjection of Women* are in both her and Mill's hand (Taylor and Mill, *Papers on Women's Rights*).

Taylor played a variety of roles in co-authoring Mill's work. He says, when two people have 'their thoughts and speculations completely in common ... all subject of intellectual or moral interest are discussed between them in daily life, and probed to much greater depths than ... usually or conventionally'; when they 'set out from the same principles', and 'arrive at their conclusions by processes jointly pursued', then:

[I]t is of little consequences in respect to the question of originality which of them holds the pen; the one who contributes least to the composition may contribute most to the thought; the writings which result are the joint product of both, and it must often be impossible to disentangle their respective parts and affirm that this belongs to one and that to another.

'In this wide sense', he adds, 'all my published writings were as much her work as mine', with many of 'the most valuable ideas ... in these joint productions ... originat[ing] with her' (Mill, *Autobiography*, 251). Some more specific cases of co-authoring include: 'working together' on 'every sentence' of *On Liberty*; influencing the 'tone', or fundamental ontology, of *Principles of Political Economy* as well as dictating some key passages; and co-authoring a series of articles on domestic violence (Mill, *Autobiography*, 249 and 255; Taylor (and Mill), *Complete Works*, 77-131).

Despite Thompson's 'Introductory Letter', Wheeler's role as co-author has been underplayed historically, though now generally acknowledged. Much less has Taylor been recognised as Mill's co-author, Mill's claims about which have been denied and denigrated (see Jacobs, 'Gifted Ladies'; Philips, 'Beloved and Deplored', 627 and 639-40; and McCabe 'Harriet Taylor Mill', 121-123). But if we accept the arguments put forward for Wheeler's co-authorship of *Appeal*, then we ought also to accept those made about Taylor, and begin to reappraise both women's position in the 'canon' of political thought.

That the *Appeal* was so openly credited as being co-authored was radical and – at the time – unique<sup>7</sup>. Mill's one public attempt during their lifetimes to acknowledge Taylor's input – a dedicatory

---

<sup>4</sup> The concluding 'Address to Women' is generally seen as being more by Wheeler than Thompson, though her authorship should not be limited to that section, – see Cory, 'Rhetorical Revisioning', 113-119; Jose, 'Without Apology', 831-32; and Dooley, *Equality in Community*, 69-70 for analysis of Wheeler's distinctive style, and evidence of it in *Appeal*.

<sup>5</sup> For more on their relationship, see McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor Mill'; Rossi, 'Sentiment and Intellect'; and Miller, 'Harriet Taylor Mill'.

<sup>6</sup> The various drafts of both essays are undated. Taylor's is written on paper watermarked 1831 and 1832, and Jacobs ('Chronology', xlii) gives an 1832 date as does Hayek for Mill's piece. However, for plausible text-based reasons, Robson ('Textual Introduction', lix-lx) suggests summer 1833 for Mill's piece because of which, and because she quotes Tennyson's *Eleanore*, first published in 1833, I give this date for Taylor's piece, too.

<sup>7</sup> See also Jose ('Without Apology', 833-4) for discussion of why Wheeler was not more formally acknowledged as the co-author; and Cory ('Rhetorical Re-Visioning', 106) for discussion of the implications of a portrait of Wheeler being the frontispiece and (111-113) how Thompson reverses the usual gendered authorial roles in his 'Introductory Letter'.

passage for first edition of *Principles* (1848)<sup>8</sup> – was scotched by Taylor’s (or perhaps her husband’s – see Rossi, ‘Sentiment and Intellect’, pp.39-41) ‘dislike of publicity’ (Mill, *Autobiography*, 257). However, Mill and Taylor left a meticulous account of the different ways in which they collaborated in the *Autobiography* (in which Taylor had a significant editorial hand). Many elements of this account bear striking resemblance to Thompson’s description of working with Wheeler, giving weight to the suggestion that they may have provided a model for Mill and Taylor’s own complicated relationship.

This possibility seems to have been first mooted by Terence Ball who ‘conjecture[s] ... that Thompson’s chaste and cerebral relationship with Mrs Wheeler provided a model for ... Mill’s subsequent relationship with ... Taylor’ (Ball, ‘Utilitarianism’, 206). Jose (‘Without Apology’, 844-45) also sees the younger pair taking the elder as ‘a model’, in a similarly Platonic way. Noting that all four thinkers share the idea of marriage as ‘sympathetic association’, he praises Wheeler and Thompson for ‘recognis[ing] that mutual and respectful shared sensual gratification was an important, indeed necessary, part of egalitarian, loving relationships’ (though not suggesting it was any part of their own egalitarian relationship), but reads Mill and Taylor as ‘remain[ing] much more closely in tune with the sexual stereotypes of [the] Victorian era’. Rossi (‘Sentiment and Intellect’, p.10) also ‘surmises that “passion” in the lives of both ... Mill and Harriet [Taylor] was a sublimated and highly intellectualised emotion’. However, though Taylor certainly linked sexual pleasure with the imagination, and contrasted this ‘higher pleasure’ with ‘sensuality’, this is not to say she ‘intellectualised’ it. Similarly, she thought people could assert rational control over sexual impulses, but this does not mean she ‘sublimated’ passion. (For more on this, see McCabe, ‘Harriet Taylor’. Also note Dooley, *Equality in Community* 81-82 for whether Ball and Jose read Thompson and Wheeler’s relationship correctly.)

More important than whether or not both pairs had ‘chaste’, ‘intellectual’ relationships is the thought that Thompson and Wheeler modelled equality for Mill and Taylor, personally and professionally. Jose (‘Without Apology’, 841) says Mill’s account of co-authoring with Taylor ‘earlier echoes’ Thompson’s account of co-authoring with Wheeler: my suggestion is that there is nothing uncanny about it.

The similarity *might* be a coincidence. Perhaps what Mill and Thompson say could be said of any co-authoring relationship – but it is striking that they are rare (perhaps unique) among men in writing about themselves as ‘scribes’ and ‘interpreters’ of a woman’s thought (see Cory, ‘Rhetorical Re-Visioning’, many of whose arguments also apply to Mill). Perhaps Thompson/Mill and Wheeler/Taylor were quite similar, so their co-authoring relationships was also similar. There may be some truth in this, but – though as Ball (‘Utilitarianism’, 206) notes there is no direct testamentary evidence – we do see potentially deliberate echoes of Thompson’s account in Mill.

Like Thompson calling himself a ‘scribe’, ‘interpreter’ and one who ‘arrange[d] ... expression’ of ideas ‘which ... emanated from’ Wheeler (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, v), Mill writes, ‘[d]uring the greater part of my literary life I have performed the office in relation to her ... of an interpreter of original thinkers, and mediator between them and the public’ (Mill, *Autobiography*, 251). Similarly, Mill (*Autobiography*, 251-261) recalls writing down for publication what had been ‘so often discussed’ (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, v) between him and Taylor, and describes his *Marriage* (37) as ‘a written exposition of ... opinions’ prompted by Taylor, following conversations between them on the topic.

Mill (*Autobiography*, 256) also expresses gratitude to his female co-author for ‘those bolder and more comprehensive views’ (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, vi): ‘I was her pupil, alike in boldness of

---

<sup>8</sup> The dedication read: ‘To Mrs. John Taylor. as the most eminently qualified of all persons known to the author either to originate or to appreciate speculations on social improvement, this attempt to explain and diffuse ideas many of which were first learned from herself, is with the highest respect and regard, dedicated.’

speculation and cautiousness of practical judgment ... she was much more courageous and farsighted than without her I should have been, in anticipations of things to come'. Again, like Thompson ('Introductory Letter', vi-vii) noting that 'to separate your thoughts from mine were now to me impossible' and that *Appeal* is an 'arrangeme[nt] [of] our common ideas', Mill (*Autobiography*, 259) writes of *Liberty* being a 'conjunction of her mind with mine', and that:

[I]t is difficult to identify any particular part or element as being more hers than all the rest. The whole mode of thinking of which the book was the expression, was emphatically hers. But I also was so thoroughly imbued with it that the same thought naturally occurred to us both.

Lastly, just as Thompson notes 'can I not be inaccessible to the plain facts and reason of the case' (Thompson, 'Introductory Letter', v-vi) for women's equality, Mill (*Autobiography*, 251) rejects what he suspects most will think – that Taylor's influence over his 'mental growth' would be solely around 'equality ... between men and women'<sup>9</sup> – and insists 'those convictions were among the earliest results of the application of my mind to political subjects', though, 'until I knew her, the opinion was, in my mind, little more than an abstract principle'.<sup>10</sup> Taylor made this less 'abstract'. Philips ('Beloved and Deplored', 633-34) argues that Taylor was more concerned with the 'everyday' nature of women's oppression, and their joint works are filled with 'practicalities' and details which are missing from Mill's single-authored feminist pieces. Her analysis is generally excellent, and helps flesh out Mill's (*Autobiography*, 251) account 'that perception of the vast practical bearing of women's disabilities which found expression in ... *Subjection* ... was acquired mainly through her teaching', without which he 'should have had a very insufficient perception 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'.<sup>11</sup>

It seems plausible – and indeed Mill himself seems to say – that Taylor's lived experience and recognition of the importance of the everyday in women's oppression informed her feminism, and also enriched his. Mill does not make exactly the same claim as Thompson ('Introductory Letter', v-vi), that being 'born a man' he cannot see these things, but – by extension – because she was 'born a woman', Wheeler can. In part, this is because Mill wants to make a more general claim for Taylor's unique genius, marrying imagination and great practical sagacity (Mill, *Autobiography*, 195 and 256), and also because both he and Taylor were chary of anything which seemed to suggest that women 'innately' understood things better than men (Mill, *Subjection*, 304-306), or that they were 'innately' 'higher' or 'better' beings (Mill, Letter 261, 509-510). However, Mill's description of Taylor's contribution to their joint feminism links to Thompson's idea that his experiences as a man blinded him to some problems which were much more evident to his female co-author.

## 2. Marriage and Slavery.

Leaving aside the question of conscious modelling by Taylor/Mill, I turn now to the second part of this article: mapping Taylor and Wheeler's shared, though not identical, claim that marriage was a form of slavery, and the proposals they offered to free women from the domination of patriarchal relationships. Jose ('Without Apology', 843-844) also charts similarities between the analysis of

---

<sup>9</sup> See Philips ('Beloved and Deplored', 632-33) for an interesting analysis of why Mill might have made this assertion in the *Autobiography*.

<sup>10</sup> Rossi ('Sentiment and Intellect', 20-22 and 24-26) gives a good account of the feminist Utilitarian/Unitarian background of both Taylor and Mill when they met.

<sup>11</sup> However, though Mill does often give 'exalted' rather than everyday examples in *Subjection*, sometimes this is because he is referring to specific arguments about women-as-rulers (Philips, 'Beloved and Deplored', 633; Mill, *Subjection*, 299-322). It is true, though, that there is no corresponding passage to that probably authored by Taylor (though the surviving copy is in Mill's hand) where she charts how women's practical involvement in politics (e.g. Abolition and prison reform) has had a beneficial effect, making people more capable of acting in the common good (Mill and Taylor, *Papers on Women's Rights*, 385).

marriage-as-slavery in *Appeal* and *Subjection*.<sup>12</sup> In this article, I seek to tease out this analogy in Taylor's writing, which is subtly different to Mill's, as well as to Wheeler's. That is, I am particularly interested in how two women who had experienced marriage formulated, and used, the marriage-as-slavery analogy (even though having to piece together their thought, on occasion, via words written by their male co-authors describing their views).

Thompson and Wheeler call 'the existing system of marriage', an institution 'under which, for the mere faculty of eating, breathing and living, in whatever degree of comfort husbands may think fit, women are reduced to domestic slavery, without a will of their own, or power of locomotion, otherwise than as permitted by their respected masters' (Thompson, 'Introductory Letter', xi). The whole title of their book makes plain the connection they saw between women's lack of voting (and other political) rights; women's lack of economic and educational opportunities; marriage; and slavery.

Women's exclusion from political rights, legal protections, and educational and economic opportunities which allow for independence without marrying leaves them in the position of 'slaves', because someone can legally exercise almost absolute power over them (Thompson and Wheeler, *Appeal*, 41-42). This involves control over where they live; whether, when and with whom they leave the house; over their property and income (if any); over their sexual lives; over their friendships; over their children; over what they learn and their ambitions for life; and, ultimately, over all their interests, and everything that contributes to their happiness. Marriage merely allows women to swap the despotism of a father for that of a husband. Wives and daughters might not be subjected – in Europe – to the kind of brutal treatment experienced by slaves as we generally imagine them, but regarding their rights, they are in the same position.

Moreover, Wheeler argues, all the vices usually considered 'natural' to, and irremediable in, women, 'are the vices of slaves', caused by tyranny, and curable by equality (Wheeler, *Rights of Women*, 35 qtd. in McFadden, 'Wheeler', 96). Women are made to fawn, be sycophantic, think only about narrow interests, be 'irrational', live only for their looks, for love, for their families etc., because their unequal position means they *must* secure a husband, and this is what they are told (probably rightly) that a husband wants (very few men appreciating the 'higher pleasures' of intercourse with an equal) (Thompson, 'Introductory Letter', xi). For these reasons, giving a lecture in 1829, entitled *Rights of Women*, Wheeler even introduced herself as speaking 'in my capacity as slave and woman' (Wheeler, *Rights of Women*, qtd in McFadden, 'Wheeler', 96).<sup>13</sup>

Taylor's claim is never quite as strident. In *Papers on Women's Rights* (380) she does say that because 'the disabilities of women' being 'disabilities by birth' which a woman 'cannot by any exertion get rid of', '[t]his makes her case ... like that of the negro in America', her disabilities being 'indelible

---

<sup>12</sup> Jose ('Without Apology', 843) notes that, when *Subjection* was published 'slavery had been abolished in the British Empire'. We might also add that 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment had been passed in the USA. *Appeal*, however, was written eight years before the British Slavery Abolition Act. Thus, he argues Mill 'could not presuppose, as could Wheeler and Thompson, an energised antislavery discourse' in the audience of his work. Arguably, though, Mill is attempting (as with other feminists) to extend the energy of the Abolitionist movement to what they saw as female slavery, rather than letting its momentum fade. Moreover, the fact that the American Civil War (1861-1865) was so recent a memory, and had ended in victory for the North and the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, adds rhetorical weight to Mill's claim about women's slavery: slavery was now abolished in countries which considered themselves 'advanced' everywhere but in the home. Slavery was legal in more places when *Appeal* was published, it is true, but slavery was still politically salient in Mill's day. (Though increased knowledge of the conditions experienced in the Southern States of America may underly Taylor's caution regarding claiming marriage *is* slavery, and wives *are* slaves.)

<sup>13</sup> I am very aware that this way of speaking – and the *Appeal's* appeal to the position of enslaved people in the Caribbean – might cause offence to the modern reader, perhaps more aware of – or more sensitive towards – the horrors and injustice of trans-Atlantic slavery, and the vast gulf in experience between even a woman in Wheeler's position (white and wealthy, though married to an abusive husband with no legal, political or economic rights as a single woman) and that of any enslaved African. I am not endorsing Wheeler's claim (or, later, Taylor's and/or Mill's), just laying it out.

ones'. However, she is not likening women's position to slavery, but saying that women's exclusion from equality of opportunity on the basis of a biological and social construct (sex/gender) is as permanent as exclusions on the grounds of race in America.

Similarly, she traces as history of society from an Hobbesian state of nature where 'the races and tribes which are vanquished in war are made slaves, the absolute property of their conquerors' through a 'gradual progress' whereby '[m]orality recommended kind treatment of slaves by their masters, and just rule by despots over their subjects, but it never justified or tolerated either slaves or subjects in throwing off the yoke', a case about which she says '[i]t is needless to point out how exactly the parallel holds in the case of women and men' (Taylor and Mill, *Papers on Women's Rights*, 387).

Similarly, she emphasises the 'domestic subjection' of women, which she says will 'will be acknowledged to be as monstrous an infraction of the rights and dignity of humanity, as slavery is at last' (Taylor and Mill, *Papers on Women's Rights*, 387). She also notes that there are 'practical' differences in the treatment of 'subjugated' women, 'as ... in the case of slaves' through history, 'from being slowly murdered by continued bodily torture, to being only subdued in spirit and thwarted of all those higher and finer developments of individual character of which personal liberty has in all ages been felt to be the indispensable condition'. That is, in several places Taylor makes a comparison between marriage and slavery, or using slavery (as the exemplar of the worst form of despotism) as an analogy to marriage, but this is subtly different to claiming marriage is *the same as* slavery, or is a form of slavery.

This said, she does say '[t]he exclusion of women from the suffrage becomes a greater offence and degradation in proportion as the suffrage is opened widely to all men. When the only privileged class is the aristocracy of sex the slavery of the excluded sex is more marked and complete' (Taylor and Mill, *Papers on Women's Rights*, 390). She also asserts that when humanity was 'in a primitive condition', 'women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of toil', and that in a slightly further stage of human progress, 'women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of sensuality'. Passing through a 'third and milder dominion', beginning in Ancient Greece, whereby '[t]he wife was part of the furniture of home', subject to 'a patriarch and a despot', but recognised as someone to whom men might owe 'kindness, and ... duty', in modern times she identifies 'a sense of correlative obligation': 'The power of husbands has reached the stage which the power of kings had arrived at, when opinion did not yet question the rightfulness of arbitrary power, but in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, condemned the selfish use of it'. This position, 'that women should be, not slaves, nor servants, but companions' is, she thinks, the position of 'moderate reformers of the education of women' (Taylor, *Enfranchisement of Women*, 406-408). Taylor herself argues for much more equality.

In the main, then, we see in Taylor a more nuanced argument – though similar to Wheeler's – that the underlying justifications given for slavery (that 'might is right', or that greater power or strength is a normative justification for rule; that there are natural, justifiable hierarchies of power and status; and that 'dependence' is some people's 'natural' and 'right' state) are those also given for women's inequality. Similarly, that historical relationships which allowed men to tyrannise over women (and, often, other men) are still prevalent today, and persist in marriages; in women's education; in the lack of opportunities afforded women outside of marriage; their lack of legal, political, social and economic rights; and in father's control over their daughters. Moreover, that as society progresses, we move more and more towards equality. This is happening, 'very tardily' as she puts it, with race (and particularly with justifications for slavery) but not changing at all for women, the only caste –

at least in Europe and America – where people think it is completely natural for there to be irredeemable inequality: women, in the view of almost everyone alive, just are not equal to men.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Socialism as the Means to Emancipation and Equality.

Having charted their similar – but not identical – arguments about marriage, women’s oppression, and slavery, I turn in the last part of this article to considering Wheeler and Taylor’s suggested solutions to the issue. Both, at root, suggest this has to be equality – that is meaningful equality, not mere equality of legal rights (though these are an important first step). Both argue that this kind of equality is a ‘higher pleasure’ (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, xi; Taylor, *Marriage*, 17-24). Both also endorse socialism as the ideal future for humans. Wheeler is more definite in saying female equality is impossible without socialism, a position which is also discernible in Taylor’s views, though never stated overtly.

Wheeler was very involved with contemporary socialism, particularly Owenism, Saint-Simonism and Fourierism. Thompson (‘Introductory Letter’ ix-x) describes Wheeler as ‘look[ing] forward to

a ... society, where the principle of benevolence shall supersede that of fear; where restless and anxious individual competition shall give place to mutual co-operation and joint possession; where individuals in large numbers, male and female, forming voluntary associations, shall become a mutual guarantee to each other for the supply of all useful wants, and form an unsalaried and uninsolvent insurance company against all insurable casualties; where perfect freedom of opinion and perfect equality<sup>15</sup> will reign amongst the co-operators; and where the children of all will be equally educated and provided for by the whole.

Thompson and Wheeler thought ‘the principle of individual competition’ being ‘the master-key and moving principle of the whole social organisation’ and ‘*individual* wealth the great object sought after’, ‘it seems impossible – even where all unequal legal and unequal moral restraints removed ... – that women should attain equal happiness with men’: biological factors ‘must eternally render the average exertions of women in the race of the competition for wealth less successful than those of men’ (Thompson, ‘Introductory Letter’, x). Thompson (xi) adds that they thought:

Were all partial restraints, were unequal laws and unequal morals removed, were all the means and careers of all species of knowledge and exertion equally open to both sexes; still the barriers of physical organisation must, under the system of individual competition, keep depressed the average station of women beneath that of men. Though in point of knowledge, talent, and virtue, they might become their equals; in point of independence *arising from wealth* they must, under the present principle of social arrangements, remain inferior.

That is, what might be thought of as ‘liberal feminist’ reforms would be useful, but could never be sufficient for female equality. The whole system of competition needs to be replaced with cooperation for equality to occur. This is both because competition systematically discriminates against women (and the social structures of gender and women’s education though exacerbating this, also flow naturally from this structural iniquity), and because only in cooperation will both men and women’s characters be changed sufficiently for them to experience the ‘higher pleasure’ of life among equals.

Speaking of his and Taylor’s ideal view (and in a text which Taylor had chance to edit), Mill says they saw the ‘social problem of the future’ being ‘how to unite the greatest individual liberty of

---

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the ‘marriage as slavery/women as slaves’ trope is more visible in Mill’s work (see particularly *Subjection of Women*, 264-267 and 271). He even added a footnote to the 1859 reprint of *Enfranchisement* which called working-class women, in particular, ‘household slave[s]’ (Mill, footnote to Taylor, *Enfranchisement*, 404. See also editor’s notes to the publication history of this work on 393.)

<sup>15</sup> Jose (‘Without Apology’, 842) highlights how this phrase also links Thompson, Wheeler, Taylor and Mill.

action, with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour'. Their ideal 'society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious' and 'the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending ... on the accident of birth, will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice' with 'human beings ... exert[ing] themselves' for benefits which would be 'shared with the society they belong to' (Mill, *Autobiography*, 239).

They thought 'cooperative societies' might be the best way of achieving this ideal society (Mill and Taylor, *Principles*, 793-94). 'Associations of the labourers with themselves', spreading gradually throughout society until almost all industry (including agriculture) was organised on cooperative lines (with some additional state provision), 'in perhaps a less remote future than may be supposed', 'may' effect 'a change in society, which would combine the freedom and independence of the individual, with the moral, intellectual, and economical advantages of aggregate production' without needing a violent revolution.

[This] would realise, at least in the industrial department, the best aspirations of the democratic spirit, by putting an end to the division of society into the industrious and the idle, and effacing all social distinctions but those fairly earned by personal services and exertions ... a transformation ... thus effected, (and assuming of course that both sexes participate equally in the rights and in the government of the association) would be the nearest approach to social justice, and the most beneficial ordering of industrial affairs for the universal good, which it is possible at present to foresee (Mill and Taylor, *Principles*, 793-94).

Taylor may also have been more open to communism than Mill, though the evidence for this is scanty, relying solely on part of Mill's half of their correspondence on the issue (Mill, *Mill-Taylor Correspondence*, 1026-27). She seems to have thought there was much to be gained for happiness from the guarantee of subsistence made under communism (which Mill thought might be over-exaggerated by those who had never experienced it). She also thought that society might adopt communism within fewer generations than Mill did (who thought there might be something of a chicken-and-the-egg problem: certainly, communist teachers could raise communist children, but who would have made these communist teachers in the first place?). In this, she may have been endorsing more communal schemes than Mill in general advocated (though arguing that those who wanted to make these experiments in living should take the chance), or she may only have been advocating 'equal shares' (the core principle of communist distribution as they saw it) as a more feasible and desirable principle of justice within cooperative associations than Mill. (In *Principles*, they advocate an initial adoption of principles akin to Fourierism, 'allowing to every one a fixed minimum, sufficient for subsistence, the[n] apportion[ing] all further remuneration according to the work done' – which, interestingly, meets Taylor's endorsement of the importance of securing subsistence without needing to endorse full-blown communism – and endorse 'equal shares' as a 'higher' principle of justice than securing for the labourer the fruits of their own labours, and the Blancian principle of 'from each according to their capacities, to each according to their needs' as a 'still higher' principle (Mill and Taylor, *Principles*, 203 and 782-84).)

There are several similarities between this view and that of Thompson and Wheeler in *Appeal* (and with Thompson in *Inquiry*). There are also interesting links with Owenite ideas and Fourierism regarding small-scale communities, inter-relations between members, distributive justice, and the transition to socialism, as well as a shared feminism (see McCabe, 'Mill and Fourierism', pp.35-61). Given Wheeler's links to the Saint-Simonians, it is also worth noting that Mill describes Taylor's most-significant contribution to *Principles* being the setting of its 'tone'. This may sound slight, but it refers to the foundational ontology of the book, and its view of the difference between laws of production (which are laws of nature) and laws of distribution (which are human constructs), the recognition of which opens up the space for consideration of a more just socialist future. Mill



(*Autobiography*, 253-57) acknowledges that this is a Saint-Simonian idea, but says Taylor ‘made [it] a living principle pervading and animating the book’.

Mill/Taylor and Thompson/Wheeler envisage a transformation of both economic organisation and individual human character – both being inextricably linked to, and influencing, the other. Men and women will be capable of equal relationships and ‘benevolent’ feelings<sup>16</sup>, as well as being able to tolerate freedom of speech and action (and eccentricity of personality) among their fellow citizens. There will be meaningfully equal participation in work and government in these associations, with women no longer being confined to the entirely domestic sphere where, if they are not domestic ‘drudges’, they live lives of enforced idleness. (It is worth considering a feminist angle on the commitment that *all* shall work, as well as recognising that Wheeler/Thompson and Taylor/Mill recognised domestic labour *as* work, and the necessity for society to recognise it as such. (Mill, *Autobiography*, 239; McCabe, “‘Good Housekeeping’?”, pp.135-155.))

Mill and Taylor saw as the greatest difference between their views and those of socialists like Thompson and Wheeler their inability to share the socialist antipathy to competition. As noted, Thompson and Wheeler see a system of individual property, based on and necessitating, individual competition to be innately biased against women, and one of the core causes of their inequality. Taylor and Mill (*Principles*, 794-96) do not take on this feminist critique of competition, instead offering arguments *for* competition based on considerations of efficiency (of production); and increased quality and lower prices (for consumers), reminding socialists that ‘wherever competition is not, monopoly is; and that monopoly, in all its forms, is the taxation of the industrious for the support of indolence, if not plunder’. They recognise many of the ills associated with competition, but insist that it is not, in itself, the root cause of all social evils.

This said, their commitment to competition can be over-stressed. As they point out (*Principles*, 795), ‘if association were universal, there would be no competition between labourer and labourer; and that between association and association would be for the benefit of the consumers, that is, of the associations; of the industrious classes. They acknowledge the moral case against competition put forward by socialists, preferring a society characterised by fraternity. But they also think associations would stagnate, and people’s faculties ‘rust’, ‘unless their knowledge of the existence of rival associations made them apprehend ... that they would be left behind in the race’.

We should, however, ask what kind of race. Elsewhere in *Principles* (754) – and even more strongly in *Chapters on Socialism* (which may have some input from Taylor, despite being published after both her and Mill’s death, as they discuss a separate work on socialism in correspondence). Taylor and Mill

confess [they are] not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other’s heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.

Similarly, they claim:

the power ... of emulation, in exciting the most strenuous exertions for the sake of the approbation and admiration of others, is borne witness to be experience in every situation in which human beings publicly compete with one another, even if it be in things frivolous ... A contest, who can do most for the common good, is not the kind of competition which Socialists repudiate’ (*ibid.*, 205).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> See Cory (‘Rhetorical Re-Visioning’, 120) for an interesting analysis of Wheeler’s view of gender power-relations in socialism.

<sup>17</sup> Again, this has strong echoes of Fourier: see McCabe, ‘Mill and Fourierism’, 35-61.

They describe competition between cooperative associations as being conducted in a spirit of ‘friendly rivalry in the pursuit of a good common to all’ (*ibid.*, 792).

It is important, then, to note that the ‘race’ in which associations might be left behind is not like the ‘race’ described by Mill in *Chapters* (713) – that is, the contemporary ‘race’ for existence created by the current system of private property in which those who ‘come hindermost’ are ‘put to death’ for no other fault than being slower than their competitors. Instead, it is more like an Olympic race, run for medals and public acclaim. In Taylor and Mill’s preferred institutions, no one would be allowed to suffer privation (never mind death) through poverty or lack of employment; there would be no competitive labour market; and feminist reforms and better education would keep the supply of labour under control (a primary cause, in their view, of low wages). If associations went out of business, then, through stagnation, inefficiency, or simple ineptitude, social safety nets and the chance of re-employment in other cooperatives would protect workers from penury.

Thompson – in *Inquiry* – envisaged a series of self-sufficient communities, though Wheeler’s interest in Saint-Simonism (a system organised at the national level, with everyone being an employee of the state, contributing, and rewarded, according to his or her abilities) means she may have not been wedded solely to small-scale socialism. Similarly, Fourier (who Wheeler translated into English), also pictured small-scale, self-sufficient communities, made harmonious via a range of competing ‘series’ of workers, all emulating each other and striving to out-do one another in excellence. In what has been called his ‘second-best’ utopia (Stafford, ‘Paradigmatic Liberal’, 330), Thompson also envisaged competition between mainly self-sufficient ‘villages’ for goods and services, though not in the labour market (Thompson, *Inquiry*, 156-57, 168-70 and 274-80).

There are, then, two main differences between the Wheeler/Thompson view and the Taylor/Mill one. Taylor and Mill envisaged cooperative associations, rather than self-sufficient communities. That is, rather than the population being re-distributed to roughly equally-sized villages throughout the country, we might live in the contemporary mix of urban and rural settings, whichever best suited the industry in which we were engaged, and our home lives could be separate from our place of work. Similarly, where Wheeler and Thompson see villages ‘trading’ (in some sense), Taylor and Mill envisage producer-cooperatives producing goods which are distributed by consumer cooperatives. Under the Rochdale model, goods are sold to members of the cooperative, and any profits made distributed among those members (with a portion reserved for mutual insurance, and often other services such as libraries). So something approximating cost price is actually paid, in the end, by the consumer. The same could be applied to sale of goods by producer coops, redistributing profits to buyers and thus trading at something like cost price, while retaining the advantages for quality, efficiency and innovation provided by competition between rival producers all motivated by emulation rather than profit.

Socialists like Wheeler and Thompson would no doubt have concerns that Taylor and Mill do not eradicate enough of the individual property system to properly free women from domestic servitude, even if they would free them from political and civil ‘slavery’ through their preferred reforms. That is, in not embracing the communal living elements of many socialist schemes, and retaining more nuclear family structures in individual houses (*Principles*, 209), Taylor and Mill do not succeed in freeing women. These charges are not without merit.

On the other hand, Taylor and Mill’s preferred institutions *do* do away with many of the evils of competition which Wheeler and Thompson thought lay at the root of women’s inequality. In Taylor and Mill’s ideal society, we are no longer motivated by a desire for individual wealth, but communal well-being, and so individualistic competition is no longer ‘the master-key and moving principle of the whole social organisation’ – instead, fraternal concern with one another’s well-being is, aided, in terms of social mechanisms, by human psychology’s urge for emulation and desire for praise. In itself, the idea of ‘a contest, who can do most for the common good’ (Mill and Taylor, *Principles*, 205), is not innately gendered. Female biology, that is, need not ‘eternally render

the average exertions of women' in *this* 'race' 'less successful than those of men' (Thompson, 'Introductory Letter', x). Women's enforced absence from the labour market to have children, that is, might always be a disadvantage in a race for individual wealth, but given the importance of parenting to the common good, this does not immediately disadvantage women in a socialist society (even without the hope that parenting, too, would be more equal, and that domestic work which might conceivably be linked to female biology (such as breast-feeding) would *also* be recognised as socially-important work).

Certainly, if a sort of 'masculine' ideal still permeates cooperative society – if *only* work done outside the home in producer-cooperatives (and perhaps at traditionally masculine work, be that hard physical labour, engineering/manufacturing or the professions) is recognised as contributing to the social good, then women will be disadvantaged in terms of rewards in the same sort of ways, though the rewards would be very different. However, though no longer a matter of life and death, they would have serious consequences of equality, and allow the notion that women are just worth less than men to persist. This said, the same fear might be raised over Thompson and Wheeler's idea of self-sufficient villages, if there was also a gendered division of labour within them.

Overall, then, Wheeler is more strident in her claim that the system of individual property and particularly competition for individual wealth needs to be dismantled if women are to be freed from 'slavery', and men and women made equal. Taylor supports *both* equality for women *and* a radical restructuring of the economy towards communal property and cooperative associations. Her insistence on securing minimum subsistence may have feminist roots – after all, it secures women from dependence on fathers, brothers and husbands (at least if they work, and/or want to separate from the husbands or live independently from their families – something which was, at the time, almost impossible for women to do without finance and approval from a male relative). This, however, is not stated forthrightly in her work, and – in the main – she treats of feminism and socialism separately (while noting both that it is to the socialists credit that they are, in the main, feminists, and that her preferred socialist institutions must allow women an equal role). Given her insight into how the patriarchy affects *all* elements of progress, however, and her evident belief that socialism was a key part of human progress, it might be the case that this separation in published works is a political decision more than seeing the issues as not really related. That is, like Wheeler, she may well have believed that 'liberal' feminist reforms (i.e. equal rights) would not be sufficient to end women's subjection, but still have thought there were a necessary first step, and one which was more easily to be accomplished by advocating a single argument (i.e. regarding the vote), rather than also bringing in claims about economic justice. (She may also have desired to make the demand for women's votes seem less radical and dangerous than working-class demands for a mixture of political and economic reforms, and thus be more likely to win her case.)

This said, both women are alike in their analysis of women's subjection, marriage, and individual property relations. Wheeler goes further than Taylor, being more willing to call marriage slavery; and firmly labelling eradication of individual property, and a social system based on competition as necessary for female emancipation. They both had strong interests in the work of Owen, Thompson, Saint-Simon and Fourier, and in the events of 1848 in Paris (which Wheeler was invited to participate in, though declining due to ill health, and from which Taylor learned a great deal regarding the possibilities of 'association'). They both saw themselves as socialists, and had similar, though not identical, preferred institutions, in which the achievement of emancipation, social justice, fraternity and equality was not just a question of redistribution of economic assets, but also a question of fundamentally changing human nature such that meaningful equality between the sexes was not only realisable, but recognised to be a core element of happiness.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> I would like to extend my thanks to Alison Stone, Charlotte Alderwick and two anonymous reviewers for comments on this piece, as well as the organisers and attendees of "Wollapolooza!" at APSA 2018 and 2019; ISUS 2018; CSiW conference (Johannesburg, 2018); 'Bridging the Gender Gap Through Time' workshop (Kings College, 2018);

Word Count (including Bibliography, title and references): 8122.

## Bibliography

- BALL, TERENCE, 'Utilitarianism, Feminism and the Franchise' in *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.175-212.
- CORY, ABBIE L., 'Wheeler and Thompson's *Appeal*: The Rhetorical Re-Visioning of Gender', *New Hibernia Review*, 8/2 (2004), pp.106-120.
- JACOBS, JO ELLEN. 'The Lot of Gifted Ladies is Hard: A Study of Harriet Taylor Mill Criticism', *Hypatia* 9/3 (1994), pp.132-162.
- JACOBS, JO ELLEN. 'Chronology' in *Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill* edited by Jo Ellen Jacobs. Bloomington: Indiana State University Press, 1998.
- GARDNER, CATHERINE VILLANUEVA, *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- MCCABE, HELEN. 'Harriet Taylor Mill', in *A Companion to Mill* edited by Christopher MacLeod and Dale E. Miller. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), pp.112-125.
- MCCABE, HELEN. "'Good housekeeping'?: Re-assessing John Stuart Mill's position on the gendered division of labour", *History of Political Thought*, 39/1 (2018), pp.135-155.
- MCCABE, HELEN. 'John Stuart Mill and Fourierism: 'association', 'friendly rivalry' and distributive justice', *Global Intellectual History* 4/1 (2019), pp.35-61.
- MCCABE, HELEN. 'Harriet Taylor', *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.
- MCFADDEN, MARGARET. 'Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785-1848): Philosophy, Socialist, Feminist'. *Hypatia* 4/1 (1989): 91-101.
- MILL, JAMES. 'Government' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Supplement*. Edinburgh. Archibald Constable and Company, 1820.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *John Stuart Mill – Harriet Taylor Mill Correspondence Concerning the Principles, Collected Works* III. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1965.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *Chapters on Socialism, Collected Works* V. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1967.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. Letter 261, to George Jacob Holyoake, 21 September, 1856, *Collected Works* XV. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1972.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *Autobiography, Collected Works* I. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1981.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *On Marriage, Collected Works* XXI. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *The Subjection of Women, Collected Works* XXI. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- MILL, JOHN STUART AND TAYLOR, HARRIET. *Principles of Political Economy, Collected Works* II and III. Toronto. Toronto University Press, 1965.
- MILL, JOHN STUART AND TAYLOR, HARRIET. *Papers on Women's Rights, CW* XXI. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- MILLER, DALE E., 'Harriet Taylor Mill'. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002; revised 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/harriet-mill/>.
- PANKHURST, RICHARD, 'Anna Wheeler: A Pioneer Socialist and Feminist', *Political Quarterly* 25/2 (1945), pp.132–43.

---

Workshop on Mill (Lancaster, 2017) and Symposium on J.S. Mill's *Subjection of Women* at 150 (Cyprus, 2019) where some of these ideas were first tried out in public. I also want to thank the AHRC for the award of a Leadership Fellowship, for which project this piece forms an initial part.

- PHILIPS, MENAKA 'The "Beloved and Deplored" Memory of Harriet Taylor Mill: Rethinking Gender and Intellectual Labor in the Canon', *Hypatia* 33/4 (2018), pp.626-642.
- ROBSON, JOHN. 'Textual Introduction' in *Collected Works XXI*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- ROSSI, ALICE S., 'Sentiment and Intellect: The Story of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill', in *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill: Essays on Sex Equality*, edited by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp.1-64.
- STAFFORD, WILLIAM. 'How can a Paradigmatic Liberal Call Himself a Socialist? The Case of John Stuart Mill'. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3/3 (1998): 325-45.
- TAYLOR, HARRIET. *Enfranchisement of Women, Collected Works XXI*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- TAYLOR, HARRIET. *Life of William Caxton, Complete Works* ed. Jacobs. Bloomington. Indiana State University Press, 1998.
- TAYLOR, HARRIET. *On Marriage, Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill* edited by Jo Ellen Jacobs. Bloomington. Indiana State University Press, 1998.
- THOMPSON, WILLIAM. *An Inquiry into the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness*. London. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1824.
- THOMPSON, WILLIAM. 'Introductory Letter to Mrs Wheeler' in *Appeal of the One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political, and thence in Civil, and Domestic Servitude*. London. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825.
- THOMPSON, WILLIAM AND WHEELER, ANNA. *Appeal of the One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain them in Political, and thence in Civil, and Domestic Servitude*. London. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825.