WILLIAM THOMPSON AND ANNA WHEELER:
EQUALITY AND UTILITARIANISM
IN THE 19TH CENTURY

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the work of William Thompson and Anna Wheeler in relation to more prominent feminist political theorists of the period. It argues that, read in light of Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal of One Half the Human Race* (*Appeal*), John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (*Subjection*) represents a step backward in the history of feminist political thought. Mill’s *Subjection* reproduces many of the limitations in Mary Wollstonecraft’s groundbreaking *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (*Vindication*), limitations that had been overcome by Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, which was published in between the publication of *Vindication* and *Subjection*. These limitations center on the relationship between women’s access to self-government and happiness, the economy, and the lack of compensation for domestic and reproductive labor. Unlike *Appeal*, *Vindication* and *Subjection* limit women’s freedoms by maintaining women’s obligations to perform unpaid labor within the private sphere. *Vindication* and *Subjection* are unable to recognize women’s biological difference without reducing women’s role to that difference.

Thompson and Wheeler resolve the tension between capitalism and gender equality by making the case for radically democratic communities of mutual co-operation, where all useful labor, including reproductive labor, is compensated. They use utilitarianism to advance this argument, but some contemporary scholars describe them as conservative utilitarians. I argue to the contrary, that because Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is ‘indirect’ and is informed by both a rich account of the self and a relational understanding of happiness, that it is not
incompatible with arguments for greater social and economic equality.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Vindication) and John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (Subjection) are heralded by many contemporary feminists as two of the most revolutionary texts in 18th-19th century feminist political thought. Consequently, these two texts hold a firm position in the feminist canon as pre-cursory texts to the first wave activism that took place toward the turn of the century. Their books challenge assumptions of women’s inferiority and put forth persuasive arguments for increasing women’s equality with men. However, their proposals contain a fundamental weakness: women’s self-government continues to be compromised by a context in which male dominance is presumed. Despite this, Wollstonecraft and Mill are praised for their arguments advancing women’s equality in the realms of education, rights, and opportunities. From a contemporary standpoint, many scholars have highlighted the shortcomings of their work: their middle-class biases and the inattention to persistent inequalities such as unequal choices related to the maintenance of a gendered public/private divide.

These critical insights, however, are not unique to the 20th and 21st century. The dominant story of 19th century feminist political thought is missing a fundamental text, one whose contents should cause us to question how we understand, in particular, the place of Mill’s *Subjection* in the history of feminist thought. Between the publication of *Vindication* and *Subjection*, William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler published *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in*
Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery; In Reply to a Paragraph of Mr. Mill's Celebrated "Article On Government" (Appeal).

Similar in length to Vindication and Subjection, and dealing with the same subject, Appeal was published a mere 33 years after Vindication was published, and 44 years prior to the publication of Subjection. It advances claims we often associate with more contemporary feminist scholarship. Appeal combines utilitarianism and socialist feminism to resolve many of the problems Wollstonecraft identified, as well as addressing the limitations of her prescriptions for women's equality. These limitations concern the relationship between women’s self-government, the economy, and reproductive labor; and they resurface in Mill’s later book Subjection. Mill reproduces many of the issues in Wollstonecraft’s feminism that Thompson and Wheeler had taken steps toward both identifying and resolving. In this sense, then, Subjection represents a backward step in the historical trajectory of feminist political thought in the 19th century.

Despite being familiar with Appeal, in Subjection Mill does not address the limitations Thompson and Wheeler identified with Wollstonecraft’s feminism, namely the tension between capitalism and the organization of labor, including reproductive labor, in the private sphere. Mill argued that marriage and motherhood ought to be considered an occupational choice that should prevent most women from working independently outside the home. Unlike Thompson and Wheeler’s Appeal Mill’s Subjection did not identify nor attempt to resolve the lack of compensation for women’s work within the private sphere. Appeal goes much further than Vindication and Subjection by recognizing that equal opportunities, equal rights, and equal
education for women would not sufficiently eradicate the gendered power imbalance within the private realm, and that male dominance would persist in a capitalist economy that does not reward the reproductive and domestic labor of women, which, they point out, is an essential contribution to the happiness of a community. What sets their theory apart from other 19th century feminist political theory is their willingness to politicize the private sphere for the sake of women’s well being. In preserving the gendered private sphere, with a gendered division of labor, Wollstonecraft and Mill violate their own commitment to equal freedom for all individuals. In arguing that legal reform and equal rights, though improving women’s standing, would not be sufficient to secure the happiness of women, Thompson and Wheeler were among the first to articulate a tension between capitalism and gender equality.

Interestingly, Thompson and Wheeler use utilitarianism to argue for a move toward feminism and socialism. Despite this, some commentators view their work as an example of conservative or abstract utilitarianism, a view I challenge at various points throughout the dissertation.¹ Like J.S. Mill’s utilitarianism, Thompson and Wheeler’s is often considered ‘indirect’ or ‘objective,’ and thus the connection between utilitarianism and the progressive

¹ Some critics (Hunt, Dooley, Gardner) argue that utilitarianism is a conservative influence on Thompson and Wheeler’s thought by leading them to justify or maintain objectionable forms of social hierarchy (see Chapter 3 and 6). Dooley and Gardner argue that Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist arguments are undermined by the inherently abstract or masculinist nature of utilitarianism. By "abstract", these theorists mean that utilitarianism leads Thompson and Wheeler to view individuals as uninfluenced by their particular social conditions. The charge of "masculinist" is directed against Thompson and Wheeler by those authors who see the latter ascribing masculine characteristics to all individuals. My response to these concerns is laid out in Chapter 6 (below).
elements in their writing is not implausible. While they were influenced by (and were contemporaries of) Jeremy Bentham, their utilitarianism was not based on a narrowly subjective measurement and aggregation of individual pleasures. Instead, they argue that while people are self-interested, the character of any individual is largely a consequence of their social context. The fundamental institutions of society such as the family, the economy, and politics, in their view, contravene the principle of utility by, among other things, limiting women’s freedom and equality relative to men’s. While their focus is on individual well being, individuals are not understood as abstract rational actors, but rather as embedded in social systems that produce their interests, but who also have the capacity and right to self-determine and participate in political life, more broadly understood under a comprehensive social democracy. This is important for happiness because, understood as fundamentally social beings, humans are happiest when they live in a context of non-dominance. In their view, happiness can only be secured through a social and political environment that many contemporary thinkers might prefer on non-utilitarian grounds. Because they do not share Bentham’s method for calculating the principle of utility and rather view happiness as a social condition requiring an egalitarian context, their utilitarianism is not inherently conservative or abstract, and therefore provides a feasible framework for their feminist proposals. It is important to point out that this dissertation is not about the validity of utilitarianism as a coherent political or ethical theory: it does not advance an argument about whether or not utilitarianism ought to be the standard we use to determine justice. Instead, it claims that utilitarianism can be progressive, and that it can

2 I concur with other recent interpretations of their work as indirect or ‘objective’ utilitarianism. See Chapter 3.
empower women. That is, utilitarianism can be a strongly feminist theory. I use Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* and some of their other writings, to support this claim.

Thompson and Wheeler combine utilitarianism with republican, egalitarian, and feminist values in their analysis of social and political life, leading them to what we would now call a socialist feminist solution to the problem of gender inequality. Always couched in the utilitarian justification of maximizing happiness, their version of utilitarianism stresses the importance of equal access to economic security and elevates values and virtues such as self-government, equality, justice, and benevolence. Throughout the dissertation I highlight the progressive effect of utilitarianism in their writings. Their willingness to submit all fundamental social institutions to the principle of utility, combined with their commitment to consider women’s interests as important in their own right, enabled them to see and express how women’s access to the fundamental means of happiness they enumerate is compromised within patriarchal and capitalist institutions.

The utilitarian feminist framework they employ enable Thompson and Wheeler to expose barriers to gender equality that are inherent within capitalism. There are many reasons capitalism and human happiness are incompatible in their view, but one of Thompson and Wheeler’s key insights is the inability of economic activity organized according to private property and free markets to reward non-wealth generating labor. While labor such as reproductive and domestic work may not generate surplus wealth, it is nonetheless crucial for the well being of a community.3 Thompson and Wheeler were unique in understanding women’s

3 Thompson and Wheeler’s insights went beyond women’s concerns; they were concerned for the happiness of all individuals, and were particularly concerned with the happiness of those
reproductive and domestic labor on these terms, as contributors to overall happiness that deserve compensation alongside other forms of useful labor. What sets their theory apart from other 19th century feminist political theory is that they avoid compromising women’s self-government by off-loading the responsibility of unpaid but important work onto women as a class. While Wollstonecraft and Mill aim to increase women’s freedoms through access to education and greater economic and political opportunities, Thompson and Wheeler’s work recognizes that even if these goals were achieved, women would remain economically unequal, less free, and therefore less happy, than men. They explain that women will be less free because they will still be responsible for unpaid reproductive and domestic work, preventing them from enjoying the same level of participation in that part of the economy that is rewarded. In turn, this leaves women more susceptible to domination and abuse due to continued economic dependence on men. While other enlightenment progressive thinkers such as Wollstonecraft and Mill were in favor of women’s equality with men, none offered proposals that would substantially alter the public/private divide and the gendered division of labor therein. Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism thus presents a stronger challenge to the fundamental social and political institutions of their time and ours.\footnote{For Thompson and Wheeler, hierarchical social systems and institutions require radical reform if utilitarianism’s promise of the greatest happiness for the greatest number is to be}

they considered the least happy and most oppressed: the working class and women. While not the focus of their work, they also argued against slavery and racial discrimination.\footnote{Importantly, the dissertation does not seek to argue that they were correct in their proposals. Of course, there are many steps a society might take to help promote gender equality and increase the well being of individuals within society without eliminating the private ownership of the means of production.}
realized. Capitalism and male dominance, they argue, must be replaced by a co-operative, democratic social system. They reject the idea that education and legal reform would be sufficient to grant women equal happiness with men. Democracy, they argue, should be extended to all adult members of a community, and its reach extended to all institutions, including the workplace and activities that were traditionally undertaken within the private sphere of the family. For Thompson and Wheeler, all useful labor had to be recognized and rewarded, including women’s reproductive labor. While Wollstonecraft and Mill aim to increase women’s equality through access to education and greater economic and political opportunities, Thompson and Wheeler recognize that even if these aims were realized, women would remain men’s subordinates. They proposed the creation of communities of mutual co-operation where all labor that contributes to the common good is adequately compensated and democratically organized.

At first glance it might not appear necessary to replace capitalism (what they called ‘the system of competition’ or ‘the competitive system’) with another economic system in order to achieve gender equality. Would it not be sufficient to simply eradicate patriarchy? Thompson and Wheeler argue that capitalism and human happiness are incompatible for a variety of reasons, but one of their central arguments is that capitalism is inherently patriarchal. Capitalism is unable to compensate women directly for labor that is specifically
their, for either social or biological reasons (i.e. reproductive and domestic work) despite its indispensability for a community’s happiness.\(^5\)

The only two full-length books written on the work of Thompson and Thompson and Wheeler are by Dolores Dooley and Mark Kaswan.\(^6\) Dooley’s book *Equality in Community: Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler* provides an in-depth biography of both authors, as well as an exposition and analysis of their feminism. Dooley’s book is the first to illuminate the full extent of the feminist ideas in *Appeal*, to connect the ideas in *Appeal* to Thompson’s other works, and to suggest reasons why the book has not been included in the canons of philosophy or history. Kaswan’s recently published *Happiness, Democracy, and the Cooperative Movement: The Radical Utilitarianism of William Thompson* distinguishes Thompson’s utilitarianism and his understanding of happiness from that of Benthan, in addition to discussing Thompson’s role in the establishment of co-operative principles and the potential political implications a return to these principles might have for the contemporary co-operative movement. My analysis is greatly indebted to their work. What differentiates my work from theirs, however, is that in analyzing Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism in light of other 19\(^{th}\) century comparable works, I aim to both situate Thompson and Wheeler within the history of feminist political thought and to suggest that feminist thought did not necessarily ‘progress’ when it was taken up by J.S. Mill.

\(^5\) Reproduction is, due to biological necessity, labor performed by women. While all adult members of a household might share domestic work equally, this would not rectify the issue of compensation for reproductive labor.

\(^6\) Richard Pankhurst published a biography of each in 1954: *Anna Wheeler: A Pioneer Socialist and Feminist* and *William Thompson, Britain’s Pioneer Socialist, Feminist, and Cooperator.*
1.1 Background and Writings

William Thompson (1775-1833) and Anna Wheeler (1785-1848) were activists in the co-operative movement of Britain and France in the early 19th century. Since he travelled in similar intellectual circles, and was influenced by and exchanged ideas with Jeremy Bentham, Robert Owen and their followers, Thompson is often considered to be a "Benthamite" and an "Owenite". Anna Wheeler was also involved in radical circles during that time, and associated with Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Saint-Simonian socialists. Both from Ireland, Thompson was a wealthy landowner from County Cork, and Wheeler came "from a moderately wealthy family in county Tipperary" (Dooley, Equality xii). This section provides brief biographical sketches of the two writers and brief summaries of their works in order to provide background and context for the ideas that are the focus of the dissertation. For more extensive bibliographies on these two theorists, see R. K. P. Pankhurst (“Anna Wheeler” and William Thompson) and Dolores Dooley (“Anna Doyle Wheeler” and Equality in Community).

William Thompson inherited his father’s large estate in 1814 and subsequently lived off its rents (Lane, 34). Thompson objected to his own lifestyle and social position, often describing himself disparagingly as a member of the idle class. One of Thompson’s earliest activities in the way of social improvement was his involvement in, and subsequent opposition to, the Cork Institute (1812-1819). This institute was initially created to provide a decent education to all of the children of Cork, particularly the least advantaged. Thompson criticized the institute for
wasting money on building improvements and courses on ancient Greece, instead of focusing on more practical subjects like agricultural methods and politics. He was also particularly annoyed at the refusal of the Institute to permit the education of girls, and wrote a number of public letters to officials complaining of this injustice (Nyland and Heenan, 243).

Thompson toured the British Midlands prior to visiting Bentham in 1822. This journey increased his awareness of the living and working conditions of factory workers, including low wages and subjection to nearly constant toil. Thompson was also aware that, at this time, workers had little recourse to improve their situations given the legal prohibition against unionization and the lack of wage regulation (Nyland and Heenan, 241). Most of the factory workforce was composed of women and children, who undertook their work in “…often appallingly crowded, exhausting, dangerous, and debilitating” conditions (Claeys, Machinery xvii).7 Following his tour, he lived in Bentham's house in London for fifteen months in 1822-1823 (Claeys, Machinery 90).

Wheeler was born in 1785 in Ireland, a member of the Protestant Ascendancy. Her father died when she was two years of age and she was raised by her mother and her uncle, Sir John Doyle. At fifteen she defied the wishes of her guardians and married Francis Massey Wheeler (Nyland and Heenan, 249-250). Wheeler had two daughters and many pregnancies and miscarriages during the marriage. She suffered domestic abuse and neglect from her husband

7 While working conditions were deplorable, the ability to organize and form labor associations was severely limited. Those who did attempt to organize faced a risky and hostile climate. As late as 1834, one year after Thompson’s death, six laborers from Dorchester were “…sentenced to transportation for the offence of administering unlawful oaths in the course of their attempt to establish a Friendly Society of Agricultural Laborers as a section of the grand National Union”. The movement, Cole argues, was effectively destroyed following this harsh sentence (126).
In 1812 her brother and Sir John Doyle helped her to escape from her husband’s home, where she was confined. She fled to her uncle’s home on the Island of Guernsey where he was governor. Doyle was recalled to London, and Wheeler and her daughters had to leave the house. She sent her daughters to a boarding school and she moved to Caen, France, where she set up a salon that was frequented by Saint-Simonian socialists (Nyland and Heenan, 250). Here, “Wheeler became known as the ‘Goddess of Reason’ and was perceived by the ‘local intelligentsia’ in Caen as ‘the most gifted woman of the age’” (Dooley, “Anna” 21). In 1820 she moved to London where she worked within the Owenite co-operative movement. She moved back to France in 1823, this time to Paris, where she became acquainted with Charles Fourier. Wheeler tried to convince Fourier and Owen to work together, but they could not overcome their different visions for co-operative communities (Nyland and Heenan, 250). At this time she also began contributing to Owen’s co-operative journal The Crisis by translating the works of Saint-Simonian feminists and by writing her own letters using the pseudonym ‘Vlasta’. At this time she also began translating Owen’s works into French (Nyland and Heenan, 250 and Taylor, 46).

Upon moving to London, Wheeler became close friends with both Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. She also became a well-known political activist. Wheeler was working alongside philosophers and social reformers both before she had met Thompson, and following his death (Dooley, Equality 56). According to Dooley, Wheeler had already established a friendship with Bentham when she met Thompson. Between May 6 and May 19, 1824, Bentham’s records show that Wheeler dined there twice (Equality 67). Foot and Roberts suggest that Wheeler and

8 Vlasta was a legendary female bohemian warrior who fought to end women’s oppression.
Thompson met at Bentham's house (vi-ix). However, there is no evidence indicating exactly when or how Thompson and Wheeler initially formed their friendship, aside from clues based on the year *Appeal* was published (1825) and that they were both good friends with Bentham. Thus, it is not known whether Thompson had consulted Wheeler on the content of his first book, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness; applied to The Newly Proposed System of Voluntary Equality of Wealth (Inquiry)*, published in 1824.

*Inquiry* has been given the greatest amount of attention from contemporary scholars. This book is Thompson’s longest, at 600 pages, and it advocates the system of mutual cooperation against the system of ‘force and fraud’ and against the capitalist, or competitive, system. In this book Thompson argues that the distribution of wealth ought to have two main objects: equal enjoyment and the highest levels of production, “…so as to promote the utmost possible equality of distribution consistent with security; security alone calling forth the complete development of every useful human energy, physical and intellectual” (90). The distribution of wealth, Thompson writes, is the most useful and most interesting subject because it determines both the morality of a community and also the community’s access to physical comforts. The distribution of wealth also determines how many community members have access to “…the pleasures of sympathy, prudence, and benevolence, as well as of intellectual enjoyment…” (1).

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9 Writing about capitalism prior to it having received the name ‘capitalism’, Thompson called it “the competitive system”.
In *Inquiry* Thompson argues that utilitarianism ought to be the principle that guides decision making about the proper distribution of wealth: “Utility, calculating all effects, good and evil, immediate and remote, or the pursuit of the greatest sum of human happiness, is the leading principle constantly kept in view, and to which all others are but subsidiary, in this inquiry” (1). Thompson maintains that the principle of utility dictates that an equal distribution of wealth will produce more happiness than an unequal distribution. The equal distribution of wealth produces the beneficial effect of equal access to immediate, sensual pleasures, which he terms “half the blessing”. The other half, which is equal in importance to the increase in sensual pleasures, is an “increase…of intelligence and moral habits” (385). The distribution of wealth affects the extent of both types of pleasures: physical as well as moral and intellectual. Wealth directly influences the amount of sensual pleasures available and indirectly helps to increase moral and intellectual pleasures. However, when wealth is distributed unequally it “…tends…to eradicate almost entirely these higher moral and intellectual pleasures” (25).  

In this book we see Thompson’s approach towards the relationship between economic distribution and happiness but Thompson is also critical of the study of economics itself. One of Thompson’s central criticisms of economists is the notion that increased production levels should be a goal unto itself. Without knowing the quality and extent of the distribution of production it is impossible to determine whether increases actually contribute to human happiness. “…[I]t is not their abundance, but their right use and distribution, that constitute the happiness of the community…” (xv). Political economy must consider not merely production and consumption, but the proper distribution of wealth within a community:

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10 This claim is explained more fully in Chapter 3.
'Tis not the multitude but the use and the distribution of the objects of wealth, with which society is chiefly interested. Hence the necessity of considering wealth not only in its effects on industry and reproduction, but also in its moral and political effects, in every way that it can influence human happiness (ix).

The purpose of Thompson’s *Inquiry* is to bring moral reasoning into the science of political economy, using a complex understanding of human beings: all humans depend, for their sustenance and happiness, on the material world and on one another. For Thompson, we cannot understand anything about human beings when we wish to see them as mere animalistic laboring machines, or as mere intellectual, rational agents without material needs (vii). Thompson recognizes that the way a community determines the distribution of wealth will depend upon how labor is recognized and valued. Thus, Thompson points out that economists must recognize that all human beings are dependent upon labor, their own and/or the labor of others, and everyone is ultimately dependent upon manual labor.

This approach towards wealth distribution and the study of economics has important implications for Thompson and Wheeler’s examination of women’s labor in the private sphere and its lack of remuneration. Thompson viewed the market as serving only the interests of the wealthy and privileged in the way that it values labor. Capitalism is incapable of considering the actual contribution labor makes toward promoting (or preventing) the happiness of a community. Instead, value is assigned based on the production of surplus through market exchange. This limited understanding of the value of labor also justifies an unequal distribution of wealth, which, in itself, prevents the maximization of happiness. Thompson’s understanding of capitalism as limited in its capacity to estimate the actual value of labor according to its
contribution to human well-being is important for this dissertation, since Thompson and Wheeler view the lack of compensation for women’s work in the private sphere as fundamentally unjust.

Chris Nyland and Tom Heenan speculate that Wheeler may have persuaded Thompson to include women’s concerns in the Inquiry; however, given that the book deals with all sorts of injustices and inequalities, the inclusion of gender should not appear odd. In any case, the idea that women’s work (traditional and biological) deserves compensation is further developed in Thompson’s second book, which as he states in the introduction, was co-written with Wheeler. A few comments about the authorship of the book are warranted.

The introduction to Appeal is a letter from Thompson to Wheeler. In this letter he introduces her contribution to the book by stating: “…I have endeavoured to arrange the expression of those feelings, sentiments, and reasonings, which have emanated from your mind” (v). He explains that it is impossible to separate his own thoughts on the issue of women’s inequality from Wheeler’s, thus he writes, “I love not literary any more than any other species of piracy: I wish to give every thing to its right owner” (vi). He explains that while she was the exclusive author of but a few pages of the book, “[t]he remainder are our joint property.” He also indicates that, for his part, he was merely the ‘interpreter and scribe’ of Wheeler’s ideas (vii). Many have commented on this introductory letter, and what it might indicate about the authorship of the book. According to Dooley, this admission by a male author would have been considered “indiscreet and offensive to the modesty of women”. At the time Appeal was published, men rarely acknowledged the contribution of women to their published writings (Dooley, “Anna” 26). Abbie L. Cory argues that by making this claim, the book itself reverses
conventional gender roles, where normally women would be the scribes of men’s ideas (107). Cory also argues that by putting Wheeler’s picture on the cover Thompson found another way to include her as an author of the book. This implicit acknowledgement, rather than a more explicit one, was likely at the request of Wheeler due to the prevailing social constraints against women’s political writings (106). Chris Nyland and Tom Heenan argue that Wheeler likely refused to be listed as the author of Appeal because of the hardship she had already experienced as a woman trying to escape male dominance - the flight from her husband to the sanctuary of her uncle’s home in Guernsey, a ‘social disgrace’ in itself - combined with the legacy of Wollstonecraft’s own suffering due to her publicized views on gender (253).

The introductory letter thus presents Thompson’s clear attribution of authorship to both Wheeler and himself. Cory provides additional evidence that Wheeler was the sole author of a portion of the book. She analyzes the text and compares the writing style of each section to Thompson and Wheeler’s independent writings. Her analysis points to Wheeler as the sole author of the book’s conclusion, which takes the format of a public speech (113-115). Wheeler’s writing style is evident in the book’s conclusion, but Thompson also indicates that Wheeler’s ideas can be found throughout the entirety of the book. However, because Wheeler’s name was never included on the cover of the book as an author, interpreters must decide whether to take Thompson at his word. In my view, the evidence points to Wheeler as deserving credit as co-author of this important contribution to feminist theory.11

11 Moreover, as I note in section Chapter 6 section 5, Thompson and Wheeler’s independent writings suggest that Wheeler held more radical views on gender differences than Thompson, and these views are present in Appeal. For instance, in Appeal a strong argument is made against the exclusion of women based on strength but in Thompson’s later writings he
Appeal is best known for its argument for women’s suffrage. However, the book also demands a broader set of social changes. This dissertation maintains that ultimately, political rights were for Thompson and Wheeler merely a stepping-stone toward a more comprehensive form of social equality for all individuals. Appeal articulates a comprehensive socialist feminist argument that combines the need for equal rights with greater democracy and economic equality. The main themes that this dissertation draws from Appeal include its approach to human nature, gender equality, and women’s work.

Appeal was written in response to James Mill's assertion that universal suffrage need not include women because women’s interests are necessarily included in the interests of men. They point out that Mill inconsistently applies his own theory of human nature as ultimately selfish and power hungry in making this assertion. Mill uses his view of human nature to argue for the necessity of political rights for men, but fails to see that by his own argument men will not naturally act with benevolence towards women. Were he to take his own principle of human nature seriously, he could not exclude women from the exercise of political rights, and in doing so he contradicts his own principle (4). Against Mill’s assertion that humans have a natural tendency use their power to take advantage of others, they argue that circumstances will determine whether, in pursuing one’s own interests, one will positively, adversely, or not at all influence the happiness of others. Human beings are neither naturally inclined to promote or to hinder the happiness of others (12-13). This argument against James Mill leads to an argument for creating greater social and economic equality between men and women through the

 recommends women be excluded from the early days of a community’s formation for that very reason.
establishment of co-operative communities. Sympathetic and benevolent selves are more likely to appear in egalitarian contexts, their theory states; thus, greater economic equality and equality between men and women is the only way to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Thompson and Wheeler analyze power relations in institutions according to their effect on the happiness of individuals. They consider women to be equal human beings who are entitled to happiness for their own sakes, and that the requisite components of happiness are the same for both sexes. Some of the most important aspects of individual happiness include health, self-government, sympathy, freedom of thought and action, economic and political security, education, and a non-dominating social context. Thompson and Wheeler, in showing how training in the 'sexual system of morality' and the competitive system dispossesses women of self-government and men of sympathy, insist that the happiness of each person is blocked by these systems. The only way, they argue, to promote the happiness of women as equals of men, is through the establishment of communities of mutual co-operation.

A large portion of the book presents a critique of prevailing gender relations, including economic relations, and one of their more radical arguments is that reproduction, domestic labor, and childcare ought to be recognized and rewarded for their contribution to human happiness. In their criticism of capitalism and male dominance they also argue that only by increasing the reach of democracy to the private sphere and the economic sphere can women hope to gain equal access to the means of happiness.

[12 See Chapter 3.]
Following the publication of *Appeal* Thompson and Wheeler continued their work in radical circles. In 1825 Thompson and John Stuart Mill (Mill) squared off in a debate concerning the merits of co-operation, Thompson arguing against capitalism and for cooperation, and Mill arguing the opposite. Despite their differing views, Mill writes in his autobiography that he was ‘well acquainted’ with Thompson, and that he held Thompson in high esteem (Dooley, *Equality* 31). Thompson wrote two additional books, as well as writing letters to the co-operative press.

Thompson’s third book *Labor Rewarded: The Claims of Labor and Capital Conciliated by One of the Idle Classes* (*Labor Rewarded*) was published in 1827. In it he presents a comprehensive argument against capitalism and for the establishment of mutual co-operation. His aim is to, “[b]ring about a total change in the principle of society regarding production, accumulation, and distribution of wealth” (v). Current arrangements are unjust, he argues, because they, “throw the whole of the *means* of enjoyment, without the reality of enjoying, into the hands of the idle, and … take from the industrious, the producers of all things, these *means* of enjoyment” (1). He describes a just system of industry as, “voluntary exchanges founded on equal means of knowledge and skill, on an equal command of the means of production, and on equal freedom from all mental or physical restraints of law, superstition or public opinion” (11). The book is an argument for increasing the freedom and happiness of individuals through their membership in a co-operating community. No individual can be secure against ‘force and fraud’ without living in a community where all are equally educated, and where all have input into the laws that affect their interests (15).
This work provides a scathing critique of capitalism. It emphasizes the injustice of laborers having no control over what they produce, or what happens to the products of their labor (17). Thompson argues that while laborers are entitled to the whole produce of their labor (minus other inputs such as management costs and capital investment), because labor is most often a collective activity, rather than an individual activity, it is almost impossible to determine what portion one worker contributed. He also points out that individuals who do not labor, or who do not work in wealth-generating activities, would suffer a complete lack of income if workers were to receive the entire produce of their labor. These two problems can be resolved by transferring the ownership of the means of production to the community such that labor and the economy itself, are collectively controlled (37).

Thompson was critical of capitalism not merely because of the material inequality and insecurity it fosters, but because it forces people into relationships of competition for security, it “makes us regard from birth the interests of everyone as opposed and incompatible” (65). He supports a move toward communities of mutual co-operation on two main grounds in this book (besides increasing happiness), because it will grant justice to the working class, and because “[n]ew circumstances give rise to new motives” (100). Thompson also elaborates on the democratic system he envisions should govern a co-operative (122-124), and the importance of an equal and abundant diffusion of knowledge to all members (44-47).

His final book, Practical directions for the speedy and economical establishment of communities, on the principles of mutual co-operation, united possessions and equality of exertions and of the means of enjoyments (Practical Directions), was published in 1833. In this
work Thompson puts forth a detailed plan to establish communities of mutual co-operation, including blueprints of the structure of the community. It emphasizes the importance of individual independence, gender equality in laboring activities, and equal distribution of resources (3-4). The community, he writes, will collectively own the means of production, and will collectively distribute the goods produced, “…the equal effort to promote the common good must go hand in hand with equal proprietorship, use and enjoyment” (7). This book also outlines some concrete prescriptions for regulating reproductive labor, which I discuss in Chapter 6.

When Thompson was not writing his books or letters to various co-operative press outlets, he was an active participant in co-operative congresses in Britain. Robert Owen was known as the leader of the co-operative movement, however Dooley points out that by 1832 Thompson was preferred over Owen to lead the movement by a majority of the membership. There were two reasons for Thompson’s popularity over Owen. Thompson argued that a community did not need as much initial investment as Owen had claimed, and Thompson’s co-operative vision was far more democratic than Owen’s (Dooley, Equality 50). Thompson’s plans for a co-operative community were adopted by the co-operative congress, and he had planned on instituting a community on his own estate – he had even begun erecting some of its buildings. Unable to fully develop his community, he suffered from poor health and died in May 1833. In his will he left his body to science, an annuity of £100 to Anna Wheeler, and the rest of his estate to the co-operative movement. Unfortunately, his two sisters contested the will, arguing that it was invalid because he was insane. In the end, lawyer and court fees consumed

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13 He clarifies that by equal distribution he means a distribution, “proportioned to the physical necessities of each, which necessities must be mostly measured by individual feelings, stature, &c” (5).
the value of the entire estate (McFadden, 94 and Fennell, 192). In his request to the co-operative community for donations to help fight the suit, William Pare avoids blaming Thompson’s sisters, and instead accuses ‘two eminent Irish barristers’ of convincing them that the property was rightly theirs (15-16).

According to William Pankhurst, Thompson was, for almost 20 years prior to his death, “…a non-smoker, vegetarian, and teetoller, declaring he could thus read and write better” (William 7). Thompson writes in the Weekly Free Press, “…without temperance, neither health, nor pleasures of the mind can be enjoyed, nor any useful pursuits be conducted regularly and pleasurably to their appropriate end” (“Lease … IV”). For Thompson, animal meat is too ‘stimulating’ and causes ‘over-excitement’ of the body’s digestion. He thought his diet of roots, vegetables and seeds had provided him with ‘lightness, and serenity of mind and body’ as well as an increased ability to enjoy other pleasures (“Lease … IV”). He explains, “[a]s rational beings we only live for enjoyment, and if wallowing in fat and blood, and lying down in drunkenness, really made us happier, all consequences considered, we should be fools not so to wallow and to enjoy” (“Lease … IV”).

Following Thompson’s death, John Minter Morgan included a letter from ‘Vlasta’ (Wheeler’s pen-name) in his book Hampden in the 19th Century. Dolores Dooley attributes authorship of this letter to Wheeler since this was her well-known pseudonym (“Anna Wheeler” 41 and Equality in Community 82). The letter is titled ‘Letter by Vlasta’ and is addressed to Lord Hampden. It describes William Thompson’s life and character. It states that Thompson was governed, in every minute action of his life, by the principle of utility. It describes him as
having a ‘weak constitution’ and being a ‘valetudinarian’, which could mean that he was overly worried about his health, or that he was generally ill (302). It describes his writing as a product of intense concentration and focus, but as also quickly tiring to the reader due to “…the constant and ever-active attention required to follow the author in his reasoning” (318-319). While Thompson was lonely and wished for a companion, he refused to participate in the system of marriage, which he believed was inherently unjust. Moreover, he found it impossible to find “…a delightful, intellectual, rational female companion, whose tastes, opinions, and pursuits corresponded to his own… “. The letter then hints that Thompson found this person in Vlasta (Wheeler), but it was her refusal to re-enter the institution of marriage that made this union impossible (323). The letter also compares Thompson with Bentham, pointing to their mutual distaste of poetry, both believing that intellectual pursuits ought to focus upon issues of greater importance, especially since poetry and imagination will often lead one away from the truth (319).

Following her work with Thompson, Wheeler continued to give public speeches and also contributed to co-operative periodicals. She was particularly close to two Saint-Simonian women who worked hard to organize working class women and to create women’s trade associations: Flora Tristan and Desiree Veret (Dooley, Equality 96). In her Rights of Women speech, Wheeler pays homage to another activist woman, Frances Wright. She advises that:

[w]hen ever the advocacy of general education shall be attempted, the name of Miss Frances Wright  ought never to be omitted; may she find an echo in every instructed woman, and an active ally in every man! Grateful posterity will no doubt associate her name, with the illustrious men of the present age, who, having discovered the principles of real social science, gave them to the world under
the name of CO-OPERATION (Wheeler, “Rights of Women Part II’ 36).

Wheeler wrote a letter in 1832 following the death of Bentham where she laments that she had not received a ring he had left for her (Wheeler, “Letter to monsieur Jullian” 22).

Benjamin Disraeli met Wheeler in the home of her daughter and son-in-law in 1833. He described her as “…something between Jeremy Bentham and Meg Merrilies, very clever, but awfully revolutionary” (Pankhurst, “Anna” 135). In Thompson’s introductory letter to Wheeler in *Appeal*, he writes to Wheeler that, “…yours was the eye to which no prejudice obscured, open to the rays of truth from whatever quarter they might emanate” (vii). Wheeler has described herself as “…a woman and without any master; two causes of disgrace in England” (Wheeler, “to monsieur Jullian” 22). Unfortunately, there are very few details on record of Thompson and Wheeler’s relationship. The only concrete clues available are Thompson’s introductory letter in *Appeal* and evidence of their mutual friendship with Jeremy Bentham. Thus, the nature of their relationship, aside from its obvious intellectual character, is unknown.

1.1.1 Irish Intellectual Context

Although Thompson and Wheeler became well known in radical circles in England and France, their Irish roots likely also influenced their work. Thompson and Wheeler would have been aware of the acuteness of England’s oppression of Irish Catholics. Woodham-Smith describes this context:

> [n]o Catholic could vote, hold any office under the Crown, or purchase land, and Catholic estates were dismembered by an enactment directing that at the death of a Catholic owner his land
was to be divided among all his sons, unless the eldest became a Protestant, when he could inherit the whole. Education was made impossible, since Catholics might not attend schools, not keep schools, nor send their children to be educated abroad. The practice of the Catholic faith was proscribed (quoted in Nyland and Heenan, 242).

James Connolly explains that in Ireland Catholic sons and wives could convert to Protestantism and take ownership of their father’s or husband’s land. Catholics could not own a horse that was worth more than £5.00. Moreover, the Irish were prohibited from trading with Europe and America except through an English port, which stunted Ireland’s capitalist development. No member of the Irish working class, furthermore, was permitted to sit in the House of Commons in Dublin (51-54). The major movements in Ireland, when Thompson and Wheeler were writing, were Catholic emancipation and a movement against the payment of tithes to the Church of Ireland (Fennell, 193). This oppression of Catholics was resisted by both Irish Catholics and Protestants, including William Thompson. Many agitated for parliamentary reform, a reduction of poverty, and Catholic emancipation (Nyland and Heenan, 242). While Thompson supported the cause of Catholic emancipation, Lane argues that the uprisings of the United Irishmen would have caused him great ‘trepidation and fear’ given his class and religious affiliation (30). Lane also points out that because Thompson was not a nationalist, he could not forge a strong connection with the working class movement in Ireland (41).

While Thompson’s major works did not focus on Catholic emancipation or other issues particular to Ireland, he did participate in Daniel O’Connell’s movement for emancipation and did all he could to improve the lives of his tenant farmers, such as providing decent housing,
generous land leasing arrangements, and giving his tenants’ children an education (Duddy, 226). Indeed, Thompson proposed to lease his land ‘forever’ or until purchase is possible to a co-operative community (Thompson, “Lease … I”). The conditions of the lease included equal ownership by all members, perfect equality between men and women, and the protection of freedom of opinion and expression (Thompson, “Lease … II”).

Despite their background as Irish thinkers who must have been concerned with the oppression of the Irish by the English, Wheeler and Thompson both also resisted nationalist sentiment. While Thompson implicitly avoided nationalism while supporting Catholic emancipation, Wheeler explicitly rejected patriotism in a letter written to Robert Owen in 1831: “…mere patriotism has appeared to me like an ignorant mother whose partiality strains heaven and earth for one child – which in her blindness she is always sure to load with a thousand evils – making the Idol a victim…” (Wheeler “to Robert Owen” 1831).

1.2 Citing Thompson and/or Wheeler

Because in my view Appeal is most likely co-authored it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine from whom each of its ideas originated. Thus, except the introductory letter to Wheeler, which was clearly written by Thompson only, when I draw from Appeal, I credit both Thompson and Wheeler. Acknowledging that they do not always speak with a unified voice, especially on points that are only found in Thompson’s other works and not in Appeal, the thesis will indicate that it is Thompson’s view by only citing him in these instances. However, the
overarching argument of the dissertation concerns the arguments put forth in the *Appeal* and often these arguments are supported or further explained in Thompson’s other books.

### 1.3 Dissertation Overview

#### 1.3.1 Chapter 2: Wollstonecraft Breaks Ground

This chapter focuses on Wollstonecraft’s contribution to feminist thinking in order to set the stage for situating Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* within the history of feminist political thought. Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is often regarded as the first feminist full-length book to call for greater gender equality by arguing for women’s rights. Thompson and Wheeler acknowledge Wollstonecraft’s influence on their own feminist thinking. Given the reach of her book, there can be no doubt that it was also read carefully by John Stuart Mill whose *Subjection* is the topic of Chapter 5. By examining Wollstonecraft’s work we can better see the contribution Thompson and Wheeler made through their *Appeal*, which they published 33 years following the publication of *Vindication*. The chapter highlights the strengths of Wollstonecraft’s analysis, including the connection she makes between gender inequality, power, and arbitrary rank; her insights regarding feminine socialization and economic inequality; and of course, most famously, her arguments in favor of educating women to be rational and independent. While acknowledging the strengths of her feminism, the chapter also points to its limitations, including the maintenance of a gendered public/private divide; connecting women’s virtue to their biological capacity to reproduce; continued class inequality;
and suggesting but not providing an argument for equal political rights.

1.3.2 Chapter 3: Thompson and Wheeler: Human Nature, Happiness, and Utilitarianism

This chapter introduces the philosophical underpinnings of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism by outlining their understanding of human nature, happiness, and the utilitarian framework they use to justify greater equality. Two fundamental aspects of their feminist political thought are, first, that social systems and institutions are responsible for the construction of individual motives and desires towards others, and in turn these motivations and desires help to explain and justify relationships of domination and subordination inherent within those systems. Second, these systems cannot be fixed through education and legal reform only; utilitarianism as a moral theory must also govern the structure of relationships within the economy and the family.

Against some of their utilitarian counterparts, such as James Mill, they argue that the principle that men are apt to use their power to advance their own interests is not a primary principle of human nature but a secondary one. This principle only applies given certain conditions. It is untrue that men will naturally use their power either benevolently or selfishly. They argue instead that human motivations regarding others arise out of their circumstances, and whether their environment places their interests in accord, or in opposition, to others. Thus, human beings pursue their happiness through the avenues available to them in their specific context. They thus examine the role of power and the structure of institutions in producing sympathetic or antipathetic characters, and argue that different systems and institutions – social
and economic - could produce different selves. Thompson and Wheeler couple this deeply social understanding of human nature with the principle that women and men are moral equals, deserving of equal rights, and equal recognition and compensation for their contributions to the happiness of the community. Sociality and equality are the two foundations of their utilitarian socialist feminism, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

Thompson and Wheeler emphasize that social contexts that produce misery for the majority of the population include societies with extreme hierarchies of social position and wealth including patriarchy, slavery, and capitalism. Social contexts that produce happiness for the majority of the population are more egalitarian, in that they will not give any one person or group the ability to dictate the activities of others. The society that is the most productive of happiness is based on voluntary, mutual co-operation.

As utilitarians, Thompson and Wheeler are chiefly concerned with maximizing happiness. The chapter explains how Bentham influenced their utilitarianism and outlines how it is also fundamentally different, often being described as more indirect or objective. Like J.S. Mill, they believe that pleasures are not equal, that they should be measured and ranked qualitatively. The chapter also examines the key similarities and differences between Thompson’s and J.S. Mill’s utilitarianism. Thompson anticipates many of the points Mill makes in his book *Utilitarianism* and their views differ only slightly concerning the emphasis made on the impact of inequality on happiness, and the depth and breadth of required reforms to promote greater equality.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of one contemporary interpretation of
Thompson’s utilitarianism as conservative and argues that Thompson’s work, while utilitarian, is in many respects less conservative than socialist or Marxist theories that do not seriously account for the exploitation of women’s labor.

1.3.3 Chapter 4: Thompson and Wheeler’s Feminism: The Private Sphere, Politics, and Mutual Co-operation

This chapter outlines Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism. It examines how Thompson and Wheeler resolve the problems Wollstonecraft highlights, and how they move beyond the limitations of her feminism explained in Chapter 2. First, it explains their criticisms of marriage, the family, the economy, and politics. The chapter then explains their key argument in Appeal: equal political rights for women. The chapter turns next toward their most radical criticism: that capitalism is incapable of recognizing and rewarding women’s reproductive and domestic work, and therefore democratic communities of mutual co-operation ought to be established. The last part of this chapter explores their proposed new communities, and how these communities would, if successful, solve the problem of gender inequality. For Thompson and Wheeler, women will enjoy greater happiness within communities of mutual co-operation for they will be economically secure, their work will be recognized and compensated, they will enjoy full political and civil rights, and will receive an equal and vigorous education. Throughout, the chapter also explains the role of utilitarianism in justifying their socialist-feminist analysis and vision.
1.3.4 Chapter 5: *Appeal and Subjection* in the History of Feminist Political Thought

Chapter 5 examines the place of J.S. Mill’s *Subjection* in light of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism. It begins by providing evidence indicating the very high likelihood that Mill carefully read *Appeal*. Establishing that Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism would have influenced Mill, the chapter presents an overview of Mill’s feminism as outlined in *Subjection* and compares it with Thompson and Wheeler’s earlier *Appeal*. Despite being familiar with Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, Mill’s feminism retains similar limitations that Thompson and Wheeler aim to overcome from Wollstonecraft’s earlier *Vindication*. Thompson and Wheeler use their utilitarian framework, coupled with Wollstonecraft’s analyses of power and the importance of granting women the means of self-government, to comprehensively criticize the private sphere and the capitalist system, themes that Mill failed to take up in his later, and more well-known, *Subjection*. While Mill grants women marginally more freedom than Wollstonecraft, should they marry and become mothers they will find themselves similarly confined to an institution where, structurally, they are dominated. As was the case for Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, in *Subjection* women’s self-government is compromised by familial duties and a lack of compensation for women’s reproductive contributions. Thompson and Wheeler provide a deeper analysis of women’s inequality, and more radical proposals to help rectify this, including proposals to restructure the family and economy. Including Thompson and Wheeler in the canon of feminist political thought highlights the limitations of *Subjection* and of liberal feminism generally.
1.3.5 Chapter 6: Utilitarianism and Thompson and Wheeler’s Feminism, Exploring Contemporary Critiques

In the final chapter I explore recent scholarly criticisms of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism and present my own interpretation of the limitations in their thinking. Some contemporary scholars have argued that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarian framework is fundamentally masculinist and has contributed to perceived weaknesses in their feminism, such as overvaluing the public sphere and undervaluing the private sphere, and generally failing to empower women politically. In her book *Equality in Community*, Dolores Dooley argues that Thompson and Wheeler maintain gendered power relations by overvaluing the public sphere and undervaluing the private, denying women moral agency, and devaluing women’s traditional work. Catherine Villanueva Gardener’s recently published book *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy*, examines and analyzes 19th century utilitarian feminist books, including Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, through what she considers a new philosophical lens that asks “Does it empower women?” (462). She argues that ultimately Thompson and Wheeler’s ideas in *Appeal* fail to empower women because they focus on changing men, maintain traditional gender roles, fail to argue for compensation for reproductive labor, and because Thompson and Wheeler do not grant women exclusive political rights. She blames an abstract and masculinist utilitarian framework for the failures she reads into their work. The chapter offers alternative explanations, besides utilitarianism, for the shortcomings Dooley highlights. The chapter then defends Thompson and Wheeler by demonstrating that Villanueva Gardener’s criticisms rest on fundamental misinterpretations and a
misreading of their work.

The chapter also sets out my own views on where the limitations in Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism lie, including reproductive control within a co-operative community; classism, exclusion of women based on their inferior strength, and problematic comparisons of middle class white women to female slaves in the West Indies. Despite these limitations, Thompson and Wheeler’s community of mutual co-operation is fundamentally democratic and includes quasi-constitutional protections of women’s freedoms. These factors and others, such as equality in education and living arrangements, might be enough to ensure women avoid exclusion based on arbitrary generalizations, and that they maintain control over their own reproductive labor.
Chapter 2: Wollstonecraft Breaks Ground

In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft published her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Vindication).\(^\text{14}\) Perhaps the benchmark comprehensive feminist text of the period, *Vindication* would have been read carefully by Thompson, Wheeler, and John Stuart Mill. Wollstonecraft’s influence on Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism cannot be understated. As the only full-length book to have been published on women’s rights prior to *Appeal*,\(^\text{15}\) understanding her ideas as outlined in *Vindication* helps to properly situate *Appeal* in the history of feminist thought. This chapter outlines Wollstonecraft’s views, how she thought of the problem of women’s inequality, and what she thought was necessary to improve the situation for women, their families, and the community. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of her feminism. Subsequent chapters in the dissertation examine Thompson and Wheeler’s place in the history of feminist thought relative to this starting point.

Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has two stated aims, to: “…first consider women in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties; and afterwards [to] more particularly point out their peculiar designation” (8). She finds that women’s education and subordinate status renders women incapable of becoming virtuous mothers. Whereas boys are educated to become rational and virtuous citizens, girls are educated to please a man and to find a husband (60). She believes

\(^\text{14}\) Unless otherwise indicated, citations in this chapter refer to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
\(^\text{15}\) Of course there have been writings on women’s rights, such as the famous pamphlet by Olympe de Gouges, but as far as I can tell Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* is the first book-length text of its kind.
that the most troubling aspect of this unequal education is the destruction of the character of women, leading to their inability to fulfill their duties to society and their families as mothers.\textsuperscript{16} In order to resolve this problem, she argues that women deserve an education to develop their God-given capacity to reason, enabling them to become independent and therefore able to perform their duties virtuously.

Wollstonecraft argues that women are human beings because they, like men and unlike animals, have the capacity to develop and use their reason. Women are denied their humanity and also the opportunity to become virtuous, because they are denied the opportunity to develop this distinctly human capacity (8). Reason is required to properly perform one’s duties. In order to fulfill one’s duties properly, one also has to be a moral being capable of reasoning independently such that one’s duties are understood. Only by understanding one’s duties and accepting them independently can one perform them well and according to virtue (64). She explains that “[t]he being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother” (145). In her earlier text, \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Men}, she claims that every human being has natural, God-given rights, because every human being is endowed with reason, and is therefore improvable. For Wollstonecraft, reason and virtue are inseparable, she writes, “…conscience, or reason, … in my view of things, they are synonymous terms” (9). Connecting the common characteristic of

\textsuperscript{16} Wollstonecraft was also concerned with the character of men, arguing that power also corrupts their character and inhibits their ability to reason and fulfill their duties as husbands and citizens, however in this book the focus was the character of women. She does indicate that women’s lack of education has a negative effect on the character of men because mothers lack the reason required to provide their sons with an adequate education (162).
‘reason’ to the divine, she is able to argue for the equality of women on the basis that they, too, can reason and improve. She writes, “…the inquiry is whether she have reason or not. If she have, which, for a moment, I will take for granted, she was not created merely to be the solace of man, and the sexual should not destroy the human character” (Vindication 53). In this way Wollstonecraft establishes women’s equal personhood with men: they have the capacity to reason, and, correspondingly, to be virtuous. One of the main problems to be solved, then, is women’s exclusion from developing their reason, rendering them incapable of independent thought and action, making virtuous behaviour practically impossible. As I will explain in the following section, Wollstonecraft understands this exclusion to be the result of arbitrary hierarchies of power and status.

2.1 Inequality and The Problem of Arbitrary Power and Hierarchy

Throughout her two major works on rights, Wollstonecraft places much of the blame for the misery and corruption she sees on arbitrary hierarchies of rank. Wollstonecraft is most concerned with arbitrary hereditary power, power produced through respect for hereditary rank, rather than respect for the virtuousness of the person. In Vindication of the Rights of Men, Wollstonecraft is particularly critical of hereditary property laws, and in Vindication of the Rights of Woman, she is critical of the arbitrary power of men over women, and in particular the practice of excluding women from developing reason, thereby excluding them from enjoying the right to be human in learning to become virtuous.
The development and exercise of reason is greatly influenced by an individual’s social context. For Wollstonecraft, developing one’s capacity to reason is a human right from which some classes of men, and all of women, have been excluded. In turn, this means that those excluded groups have not had the opportunity to develop virtue. Wollstonecraft claims that virtue can only exist where reason is employed, and reason can only be employed within a context of freedom and equality. Reason needs freedom in order to properly evaluate the morality of a feeling or an action. The freedom of employing moral reasoning, however, is stunted by hierarchy. In *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, she writes, “[i]nequality of rank must ever impede the growth of virtue, by vitiating the mind that submits or domineers…” (47). She later reiterates, “…virtue can only flourish amongst equals” (59). She revisits this egalitarianism in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, writing that reason ought to be the only authority for actions, and that virtue and reason cannot exist when people submit to any other authority (191).

Because Wollstonecraft considers women to be human beings whose reasoning faculty could be developed, she rejects nature-based arguments for women’s subordination and considered them mere justifications for excluding women from enjoying basic rights. For instance, she argues that because women seem to accept their subordinate position, this does not mean it is natural for them to be subordinate. To the contrary, women’s participation in their slavery and dependence upon men is similar to men’s slavery and dependence upon the arbitrary power of monarchs and ministers. In the same way that men’s arbitrary power over women inhibits human progress by making half of humanity slaves, the operation is the same concerning hierarchies amongst men themselves (*Vindication* 45). “…[M]en have submitted to superior
strength to enjoy with impunity the pleasure of the moment – women have only done the same…” (Vindication 37). She points out that men have submitted to kings, despite the widely accepted belief that kings are inferior to the average person in virtue and ability. There is no valid reason for this submission, and likewise one can make the same argument regarding women’s submission to men, “…till it is proved that the courtier, who servilely (sic) resigns the birthright of a man, is not a moral agent, it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated” (Vindication 37). For Wollstonecraft, this is not a woman’s condition only; this is a human condition. Men, also, have been made the slaves of undeserving monarchs. Thus, it is a characteristic of humanity, rather than of sex, to accept a subordinate position in order to gain power. Both aristocratic hierarchies and male dominance are arbitrary, not based in reason or merit, and both cause the corruption of character and inhibit virtue.

In Wollstonecraft’s view, arbitrary hierarchies of rank corrupt all classes and both sexes by creating ‘voluptuous tyrants and cunning envious dependents’. The main reason why rank is so corrupting is because respect is not accorded to individuals based on the fulfillment of their duties as human beings. This leads people to seek power at the expense of virtue. For men the situation is less dire than it is for women. Men can find cracks in the structure to break through in order to ‘think and act for himself; but for a woman it is a herculean task, because she has difficulties peculiar to her sex to overcome, which require almost superhuman powers” (Vindication 144). The task is more complicated for women because the only way to access power is through subordination. Women have been ‘duped’ into thinking that beauty will bring
them more power (*Vindication* 24). Instead of tending to their children, they tend to their beauty in order to “…obtain indirectly a little of that power of which they are unjustly denied a share” (*Vindication* 6). Thus, women, despite being subordinate, exercise what power they have through cunning, “…render[ing] both men and themselves vicious” (*Vindication* 6).

Women must contend with a much harsher social context, according to Wollstonecraft. Unlike men, women have fewer ‘cracks’ through which to escape the corrupting influence of power. For Wollstonecraft, it is this unequal context that explains most non-physical differences between men and women. She believes that physical differences are the only obvious natural differences between the sexes, and that capacities for virtue, enjoyment, and intellect are the same in both sexes. She writes, “I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behavior.” For Wollstonecraft, it is the artificial differences between the sexes that have been emphasized, producing women’s ‘weakness of character’. These false distinctions have inhibited women from cultivating their understanding, and from pursuing ‘heroic’ as opposed to ‘graceful’ virtues (*Vindication* 57).

While Wollstonecraft does not deny that there are physical differences between the sexes, she does not believe the extent of those differences is natural. She argues that it is impossible to know to what degree men are superior to women in terms of bodily strength, because women have not been permitted to exercise their bodies as fully as men have. She explains that women, educated to be weak with delicate sensibilities, soon become ‘objects of contempt’. It would be much better for women if they were to gain ‘strength, both of mind and body’ (*Vindication* 9). In her view, girls and women should be given the same opportunities to
develop their bodily strength in order to determine “how far the natural superiority…extends” (*Vindication* 95).\(^{17}\)

One of the first indictments of femininity, *Vindication* contends that in addition to women’s physical weakness, women’s socialization to be inferior also results in mental ignorance and superficiality. These traits are not natural aspects of the character of women (42). The faults of women are, she argues, “…the natural consequences of their education and station in society” (194). She connects women’s economic dependence to feminine socialization:

…told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of a man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives (19).

Women and men are equally susceptible to being corrupted by luxury, idleness and wealth. However, because women are excluded from developing their reason, they are dependent upon men to ‘guide their tottering steps’, meaning they must also be ‘slaves to their persons’ in order to attract the affections of men (145). Society is thus implicated in women’s oppression in two ways: first, women lack the opportunity to develop their reason and become more economically self-sufficient; second, society values wealth and charm above virtuous behaviour. Both work together to encourage women to cultivate characters that are contrary to virtue in order to

\(^{17}\) She writes that men’s superior strength is a, ‘noble prerogative’ (*Vindication* 8). It is likely she was being facetious, given her enlightenment rejection of the legitimacy of rule by force – the word noble alluding to arbitrary power under the feudal system, rather than virtue or excellence. Once more she compares the legitimacy of male dominance to the legitimacy of monarchs.
survive economically. Thus, Wollstonecraft draws a connection between women’s subordinate economic position and the flaws in their characters due to feminine socialization.

The responsibility for this harmful form of gendered socialization falls, for Wollstonecraft, on the lack of decent education. Education, understood broadly to encompass formal education as well as childhood socialization, introduces sex distinctions too early in life. If gender differences were not ‘inculcated’ so early in the minds of children, boys and girls would naturally play together as equals during the first years of life, until “…nature makes a difference” (Vindication 43). Presumably, Wollstonecraft is alluding to puberty, and arguing that girls and boys are not very different until this stage of development. She therefore disagrees with her contemporaries who argued that girls’ education should be different from boys’ because boys and girls are different, as evidenced by girls’ natural fondness for dress. She is unequivocal in her criticism of women’s natural femininity in this respect, writing that “[i]t is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power” (Vindication 28). Women’s quest for power through their beauty will continue, according to Wollstonecraft, until “mankind becomes more reasonable”. Like the rest of humanity, “…women will avail themselves of the power which they attain with the least exertion…” (Vindication 56). The flaws women’s rights opponents claim are inherent in women’s nature are actually the result of an unequal social context, Wollstonecraft maintains. The supposedly natural flaws in female character are actually evidence that women and men are similar in nature, in that both men and

18 Like Wollstonecraft, Thompson doesn’t believe that children naturally view the sexes as inherently different. This difference is taught, until “passions grow up within them”. He writes, “…children, if not perversely mis-directed, will see no more difference in each other than in differently drest dolls (sic), and their curiosity respecting each other would be attended with no more feeling or emotion than curiosity directed to any other object” (Inquiry 342).
women seek power in ways adapted to their social context. Women and men are similar in nature as evidenced by their power-seeking behaviour.

However, Wollstonecraft claims that this power-seeking situation is worse for women because they are not given the tools, the education in reason, in order to even recognize that they are oppressed. She considers women’s participation in their own oppression to be one of the main hurdles to improvement. They accepted it, or they agreed with it. In her estimation, women need to recognize that femininity is an artificial, or false form of womanhood that grants women only a fleeting form of power. Wollstonecraft is especially critical of the dominant understanding of femininity which, she argues, made women invest too much time and energy into becoming pleasing to men, primarily through their beauty and weakness. She argues that women are ‘exalted by their inferiority’, that they depend upon beauty for their sense of self-worth and this causes corruption and rotting of the soul and the intellect (Vindication 55). Through the inculcation of this damaging form of femininity, and its worship, women become creatures of sensation only, stripped of human virtue, and whatever power they gain through it is only short-lived. Thus, while this kind of femininity involves a striving for power, it is also an effect of an intense, and unjust, socialization process. She explains that this socialization occurs well before women are capable of understanding it; “…they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength” (Vindication 44). In addition to the lack of formal educational opportunities, the process of feminine socialization itself blocks women’s access to independent thought, preventing the development of their reasoning faculty in the first place. “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes
itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (*Vindication* 44). Women and men’s socialization is extremely different; men’s encourages them to look outside themselves in their activities with the world (*Vindication* 44). In contrast, women are imprisoned because they cannot perceive the importance of anything outside of their own bodily presentation, whereas in her view, the development of women’s ability to reason would free them from such concerns and enable them to become virtuous beings.

The consequences of this situation extend beyond the lives of individual women. Viewed as akin to aristocratic, feudal hierarchies, male domination and female subordination produce women with bad characters and constitutions who are unable to mother, according to Wollstonecraft. Women, trained to become both ‘weak and artificial,’ “…undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society…” (*Vindication* 9). For Wollstonecraft, women’s usefulness and happiness are both sacrificed when they become ‘intoxicated’ by the attention paid to beauty. Instead, women would be more useful, and happier, if they aimed toward properly discharging their duties as mothers (*Vindication* 142).
2.2 Argument from Good Motherhood

Wollstonecraft argues that women are not properly prepared to fulfill the duties of motherhood, and her criticisms of power and gender center on this claim. For Wollstonecraft, women are incapable of performing their domestic duties, because they are taught to obey their emotional impulses, rather than ordering their conduct and making decisions by using a developed sense of reason. Women, governed solely by their emotions, make bad mothers who tend to spoil their children because they are “…carried away by their feelings” (68). Wollstonecraft also argues that this is due to women’s oppression, including their internalized “…notions of passive obedience,” which prevent them from gaining the skills necessary for properly managing a family and educating children (35). Because women cannot think rationally, they are “slave[s] to prejudice” and whatever maternal affection they might exhibit is superficial, instead of being “enlightened”. This results in two extremes characteristic of bad mothering: spoiling or neglecting their children (151). “…[U]nless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly” (152). Independence of mind is required for women to be competent mothers; they cannot simply depend upon their husbands to make decisions. Women do not deserve independence solely because they are human beings (although they do deserve it for that reason) but also because virtuous motherhood is impossible without the capacity to think independently.

Wollstonecraft, then, uses women’s prescribed role as child-bearer and rearer to argue for women’s rational education. She argues that if women are only taught how to submit to their
husbands they will not be fit to raise children. A passive, weak, dependent being is not conducive to good motherhood, a role that requires the ability to make rational decisions. Wollstonecraft believes that the rearing of infants is woman’s proper ‘sphere’ and “whatever tends to incapacitate the maternal character, takes women out of her sphere” (Vindication 176-177). Thus, Wollstonecraft views the flaws of the family as originating primarily from women’s lack of education resulting in an inability to mother properly.

In her first Vindication (of the rights of men), Wollstonecraft argues that motherhood is woman’s duty under the social compact, including breastfeeding. She explains, “[w]omen would probably then act like mothers, and the fine lady, become a rational woman, might think it necessary to superintend her family and suckle her children, in order to fulfil her part of the social compact” (23, sic). Wealth and arbitrary rank, however, prevent wealthy women from fulfilling this role (23). For Wollstonecraft, breastfeeding is an important activity for mothers because it establishes a maternal, affectionate bond. In refusing to breastfeed their own children, which they often do to preserve their bodies for their husbands (an effect of their subordination), some women harm the familial bond.

Her parental affection … scarcely deserves the name, when it does not lead her to suckle her children, because the discharge of this duty is equally calculated to inspire maternal and filial affection: and it is the indispensable duty of men and women to fulfil the duties which give birth to affections that are the surest preservatives against vice. Natural affection, as it is termed, I believe to be a very faint tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy; and what sympathy does a mother exercise who sends her babe to a nurse, and only takes it from a nurse to send it to school (Vindication 152)?
Thus, Wollstonecraft emphasizes the need for women to be independent from men in order to become virtuous and good wives and mothers. “Whilst they are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean, and selfish…”. Society ought to be organized such that each willingly accepts their duties of life in order to gain respect from their peers, which is a universal human desire. As society is organized, more respect is paid to wealth and charm, lessening the chances for virtue and affection to take hold (Vindication 141).

2.3 Wollstonecraft’s Proposals

Wollstonecraft is most famous for her proposal to educate women to strengthen both their minds and their bodies. Education ought to aim to enable an individual to become independent and virtuous. Virtue requires the use of independent, developed reason (Vindication 21). Wollstonecraft also argued for other civil rights for women, including increased economic opportunities. The main limitations to these proposals are that they remain largely gendered; women will not have the same citizenship rights or duties as men – women’s independence is in some ways compromised by the requirements of virtue. Wollstonecraft’s proposals are also limited in that class inequality among women is not adequately addressed, and in many ways, it is maintained.

Wollstonecraft understood femininity to be an effect of male dominance and also a problematic strategy employed by women to gain the only power available to them. This resulted in a corruption of women’s characters, their inability to fulfill their duties as mothers,
and worked to spread corruption throughout society. For Wollstonecraft, if the early education of girls did not emphasize the damaging aspects of femininity, such as irrational fear, physical weakness, dietary restrictions, and customization to confinement, “…we should quickly see women with more dignified aspects” (Vindication 62). By education, Wollstonecraft includes what we now call socialization, and she calls on parents to refuse to socialize their daughters in femininity. She writes that parents ought “…not to destroy the constitution by mistaken notions of beauty and female excellence; nor should girls ever be allowed to imbibe the pernicious notion that a defect can, by any chemical process of reasoning, become an excellence.” Only parents who do not believe that girls were created to become the sexual and domestic servants of men will endeavour to properly educate their daughters (Vindication 40). A more equal and rational education would grant women greater respect in society, and would enable them to “discharge the important duties of life by the light of their own reason”. Thus, against Rousseau, Wollstonecraft argues that women ought to be educated such that they gain self-government, rather than power over men (Vindication 62). Not only for women’s sake, but also for the sake of humanity in terms of knowledge and virtue, women must receive a more rational education (Vindication 40). She reiterates: “…make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives, and mothers; that is – if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and father” (Vindication 178).

Throughout Vindication she makes two arguments to advance the idea that women should receive a decent education. The first is that they are entitled to an equal education because they, like men, are rational human beings. Second, she argues that if women were given
equal education with men they would become better mothers. Wollstonecraft called for the establishment of a national education system of day schools. Until the age of nine, Wollstonecraft proposes that both sexes would be improved if they were educated together (rather than segregated by sex) in public schools, where they would learn how to be friends from a young age, improving the quality of marriage relationships (165). Wollstonecraft does not simply wish boys and girls to be educated together, but boys and girls of all classes, subject to the same discipline, and wearing the same clothing. This would have been a very radical proposal in her time, when education was segregated along the lines of class and sex for all ages of children.

Wollstonecraft’s proposal to achieve a more virtuous state of affairs includes more than an education that enables women to exercise their reason to become respectable and gain independence of character (*Vindication* 51). Women also need to be able to enjoy basic civil rights. These rights will secure to women the freedom necessary to become virtuous in the discharge of their duties (*Vindication* 175). Wollstonecraft thought women should be admitted to certain professions. She argues that healthcare is an appropriate subject for women to study, to enable them to become nurses and even doctors. Women should also continue to be midwives, but she notes concern with the trend of male physicians taking over this role (*Vindication* 148). They could also be business owners, which might help ‘save many from common and legal prostitution’. Here, she means not only prostitution, but also marrying for security (a woman’s

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19 Jennifer Lorch argues that Wollstonecraft argued for separate educations for girls and boys in order to protect certain professions from male co-optation, which is what led to the demise of midwifery (87).
own or her family’s). She explains, “[w]omen would not then marry for a support, as men accept of places under government, and neglect the implied duties…” (Vindication 148). Thus with increased economic opportunities, women would experience less coercion to marry; with more opportunities marriage could become closer to a choice.

Wollstonecraft lists the responsibilities of a wife and mother, which include managing the family, educating her children, and helping her neighbours (in addition to breastfeeding) (Vindication 146). Housekeeping and other domestic chores would be the duty of a working class woman in her own home (Vindication 75), but a woman with means might want to hire a servant to do these tasks (Vindication 142). While she says relatively little on the subject, she hints that a good husband and father would be one who does not frequent prostitutes or commit adultery (Vindication 11, 65) and who provides for the family (Vindication 142). Wollstonecraft views the ideal spousal partnership as one where love is gradually replaced with friendship, built upon mutual respect and esteem between the husband and wife (Vindication 72). This relationship of mutual respect is not possible, she argues, because women are not respectable beings. Since true affection requires respect, marriage cannot as pretended, be an affectionate relationship (Vindication...Men 22). Wollstonecraft’s ideal middle-class familial situation is one where the mother and wife nurses her own children and manages the household with the help of a servant, thus creating a happy scene for her husband upon his return home from work. She describes both the wife and the husband as independent in the relationship, with their independence connected to their fulfillment of ‘the respective duties of their station’. The only items she believes might improve this situation is ‘a taste for literature’ to stimulate their

20 Legal prostitution is a euphemism for marriage arranged for economic security.
conversations, and extra money to enable them to donate to charity and to purchase books (Vindication 142).

2.4 Limitations in Wollstonecraft’s Proposals

Compared to the proposals outlined in the later feminist works of the period, Appeal and Subjection, Wollstonecraft advocates more modest reforms. Most contemporary scholarship on Wollstonecraft’s feminist political theory acknowledges that her critiques and proposals were radical for their time, and that her work has instructive limitations. Perhaps the main limitation highlighted by contemporary scholars is that her proposals maintain a gendered public/private dichotomy. Wollstonecraft’s argument for women’s freedom and self-government is weakened by her belief that women’s virtue is tied to the performance of her duties in the private sphere (Abbey, MacKenzie, Gatens, Eisenstein, Brace). Moreover, Wollstonecraft’s proposals are limited to increasing, rather than equalizing, access to education and opportunities outside the home. She assumes advanced education is the province of the wealthy classes, with the exception of extremely talented working class children. Moreover, boys and girls were to have separate education beyond the age of nine. Additionally, while in favor of moral equality between persons, and against arbitrary hierarchies, she did not find class inequality, in itself, as problematic. In what follows I will consider these points in turn.
2.4.1 Women’s Virtue, Independence, and Self-government are too narrowly defined

Wollstonecraft justifies women’s civil rights and access to education by arguing that these are necessary for women to become virtuous in the fulfillment of their duties as women. For Wollstonecraft, if women are granted civil rights, including a decent education, and provided with freedom to develop and use their own reason, they can become virtuous citizens by understanding and accepting their ‘natural’ duties as good wives and mothers. This is clearly problematic because in granting women a degree of freedom she also connects women’s virtue to their ability to bear, suckle, and rear their children. She argues that wives are currently not qualified to be citizens because, “[t]he wife, in the present state of things, who is faithful to her husband, and neither suckles nor educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of a wife, and has no right to that of a citizen.” But take away natural rights, and duties become null” (Vindication 146). Because women, as wives and presumably otherwise, do not have civil rights, including the right to develop their reason, they can have no duties, including those attached to the role of wife. Until women receive these rights, they cannot be held responsible for their lack of virtue. Civil rights would grant women the freedom necessary to be moral beings, but with specific duties determined by the individual’s sex.

Men and women are defined and determined by their bodily difference and held to different standards of virtue. The problem with this approach is that women who do not live up to this narrow understanding of virtue will ultimately face some sort of sanction, either social or

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21 As I discuss below, this line of argument might have been strategic given her context.
22 Because Wollstonecraft tends to collapse women with wives and men with husbands, it is unclear whether unmarried men and unmarried, childless women would also have different duties depending on their sex.
Moira Gatens explains, “Wollstonecraft’s tendency to treat the role of wife/mother/domestic worker as one which flows directly from women’s biology raises further problems for a feminist analysis of women’s social and political status” (Gatens, “The Oppressed” 114, 1991). Indeed, Wollstonecraft re-iterates her view that women will have different citizenship duties by explaining that with freedom and a decent education, women would become, “…more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens” (Vindication 150). Equal independence between men and women is not possible with Wollstonecraft’s proposal because women are still in many ways confined as subordinate in the private sphere.

While Wollstonecraft makes arguments in favor of women’s access to self-government and against paternalism, these arguments still limit women’s freedom in comparison to men’s. She argues that because women, like men, are endowed with reason, when men argue for their liberty they are acting unjustly if they also do not fight for the equal freedom of women. She writes,

> [c]onsider, I address you as a legislator, whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness? Who made men the exclusive judge, if women partake with him the gift of reason? (Vindication 5).

The problem is that she holds a very narrow understanding of self-government and independence for women. Wollstonecraft’s major contribution is an argument for women’s equality grounded in the idea that women are human beings who can reason. Her understanding is that reason
leads to virtue. Virtue involves recognizing, accepting, and willingly performing one’s duties – or performing one’s duties for reasons one accepts. Because women’s bodies have the capacity to reproduce, they have different duties than men. This, however, leads her to argue for women’s independence based on the contradictory notion of performing and accepting sex-ascribed duties. For Wollstonecraft, the natural biological differences between men and women give rise to different sex-determined duties, that for her it would be unreasonable and against virtue to reject. This is contradictory because, in itself, the idea of women’s independence precludes women’s (and men’s) freedom of self-government by determining, in advance, their occupations and life paths.\footnote{Importantly, Wollstonecraft did not advocate legal limits on women’s freedom, nor did she assume women would want to mother and care. Her argument was that developing women’s reason would lead them to see that being a good wife and mother was their duty. She also connected this to women’s citizenship. As we will see below, Wollstonecraft’s independent woman is also both socially and structurally coerced. Ideas of virtuous motherhood coupled with a lack of compensation for domestic and reproductive work maintain both working and middle class women’s inequality.} Laura Brace explains it this way: Wollstonecraft’s proposed reforms fail to challenge women’s subordination; they still make “…participation – heterosexuality, motherhood, domesticity – compulsory … women are [still] forced into ‘rational subjection’” (454).

One of the main problems of Wollstonecraft’s 	extit{Vindication} is the way she balances women’s freedom and happiness with the freedom and happiness of the community – given that women and their bodies are necessary for the reproduction of the community, and somebody must undertake the duties of care and domestic chores. For Wollstonecraft the balance is struck by assigning these duties to women. Eisenstein argues this is the main problem with Wollstonecraft’s work: her acceptance of separate public and private spheres. The gendered
separation of these spheres dictates that women must not only reproduce children, but are also responsible for child rearing. This is problematic, Eisenstein explains, because capitalism (in its early formation when Wollstonecraft was writing) “…does not recognize the activity as economically rewarding or socially necessary…” Thus while Wollstonecraft was critical of women’s economic dependence, her proposal would keep that dependence largely intact (103). Wollstonecraft emphasizes the negative consequences for a community’s well being when women do not properly fulfill the ‘duties of their sex’: widespread vice throughout the community. Of course, mandating that women perform their ‘natural’ duties poses problems for both the equal humanity of women, and the freedom we would want to grant to women by virtue of their equal membership in humanity. In mandating biologically imperative duties on women, Wollstonecraft fails to recognize and grant women full equality with men. We will see that Mill’s *Subjection* also struggles with this issue, and for similar reasons he is also unable to provide a proposal that would equalize freedom and well being for women with men.

### 2.4.2 Education and Class Inequalities

Wollstonecraft was concerned with improving access to education and opportunities for all citizens, men and women, rich and poor. She was not, however, an egalitarian in the liberal sense of advocating equality of opportunity, or even equal and identical educational opportunities between girls and boys. Instead, Wollstonecraft thought material and educational realities could be improved for all, without being equalized. Thus, she acknowledged the damaging effects of early gendered education, but viewed gender streaming at advanced levels
as unproblematic. Moreover, she saw no problem with poor children having fewer educational opportunities than wealthy ones. While clearly aware and sympathetic to the plight of the poor, Wollstonecraft did not challenge class inequalities, including inequalities among women.

Without diminishing what would have been an extremely radical stand, that all classes of children and both sexes be educated together, it is important to acknowledge that Wollstonecraft’s proposal re-introduces class inequality for students at age nine, as well as advocating a gendered curriculum. She explains that,

…after the age of nine, girls and boys, intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades, ought to be removed to other schools, and receive instruction … the two sexes being still together in the morning; but in the afternoon, the girls should attend a school, where plain-work, mantua-making, millinery, &c. would be their employment. The young people of superior abilities, or fortune, might now be taught, in another school, the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and continue the study of history and politics, on a more extensive scale… (Vindication 168).

For Wollstonecraft, girls’ education ought to be geared towards their main task in life, as mothers and wives. Here, girls should learn basic anatomy and medicine, in order to preserve their own health, but also to enable them to be better nurses to their own children, parents, and husbands (Vindication 177). 24 This is an important limitation in her work: the maintenance of

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24 At the time, middle-class girls were normally educated within the home by parents or a governess, and sometimes they would go to ‘a small private school, usually managed by middle-class women’ (Purvis, 53). Working class girls, when able to go to school, might attend “…dame schools, charity schools, day schools of the British and Foreign School Society… and of the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, Sunday schools and industrial schools (Purvis, 61-62). The content of middle-class girls’ curriculum “…tended to stress ornamental knowledge that might attract a husband” (Purvis, 53). Working class girls were taught basic skills such as “…reading, writing,
these class and gender distinctions in education, particularly in light of her rejection of arbitrary hierarchies.

Beyond the question of inequality between men and women, scholars also point out Wollstonecraft’s maintenance of inequality among women. According to Laura Brace, Wollstonecraft “…fails to recognize that the tensions between motherhood and citizenship affect middle-class and working-class women in different ways” (435). Wollstonecraft did, however, recognize differences between working class women and those of the middle to upper class. She simply did not view the distinction, and the inequality between women that would be maintained, as problematic. For instance, she writes, “…though I consider that women in the common walks of life are called to fulfil the duties of wives and mothers, by religion and reason, I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence” (Vindication 146-147, sic). Wollstonecraft, then, finds it more problematic that women of privilege are confined to their homes, than that ‘common’ women must become wives and mothers, as well as presumably working in some employment, whether inside as piecework, outside the home. She would have known that most women did have to work, usually in menial jobs in addition to their activities as wives and mothers. She also recognizes that only privileged women will be able to properly balance the duties of wife and mother while enjoying other opportunities. She does see that

and practical, utilitarian skills such as plain sewing and knitting”. Their education sought to prepare them to work in their own homes, as well as within certain sectors of wage labor such as dress making. Historians agree that the quality of the education was very low as illiteracy rates for working class women was quite high at the time (Purvis, 62).
inequality between classes of women exists; she simply does not consider this class inequality as a problem to be solved (at least not in *Vindication*).

While poor women are destined to be mothers and wives, she argues that they also must be employed in order to be virtuous, and that middle-class women should employ them instead of using their extra funds to buy products to satisfy their vanity. She writes,

> [t]o render the poor virtuous they must be employed, and women in the middle rank of life, did they not ape the fashions of the nobility, without catching their ease, might employ them, whilst they themselves managed their families, instructed their children, and exercised their own minds (*Vindication* 75).

While Wollstonecraft ignores the issue of inequality between poor and middle class women in their ability to fulfill their motherly and wifely duties, she does show some sensitivity to the way middle class women treat women of lower classes. In particular, she is critical of the way middle-class women treat their domestic servants (*Vindication* 190). Wollstonecraft places the blame for the abuse of power domestic servants experience on the lack of education afforded to middle-class women. She writes that because of the uncultivated status of their minds,

> …they are always tyrannizing to support a superiority that only rests on the arbitrary distinction of fortune. The evil is sometimes more serious, and domestics are deprived of innocent indulgences, and made to work beyond their strength, in order to enable the notable woman to keep a better table, and outshine her neighbours in finery and parade (*Vindication* 66).  

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25 Wollstonecraft was also critical of the disrespect paid to governesses, who are normally less respected than male tutors, who are also often disrespected (*Vindication* 148).
It is clear in this example that Wollstonecraft was aware of the class differences among women, however, she did not concern herself with the way her solution would play out for these different classes. As previously noted, her concern in this book is middle-class women (Vindication 9).

For Wollstonecraft, arbitrary hierarchies are damaging to reason because humanity has a propensity to abuse whatever power it is accorded over others. She argues that “…the more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society” (Vindication 16). Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft does not elaborate on the extent of equality she believes is necessary, although based on her acceptance of domestic maids for middle-class women, and her emphasis on the harm caused by arbitrary hierarchies (such as aristocratic ones, or those developed by chance of birth), it is unlikely that she considered economic inequality in itself as something that had to be remedied. While recognizing the radical elements in Wollstonecraft’s feminism, Susan Ferguson argues that Wollstonecraft’s assumption that the class system and nuclear family are both natural and good, “…leave[] her no strategy for the emancipation of working-class women” (432).<sup>26</sup> While she understood the hardship faced by those disenfranchised by the prevailing social and economic systems at the time, she blamed unjust laws and inadequate education, and did not find faults with the emerging capitalist economic system itself.

While Wollstonecraft admits that Vindication focuses on the middle-class, “because they appear to be in the most natural state” (9), her last, unfinished, fictional novel, The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria (Maria) she addresses the issue of poverty and the injustice experienced by  

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<sup>26</sup> Ferguson points out that William Thompson was the first feminist to offer a structural critique of society that, unlike Wollstonecraft’s, questioned “…the very existence of class and family as institutions” (450).
working class women. The main character, Maria is a middle class woman and mother of an infant, who was committed to an asylum by her husband. Maria befriends an asylum attendant, Jemima, who recounts her life story. Jemima’s story illustrates Wollstonecraft’s awareness of the difficulties poor women experienced. At the same time, Wollstonecraft may have intended to demonstrate that her earlier proposals could ameliorate the situation of all women, for general class inequality and economic inequality among women remains unchallenged.

The first aspect of Jemima’s tragic life story is the loss of her mother. Jemima confides to Maria that her mother died when she was nine days old, after which her father left her with “…the cheapest nurse [he] could find”. “…[T]he feminine caresses which seem a part of the rearing of a child, [were] never bestowed on me. … Left in dirt, to cry with cold and hunger till I was weary, and sleep without ever being prepared by exercise, or lulled by kindness to rest; could I be expected to become anything but a weak and rickety babe?” (92-93). Jemima was next returned to her father’s house when he remarried, and there she experienced severe physical punishments, slavery-like conditions, and a lack of proper meals. Wollstonecraft highlights the importance of motherhood and the mother-child bond through the story of Jemima’s early childhood history. Jemima, in analyzing her own situation, considers it caused by “…the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life – a mother’s affection. I had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect’” (95). Jemima not only lost her biological mother, she then became the victim of an abusive stepmother.

Lacking a virtuous mother to protect her interests, Jemima was left on the street after
having been raped and impregnated by the master of the house where she was working as a servant (97). She obtained an abortion by drinking poison, and became a thief and a street prostitute. Eventually she found work in a brothel, and was invited to move into the house of an older man as a housekeeper, where she began to read and was introduced to the ‘literary friends’ of her masters who visited on occasion (99-100). After this man died, she was left once more on the streets. Wollstonecraft uses this situation to criticize the idea that if one wants employment, one will have employment, thus unemployment and poverty are the responsibility of the poor and unemployed. Jemima wrote to one of her former master’s friends, requesting help, and he replied to her stating “…the woman who could write such a letter…could never be in want of resources, were she to look into herself, and exert her powers; misery was the consequence of indolence, and as to my being shut out from society, it was the lot of man to submit to certain privations”. Jemima then expresses frustration at the idea that “…every person willing to work may find employment…” (102).

Jemima then explains that due to unequal opportunities for women, she had to accept housekeeping work. She worked 19 hours every day for very little money. Although happy to be employed, she also recognized that,

…this was a wretchedness of situation peculiar to my sex. A man with half my industry, and, I may say, abilities, could have procured a decent livelihood, and discharged some of the duties which knit mankind together; whilst I, who had acquired a taste for the rational nay, … the virtuous enjoyments of life, was cast aside as the filth of society. Condemned to labor, like a machine, only to earn bread, and scarcely that…” (103-104).

Injury then left Jemima unable to continue her work, and she was once more on the streets
working as a thief and a beggar, and eventually she wound up in prison, and then in a workhouse, and was eventually invited, by the overseer of the workhouse, to work in his “private receptacle for madness” (106).

Maria, the main character of the story who was a prisoner in this asylum – sent by her abusive husband - also had an infant daughter. Wollstonecraft brings this part of the story home to middle-class readers who may have also been wives and mothers – Maria could not help but worry that her own daughter would end up suffering the same fate as Jemima, as Maria was forcefully separated from her when she was committed.

Thinking of Jemima’s peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of women, and to lament that she had given birth to a daughter. …sympathy with Jemima changed to agony, when it seemed probable that her own babe might even now be in the very state [Jemima] so forcefully described (107).

Here, Wollstonecraft is calling on middle class women to recognize their own as well as their daughters’ vulnerability to economic hardship, caused by a lack of basic rights, including education and economic opportunities.

While Maria shows that she had sympathy for working-class women, it also illuminates the limitations of her approach more generally. In describing the unjust situation of a working-class supporting character named Jemima, it does not provide any concrete proposals for change. The stated purpose of the book is not to provide a proposal, but rather to “[exhibit] the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (67). She also states that she intends to “…show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various” (68).
Through Jemima Wollstonecraft explains her understanding of the particular problems faced by women who find themselves impoverished. The first problem for Jemima was the lack of a mother and a mother’s love. Secondly, she was denied a decent education when she was in childhood and because of this she had no skills and thus no opportunities when she was thrown out of her home and into the streets. Third, once she did receive an education, because of her sex she was denied economic opportunities related to the skill she had acquired (reading and writing). This fits well with the arguments in the *Vindication*, that mothers love combined with education and civil rights for women should solve the problem of middle-class women’s lack of virtue. Working class girls will be educated to acquire a trade or to perform domestic work for middle class women, and those women will have developed enough reason to treat them well as servants. The only mention in this book of wealth redistribution from the wealthy to the poor was the obligation to give and perform charity (106).

Although Wollstonecraft is clearly sympathetic to the suffering of poor women, she doesn’t see the economy as playing a role in creating much of the hardship Jemima had to experience. Wollstonecraft does not propose changes to the economic system itself, except to remove laws that prevent women from participating in certain professions. Thus, while not ignoring wealth inequality, her proposal does not rectify this particular power imbalance. Economic differences between women are not considered problematic because, unlike Thompson and Wheeler, Wollstonecraft does not view the emerging capitalist system as problematic. As we will see, by politicizing the economic and domestic spheres Thompson and Wheeler come closer to overcoming the limitations in Wollstonecraft’s proposals.
2.4.3 Are the Limitation in Wollstonecraft’s Proposals Strategic?

As noted, one of the main limitations in Wollstonecraft’s proposal was not recognizing the injustice in prescribing duties based on sex and gender. Although, to her credit, she believes that women needed the ability to reason in order to adopt, autonomously, their duties, perhaps Wollstonecraft was implicitly and strategically using a duties and virtues argument to justify greater autonomy for women. Making a plea for greater equality by emphasizing that the result would be better wives and mothers may have been a strategic choice intended to deflect cultural anxiety about extending rights to women. For Wollstonecraft, the first commitment a woman has is to herself and her own reason. While she suggests increasing women’s access to education, and therefore providing them with the opportunity to use their reason, will lead them to recognize their natural duties, there is no way she could be sure of this. Notably, she did believe that educating women to become more reasonable would enable them to resist patriarchal power relations. For instance, she argues that educated wives will not readily submit to their husbands, or to social laws that deny their personhood (Vindication 177). Her plea that women be educated for more than marriage is couched in an argument that this type of education will enable women to better bear with the negative aspects of the private sphere. She laments that the uneducated and newly married find that they do not have the ability to cope with the relationship and its demands. She uses this social critique to argue that women should be taught to look beyond marriage,

..to acquire the qualities that ennoble a rational being, and a rough inelegant husband may shock her taste without destroying her peace of mind. She will not model her soul to suit the frailties of her companion, but to bear with them: his character may be a trial,
but not an impediment to virtue (Vindication 32).

In *The Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft gives us a hint that some of her arguments in *Vindication* might have been a strategic. She writes,

…why a woman should be expected to endure a sloven, with more patience than a man, and magnanimously to govern herself, I cannot conceive; unless it be supposed arrogant in her to look for respect as well as maintenance. It is not easy to be pleased, because, after promising to love, in different circumstances, we are told that it is our duty (130).

Indeed two other factors, her personal life and her social and political context, might lead us to think Wollstonecraft held more radical views than those she published.

Wollstonecraft led an unconventional life for a lower-middle class woman. In her early years she witnessed the economic downfall of her own family, experienced the injustice of any remaining wealth being handed to her eldest brothers, and developed a disdain for patriarchal marriage relationships by witnessing her own parents’ relationship: a father who dominated over her submissive mother (Todd, 1-2). Wollstonecraft became a companion to an upper-class maid in Bath where she was dissatisfied with her subordinate position (Todd, 3). It was perhaps here where she became witness to the frivolities she criticizes in privileged women. Wollstonecraft left this position in order to return home to care for her dying mother. Eventually, with her sister and her good friend Fanny Blood, she established a school for girls in Newington Green, which afforded her the opportunity to associate with a group of dissenters residing there, including Richard Price. Surrounding herself with liberal minded reformists she was, “…provided … with a framework of ideas into which her own experiences could fit. She came to see her personal
struggle for independence as part of a larger political struggle…” (Todd, 4). She published a book called *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and the success of this book led her to eventually accept employment in London as a translator and reviewer for the journal *Analytic Review*. While working for this publication, she began friendships with Tom Paine, William Blake, and William Godwin, all prominent radical thinkers of the time (Todd, 6). Despite having what appear in her writing to be conventional views on marriage and family life, Wollstonecraft herself deviated from these norms. While in France, she fell in love and bore a child out of wedlock (Todd, 13). Following a period of desperation, heartbreak, and suicide attempts related to her relationship with the child’s father, Wollstonecraft rekindled a friendship with William Godwin that developed into an intimate relationship. Wollstonecraft became pregnant and the two were married secretly. When this was revealed, it garnered the couple much scorn for they had both professed openly their rejection of the institution of marriage (Todd, 15). Thus, in her personal life Wollstonecraft did not adhere to the public/private divide that is maintained in her political writings on women’s rights. It may be that the conservative elements of her writing were intended to make her proposals for education and civil rights more palatable and therefore more likely to be adopted.

Wollstonecraft’s work was written and published during the French Revolution, and the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was written in response to the newly elected legislative assembly’s plan to provide education for boys but not for girls. Todd writes that Wollstonecraft’s intent, in writing *Vindication* was to “…influence French events in favor of women” (10). It is important to keep in mind the radical nature of Wollstonecraft’s proposals.
While many of these proposals do not challenge the gendered public/private divide – for example, men remain the primary income earners, and if women do work outside the home, whether by choice or out of necessity, they are still solely and ultimately responsible for the unpaid, unrecognized domestic work – other proposals, such as providing an equal education to boys and girls, and extending to women civil rights, including greater economic opportunities, would certainly break a path towards more extensive changes in favor of equality.

On the surface of her writings, there are four main limitations in Wollstonecraft’s feminist political thought. The first is imposing duties on women due to their biology and historic role as nurturers. The second is not recognizing that these prescribed duties will maintain women’s subordination in the private sphere. The third is not seeing the role of the emerging economy in fostering the oppression of working class women, and not critically analyzing class hierarchies among women. The fourth is not making an argument for equal political rights. Wollstonecraft did not make an argument against political rights, in fact she suggested, cautiously, that women might be permitted to have their own representatives. Anticipating her audience’s reaction, she writes the following about women’s political rights:

I may excite laughter, by dropping a hint, which I mean to pursue, some future time, for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government (*Vindication* 146).

She dismisses this proposal, arguing that women ought not complain when “hard working mechanics” pay taxes to royalty and have little left to feed their children (*Vindication* 147). Thompson and Wheeler’s work moves beyond these four limitations, with varying levels of
adequacy. In addition to recognizing the importance of education and economic opportunities, unlike Wollstonecraft’s proposals, these are to be equalized for all regardless of gender. Their work also offers a comprehensive argument in favour of women’s political rights and against the view that civil rights are sufficient. Perhaps most radically, Thompson and Wheeler point out that the capitalist economic system disadvantages women in comparison to men, for it is women who must perform reproductive work, which is important for the happiness of all, yet is performed without reward or compensation.

2.5 Conclusion

Wollstonecraft’s criticism of women’s subordination, including their lack of both a decent education and economic opportunities, represents a radical indictment of her social and political context. Perhaps the strongest argument she makes in favor of understanding women’s equal personhood with men is demonstrating that women and men are equal in their ability to develop and use their reason to become virtuous, and are also equal in their susceptibility to power. This understanding of women and men forms the basis for her strong intellectual argument against feminine socialization practices and in favor of improvements to women’s education to enable their independence. At the same time, the case she makes for women’s independence includes their subordination to cultural understandings of women’s biological duties to the community and the family. Moreover, Wollstonecraft’s critique of hierarchy and her proposal to ameliorate women’s situation did not fundamentally alter class distinctions or
hierarchies among women. While critical of the conditions of working class women, her proposals could not grant full independence and an equal chance of happiness to most working and middle class women.

In the introduction to *Appeal*, Thompson acknowledges the book’s debt to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*: “…that neglected banner which a woman’s hand nearly thirty years ago unfolded boldly, in face of the prejudices of thousands of years, and for which a woman’s heart bled, and her life was all but the sacrifice…” (vii). At the same time, Thompson indicates that Wheeler had more ‘comprehensiveness of mind’ than Wollstonecraft, whose “narrow views … too often marred [her] pages and narrowed their usefulness”. In contrast, Thompson characterizes Wheeler as having “…the eye which no prejudice obscured, open to the rays of truth from whatever quarter they might emanate” (*Appeal* vii). Barbara Cain is critical of Thompson’s nod to and criticism of Wollstonecraft’s feminism in *Appeal’s* introduction. She uses Thompson as a prime example of male philosophers dismissing feminist contributions, writing that his “…only comment on Wollstonecraft was a pitying one, referring her to martyrdom – a comment which fitted well with his overall depiction of women as absolutely enslaved and pitiful and hence as unable to resist in any effective way their oppression”. For Cain, Thompson had sympathy for women but failed to recognize women’s agency and autonomy (56). Unfortunately, Cain does not consider the possibility that Wheeler may have been the main critic of Wollstonecraft’s work (as noted in Chapter 1, Thompson indicates the book is a transcription of Wheeler’s ideas). In any case, she provides no reasons why Thompson should not articulate criticism of Wollstonecraft’s feminism, especially given that *Appeal* is
more comprehensive in its analysis and proposals for change. Furthermore, Thompson is not comparing his own intellectual accomplishments with Wollstonecraft’s but comparing Wheeler’s.

Further evidence of Wollstonecraft’s influence can be found in Wheeler’s daughter Rosina Bulwer-Lytton’s memoirs. Bulwer-Lytton laments that her mother was “…strongly tainted by the … poison of Mrs. Wollstonecraft’s book…” (quoted in Dooley, *Equality* 59). Clearly, on the woman question, Thompson and Wheeler were greatly influenced by Wollstonecraft, even though they considered her views too narrow.

As we will see, Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism more adequately resolves the problems identified by Wollstonecraft: those concerning education, gender, and women’s equal place in humanity. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Thompson and Wheeler do not believe that duties are a biological imperative. Their understanding of independence is tied to the interests of individual women themselves, rather than to their biology or traditional role as caregiver in the private realm. Their more socialist feminism provided a stronger critique of women’s subordination in the private sphere and a stronger justification for women’s independence on their own terms as individuals. Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of the effects of power are similar to Wollstonecraft’s, but by politicizing the economy and the private sphere their proposals are not limited to legal and educational reforms that might maintain class distinctions, and therefore, unjust hierarchies among women as well as between men and women.

One important aspect of Wollstonecraft’s theory on gender inequality that we see again in Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* is the idea that character is shaped by power. The next
chapter explains that Thompson and Wheeler share Robert Owen’s understanding of character as entirely socially produced. Wollstonecraft’s main criticism of her society was that women were socialized into femininity and that they were inadequately educated, and therefore unschooled in virtue. Her solution largely addresses this. While Wollstonecraft would like to see wives (middle class) and mothers become less economically dependent on their husbands (achieved through greater opportunities for employment), their dependence upon a man will to some degree continue (even if her husband is virtuous, he still has more power, economically, socially, and politically). It is therefore likely that some negative aspects of femininity and feminine socialization will remain intact under her vision. Wollstonecraft recognized that women’s equality necessitated a broader context of equality, including at least hinting at a greater degree of economic equality by eliminating arbitrary rank. Thompson and Wheeler take up her cause, but argue that access to education and equal civil rights are not enough. Women also need equal political rights, equal opportunities and educations, and compensation for reproductive labor.
Chapter 3: Human Nature, Happiness, and Utilitarianism

In Chapter 2 we saw the outlines of Mary Wollstonecraft’s groundbreaking feminist thought, including her insights into gender inequality, and some limitations that are widely recognized in contemporary feminist political thought. Chapter 4 will explore in greater detail the ways Thompson and Wheeler address the limitations of Wollstonecraft’s feminist thought, and move beyond it. These chapters focus on Thompson and Wheeler’s insights into gender equality and the empowerment of women by recognizing and compensating reproductive and domestic labor, and by radically extending democracy to social institutions such as the family and the economy.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the philosophical underpinnings of Thompson and Wheeler’s writings. Their feminist proposals are grounded in a particular view of human nature and character formation and are justified using a broadly utilitarian ethical framework. Thompson and Wheeler share with other utilitarian theorists the understanding that the primary principle of human nature is governed by “...the desire for happiness and aversion to misery” but argue that all other character traits are conditioned by social context (13). Far from being a conservative influence, the chapter also argues that utilitarianism enables their progressive analysis.

Their utilitarian approach is progressive because it is indirect or objective and comprehensive; it understands preferences and character as socially constructed; and it emphasizes the impact economic distribution has on the ability of a community to maximize
happiness. Contemporary scholarship distinguishes various types of utilitarianism, including act vs. rule and indirect vs. direct. It is difficult to determine which of these labels would apply to Thompson since these theoretical distinctions were not available at the time of his writings. Dooley characterizes Thompson’s utilitarianism as *indirect* because this form of utilitarianism,

…takes the principle of utility as a general standard of evaluation and uses it in such a way that appraisals do not primarily apply directly to specific actions but the standard of promoting happiness pertains to all considerations governing conduct. This includes social rules, attitudes, dispositions, sentiments which make us do one thing rather than another (*Equality* 124).

In Dooley’s reading, Thompson’s utilitarianism is clearly more aligned with what contemporary political theorists understand as ‘rule utilitarianism’ (as opposed to ‘act utilitarianism’). Rather than applying the principle of utility to actions directly, for Dooley, Thompson focuses on the rules of institutions and the cultivation of dispositions. For Thompson, to apply the principle directly to actions could decrease rather than increase utility because it could increase insecurity. For instance, although concerned with aggregate happiness, Thompson would not sanction the denial of any individual’s equal rights even if, in granting them, overall happiness is increased. The reason is human security; the denial of equal liberty to any individual leads to widespread insecurity regarding the violability of the equal liberties of each (*Equality* 213).²⁷

Apart from the question of the structure of their principle, there is also the issue of how they understood “utility”. Bentham had argued that it referred to the balance of subjective

²⁷ Furthermore, in situations where there are power imbalances, Thompson does not endorse powerful parties making decisions on behalf of the disenfranchised, for a powerful position inhibits impartiality in judging interests (Dooley, *Equality* 213).
pleasure over pain. In contrast, Mark Kaswan argues that Thompson understood utility to mean objective well being. Instead of asking individuals how satisfied they are with their lives in order to measure happiness, proponents of ‘objective well being’ examine “…the general conditions of people’s lives – for example, whether their basic needs are met, and the quality of their social interactions” (28).

Their method of applying utilitarianism is also comprehensive because they apply the approach to all social institutions, including those traditionally viewed as natural, eternal, or outside the realm of the political. For them, the economy and the family are not natural institutions; they must be scrutinized and changed if necessary to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Because they also believe that character is shaped by power relations within social institutions, and that negative characters (malevolent, antipathetic) are fostered within institutions structured through inequality and arbitrary hierarchies, their utilitarianism is not limited to merely measuring the preferences of individuals, but asks what kind of preferences individuals would have in various conditions, concluding that social pleasures (benevolence and sympathy) should be fostered in order to increase the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The chapter concludes by responding to the criticism that Thompson’s utilitarianism was ultimately a conservative influence on his work and argues, to the contrary, that utilitarianism that takes women’s interests, as individuals, seriously, and can be more progressive than traditionally male-centric socialist analyses.

Thompson and Wheeler place critical importance on the role of social relations in constructing motives for action, including what an agent considers desirable and/or pleasurable.
In their view, human nature is malleable, and humans are naturally self-interested. Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarian ideas were written and published between the period of Jeremy Bentham’s and John Stuart Mill’s most influential writing on the subject. Unlike these more prominent utilitarian thinkers, Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism begins with an understanding of human nature as fundamentally shaped and influenced by social context, and in particular, the configuration of power relations within fundamental social institutions such as the family and the economy. Rather than limiting utilitarian calculations to specific areas such as law and politics, they apply utilitarianism more broadly – to all spheres of human life where social relations have an effect on individual happiness. Additionally, Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is more concerned with the distribution of the means of happiness. For them, the utilitarian goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number cannot be achieved within a society marked by capitalism or male dominance. They propose that individuals unite, voluntarily, to create fully democratic communities of ‘mutual co-operation’ where each individual holds an equal share of the community’s resources, and has equal input into the policies that govern the community.
3.1 Not quite Benthamites

Thompson and Wheeler consider themselves adherents to Bentham’s principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. As noted in the introduction, they met at Bentham’s house, both enjoying close friendship with the famous philosopher. They agree with Bentham that laws and morals ought to be determined using a utilitarian calculation, that, “[i]t is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong…” (Bentham, “A Fragment” 45). Moreover, they share with Bentham the understanding that all motives animating human acts stem from the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain, and that all moral judgments must ultimately refer to considerations of utility, “even at the very instant that [one] rejects the greatest pleasures or embraces the pains most acute” (Bentham, “Principles of Legislation” 711).

Like Bentham, Thompson and Wheeler also emphasize that happiness is an individual calculation; there is no such thing as a general, abstract happiness apart from the happiness of individuals. All three are explicitly against the view that the happiness of the whole is more important than its parts. Bentham writes, “[t]he community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members” … [t] is vain to talk of the interest of the community without understanding what is the interest of the individual” (Bentham, “An Introduction” 86). Likewise, Thompson and Wheeler argue that “[t]here is no such thing as a general, abstract, happiness. All happiness is made up of that of individuals” (47). The happiness of individuals is paramount; the happiness of one individual ought never to be subservient ‘to the happiness of any other
individuals or classes whatever’. Each individual’s happiness contributes to the happiness of the whole. However, reasoning ‘comprehensively’ on the consequences of one’s actions will lead to the conclusion that one cannot become happy when one’s actions hinder the happiness of others (119). I return to this aspect of their thinking throughout the dissertation for it is important when considering the relationship between their feminism and their utilitarianism.

Recently, it has been suggested that Thompson’s utilitarianism is inherently conservative. In Chapter 6 I examine Dolores Dooley’s and Catherine Villanueva Gardner’s interpretation that characterizes Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist thought as having conservative tendencies as a result of adhering to a masculinist utilitarian framework. E.K. Hunt has also characterized Thompson’s socialism as ultimately conservative because it is justified using utilitarianism. I explore his interpretation at the end of this chapter. Philip Pettit has argued that it was the rise of utilitarianism and its influence on liberalism that eclipsed the republican view of liberty as non-domination (45). To illustrate his point Pettit shows how Jeremy Bentham and William Paley, both utilitarians, subscribed to a view of liberty as non-interference. Pettit argues that utilitarians had to define liberty as non-interference (as opposed to non-dominance) because liberty as non-domination was considered too radical an ideal given that the enlightenment view of human equality was spreading. The ideal of freedom had to be universal, and liberty as non-interference could safely maintain liberty for property-holding white men while liberty as non-domination would require more radical changes (48). However, Bentham and Paley were not the only utilitarians concerned with freedom. Using utilitarianism,

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28 As noted below, they argue that the ability to reason in this way is often hindered by a social context of capitalism and patriarchy.
29 This view of Bentham’s thought has been challenged by P.J. Kelly, “Classical Utilitarianism”.

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William Thompson argues that greater material equality and radical democracy would enable security and individual self-government. I return to this point later in the chapter. In contrast to these interpretations I aim to show that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism differs substantially from Bentham’s, making their version far less conservative than one might expect.

One of the main differences between Thompson and Bentham’s utilitarianism that demonstrates utilitarianism has not always been conservative, is that unlike Bentham (who thought happiness can be maximized under liberal capitalism), Thompson argued that only democratic, co-operative socialism could realize this goal. In a recently published book, Mark J. Kaswan explains that this difference is largely due to their different understanding of happiness (1-2). Bentham’s conception is more ‘hedonistic,’ focused on measuring units of pleasures and pains. In contrast, Kaswan characterizes Thompson’s view of happiness as, “… equivalent to well-being and … best understood as the condition of a person’s life” (19). As Kaswan notes, power relationships within social and political institutions are one of Thompson’s main concerns (56). These conditions are responsible for the production of character, which, in turn, greatly influences the happiness of individuals, understood as social beings. Thus, while Bentham’s main concern was legislation and its impact on pleasure-seeking self-interested independent individuals (10), Thompson begins with individuals whose characters and interests are shaped by social relations. Thompson’s conception of happiness is built on this understanding of human nature and character. Before returning to his (and Wheeler’s) views of happiness, I explore his understanding of the self in greater detail.
3.2 Character and Human Nature

Thompson’s ideas concerning character are closer to Robert Owen’s than Bentham’s. Owen understood character as, “…not the whole make-up of the individual, but rather the structure of moral ideas and values and behaviour tendencies connected with them” (Cole, 90). Owen writes,

> [f]rom the earliest ages it has been the practice of the world to act on the supposition that each individual man forms his own character, and that therefore he is accountable for all his sentiments and habits, and consequently merits reward for some and punishment for others . . . the character of man is, without a single exception, always formed for him; that it may be, and is, chiefly created by his predecessors; that they give him, or may give him, his ideas and habits, which are the powers that govern and direct his conduct. Man, therefore, never did, nor is it possible he ever can, form his own character (43, emphasis in original).

Owen had published his theory of human character development by 1820, four years prior to Thompson’s first major work on economics and morality, *Inquiry* (Claeys, *Citizens and Saints* 76). Because Thompson shares Owen’s view that people are not responsible for their own characters, and like Owen was a leader in the co-operative movement, Thompson is often referred to as an “Owenite” (Claeys, *Owenite Socialism* 10).

Both Thompson and Owen understand the character of individuals as malleable and formed through circumstance. Thompson writes,

> [w]e of the co-operative school, believe, on the evidence of our senses and experience that the compound resulting from the peculiarities of organization of the mass of children … is necessarily modified by the compound … resulting from the particularities of the circumstances surrounding and acting on that organization; and that therefore the circumstances being supposed
in our power, and sufficient skill being supposed in us to wield them aright, it is possible for us to form children into any characters, wise or foolish, kindly or malicious (Practical Directions, 218-219).

For Thompson, the biological ‘compound’ is much less influential than the contextual ‘compound’. Translated into contemporary language, Thompson believes character is determined through ‘nurture’, and that ‘nature’ has little to do with an individual’s character development.30

We should look to circumstances if we want to know how an individual’s character arose, according to Thompson. He explains that circumstances generate ‘desires operating on the will’ and these desires produce actions. By circumstances, Thompson means a combination of two things: “[t]he state of plenty or destitution … with respect to the comforts and conveniences of life, [and] the degree in which they are dependent on the will of others for pleasures or pains” (Inquiry 289, emphasis in original). Two important aspects of context, then,

30 In an article written in 1826, following the publication of Appeal, Thompson goes even further than this balancing of biology and context, by proposing that context can also shape biology. Drawing on the work of a French naturalist, Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de la Marck, he suggests that physical traits that are socially acquired are passed on to future generations through reproduction. This view of biological evolution is consistent with the idea that character is solely socially produced; his point is that social practices influence physical characteristics, which are then passed down genetically. Thus, while character is entirely socially produced, biology is both genetically and socially produced. If, therefore, women are unable to develop their physical capacities due to environmental influences, the consequent physical weakness will be passed down to her offspring genetically (Thompson, “Physical Argument” 251). Thompson here is using the scientific evidence available at the time to support his point about the impact social relations have on an individual’s access to happiness, or the means of happiness. Thus, if physical fitness, strength and bodily health are all components that lead to, or are part of, happiness, the social conditions that inhibit this development in women will also decrease women’s happiness, the happiness of her offspring, and therefore the happiness of the entire community. Of course, contemporary scientists generally agree that socially acquired traits do not get passed down genetically.
are scarcity and dominance, which are not necessarily unrelated. He explains that the structure of institutions have the greatest amount of influence over circumstances, for it is institutions where actions are ‘restrained and regulated’ and where ‘to some, power over others is given; from others all power is taken away…’ (*Inquiry* 290).

In the sense that circumstances are understood to shape a person’s character, Thompson’s argument is clearly aligned with Owen’s, that from the beginning our social relationships determine who we are, and why we behave the way that we do. Owen, however, was mostly concerned with forming the character of the working class. The conditions within competitively managed factories, he argued, were responsible for producing a new character in working people which was detrimental to human happiness; this new character elevated the love of accumulation over the love of other human beings (*Claeys, Machinery* 38). For this reason Owen thought co-operative communities should be established by the benevolent rich to help improve the characters of the laboring class, in addition to improving their material well-being. He thought the benevolent rich could paternalistically improve the character of the working class through these communities (*Folbre*, 97). While both view character as malleable, unlike Owen, Thompson emphasizes the harmful influence that power and privilege have on character. In practice, Thompson disagreed with Owen on the issue of democratic control in communities, and thought his style was too dictatorial (*Pankhurst, William* 35).
Thompson believed that the rich, like the poor and everyone else, were not responsible for their characters. Capitalism and inequality more generally negatively influence the characters of all within the system. The rich, in general, he argues, lack sympathy for the poor, but the rich are not, as individuals, to blame. It is practically impossible for the rich to relate to the poor as equals. “We are not blaming the rich for these tendencies of their situation,” he argues, “…we are merely investigating facts, and tracing them to the circumstances by which they are produced”. The excessively wealthy sympathize only with themselves, but this is inevitable and not an individual responsibility. It is produced by circumstances, and operates similarly for other groups and classes throughout society (Inquiry 215). Therefore, he thought co-operative communities should be organized democratically, rather than being managed by the rich.

While Thompson emphasizes the role of power in corrupting character, rather than miserable living and working conditions, he agrees with Owen that working and living conditions should be improved in order to increase the well-being of workers. Likely because of his view that inequality corrupts the character of the privileged, Thompson was highly critical of Owen’s faith in the ability of the wealthy classes to effect social change and improve the living conditions of the working class. Below I explain in greater detail Thompson and Wheeler’s theory concerning the way power imbalances structure character. First, I examine what they understand as the permanent aspects of human nature.

31 Thompson, however, holds a more favorable view of the character of the poor, arguing that, in fact, the poor are more generous towards others, proportionate to the means at their disposal, than most of the rich (Inquiry 215).

32 Owen did not think the working class could self-govern (Claeys, “Introduction” xix).
3.2.1 Self-Interest

Perhaps one of the most important elements in Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* is their assertion that the primary principle of human nature is simply, "...the desire of happiness and aversion to misery, without any wish, kindly or malignant, to others". It is circumstances that dictate how individuals view their interests in relation to the interests of others (13). The book begins as a response to James Mill’s argument that women should be excluded from political rights because women’s interests are identical to those of their fathers or husbands. Women, Mill suggests, do not have interests of their own (9). Thompson and Wheeler point out that this argument is inconsistent with his argument for full male political rights, which he bases on a theory of human nature as power-seeking and selfish. Mill writes:

> [t]hat one human being will desire to render the person and property of another subservient to his pleasures, notwithstanding the pain or loss of pleasure which it may occasion to that other individual, is the foundation of government. The desire of the object implies the desire of the power necessary to accomplish the object. The desire, therefore, of that power which is necessary to render the persons and properties of human beings subservient to our pleasures, is a grand governing law of human nature (56).

Thompson and Wheeler point out that when it comes to women’s rights, Mill must assume that men are naturally beneficent, but he clearly states the opposite. It is not possible that naturally selfish and power-hungry men will only act in this way towards other men, and not also towards the other half of the human species, women. The second response to James Mill’s argument is Thompson and Wheeler’s assertion that Mill’s principle is not a primary principle of human nature, but a secondary principle that depends upon particular conditions. They argue, "'tis
neither an original, or a universal, principle of human beings, to trample on, any more than it is to promote, the happiness of others" (12-13). As the primary principle of human nature, the desire for happiness and the wish to avoid pain constrains how we must understand other human motivations. In their view, no motivation can exist that is not rooted in self-interest, and this would include motives such as friendship, love, and affection. All human motivations find their reason for existence in self-interest as the primary motive. Whether this fundamental desire leads to social or anti-social secondary motivations depends primarily on social context. At first glance the claim that human nature has one primary principle might seem to challenge the view that character is entirely socially produced, however character and the desire for pleasure are two different but related things. Pleasure is a primary motive that every individual desires. Whether an individual desires to dominate others, or to act benevolently towards them (whether they have a malevolent or benevolent character) is determined by the individual’s social context. For Thompson and Wheeler, it might be possible for an individual to be entirely unsympathetic, but complete selflessness does not seem to be possible on their understanding. Humans are always motivated by self-interest, by seeking happiness, but these motives are largely shaped by the individual’s social context.

Thompson defines self-interest as “…a general desire to promote our own individual well-being without reference to any particular means”. In contrast, he defines selfishness as “…a desire to promote by all immediate and direct means in our power our well-being, without calculating the effects of our conduct on the feelings and conduct of those whom it may affect,

33 Of course, Thompson also thought that people were often mistaken about what constitutes their self-interest.
Selfishness is short-sighted self-interest that excludes consideration of the interests of others. But self-interest is not always selfish. Self-interest can also be benevolent. Benevolent self-interest is self-interest that is satisfied when it works in tandem with the happiness of everyone affected by one’s actions. In this form of self-interest the self is actually ‘secondary’ to the ‘aggregate mass of happiness’ which ‘[mingles] with it’ (Inquiry 370). Both the selfish person and the benevolent person are self-interested, in Thompson’s view. The difference between selfishness and benevolence lies in the means used to pursue one’s primary interest of happiness. Some disregard the interests of others, while others “…seek it on an enlarged calculation, estimating the interests of all human beings within the sphere of [their] influence” (Inquiry 446). How people pursue their idea of happiness varies greatly depending on social/environmental context.

3.2.2 Sympathy

In Bentham’s utilitarian writings, sympathy as an aspect of human character or as a motivation for action is not a central concern, and is rarely discussed explicitly. Sympathy plays a much more central role in Thompson and Wheeler’s arguments. Thompson and Wheeler consider self-government to be a prerequisite to this ‘beneficient morality’: they understand benevolence as a combination of reason, sympathy, and self-government (89).

Sympathy plays a more central role in J.S. Mill’s utilitarianism than it does in Bentham’s, however in Mill’s theory it is largely the role of the private sphere and education to cultivate this capacity, in contrast to Thompson and Wheeler’s broader view of community responsibility.
view sympathy as both naturally occurring and as a pleasurable component of one’s character that can be developed, corrupted, or repressed. Thompson writes in *Labor Rewarded* that while sympathy has roots in nature, in particular in the practice of breastfeeding (25), at other points he emphasizes the necessity of cultivating sympathy, indicating that this sentiment, while naturally occurring, also needs to be exercised as a capacity that can be improved or developed. In order to have the capacity for sympathy the development of both reason and kindness is required (117). In contrast, “[t]he unsocial motives of antipathy are not an essential aspect of the human mind” (25).36

Thompson asserts that human nature can only be reduced to a desire for happiness and aversion to pain – that other than this, there is “…no original and unchangeable principle of human nature or motive to exertion…” (*Labor Rewarded* 100). Thus, all motives must spring from this principle motive. At first glance, it might seem counter-intuitive to ground benevolence on self-interest.37 However, ‘self-interest’ simply means the desire for happiness / aversion to suffering common to all living creatures. Primary principles are foundational and unchangeable while secondary principles can change depending upon other environmental factors. This means that it is not inconsistent to have a natural potential for benevolence or sympathy whose appearance or exercise is dependent upon a specific social context. Thus, if sympathy and a capacity for benevolence are natural, they are subject to change, reversal or

36 Of course no human motivation can logically exist without the existence of a natural capacity for that motivation.

37 For instance, William Stafford argues that Thompson tries and fails to ground benevolence in self-interest, but he does not adequately account for Thompson’s differentiation between self-interest and selfishness (277).
repression by social conditions. Likewise for ignorance and vice -- depending on the context, self-interestedness can attach itself to ignorance, vice, wisdom, or sympathy. According to Thompson’s understanding of human nature, benevolence and self-interest are not always incompatible, and given the right social or environmental context, where interests are aligned, actions and motives can be simultaneously self-interested and benevolent.

A letter to Lord Hampden in John Minter Morgan’s book *Hampden in the 19th Century*, whose authorship has been attributed to Wheeler since it is signed ‘Vlasta’ her pen-name,\(^{38}\) agrees that whether our self-interest includes an interest in the well being of others, or an interest in their misery, largely depends on the structure of our environment and our social relations. The letter explains that sympathy is “…the humanizing link which unites our common nature, …[it is] inherent in all, if not destroyed by vicious training and circumstances, which it almost invariably is.” With an air of desperation, Vlasta argues that it is vain to expect sympathy to be present in society as it is structured. “We ask too much of men and women, when we require them to have sympathy with each other under all existing circumstances. That which divides our destiny, breaks, scatters, and destroys our natural sympathies” (“Letter by Vlasta” 317). How might this square with their “primary principle of human nature,” outlined in *Appeal* as essentially disinterested in the well being or suffering of others? If self-preservation, or self-interest is the primary motive in human nature, whether or not we view others in a sympathetic light will depend on whether our environment meets our interest in self-preservation. A disinterested self-preservation, viewed as a primary principle of human nature, does not preclude the natural existence of sympathy. Unlike natural (and neutral) self-interest, naturally occurring

\(^{38}\) See Dooley, “Anna Wheeler” 41 and *Equality in Community* 82)
sympathy is subject to change. If one’s context encourages feeling sympathy when others feel pain, or happiness, benevolent characters are more likely to result, out of the experience of sympathy.39

Sympathy depends largely upon social context, which can also foster the opposite, antipathy. Both sympathy and antipathy produce a feeling of pleasure in the subject. Thompson explains in his last book *Practical Directions*: “[s]ympathy is the feeling of pleasure or pain which we experience when we perceive, or hear of, other people experiencing pleasure or pain: it is always attended with benevolence towards the person exciting it”.40 Antipathy, on the other hand, is a feeling of pleasure at someone else’s expense; it is “…a feeling of dislike to certain persons, without any just ground…always attended with malevolence towards the person ever so innocently exciting it…” A person feeling antipathy towards another feels pleasure when witnessing the other’s pain (216). The cultivation of antipathy is ongoing through education and daily life, and differences in wealth, skin color, birthplace and religious belief are all employed

39 We can hear echoes of Rousseau in Thompson and Wheeler’s theory of human nature. Rousseau argues that humans are not naturally selfish or greedy, but that they have a generally harmless concern for their own well-being (*Discourse* 57, 61). Similarly, as noted above, Thompson and Wheeler espouse the view that humans are naturally primarily concerned with pleasure and avoiding pain. According to Rousseau, humans possess a capacity for sympathizing with others and a natural aversion to seeing others suffer. While Thompson and Wheeler share with Rousseau the understanding of human nature as neutrally self-interested with a natural propensity towards sympathy, they clearly disagree with Rousseau’s view of women. Rousseau thought women were naturally subordinate to men and should be educated to serve their husbands. (*Emile* 259-308).

40 At this point it might be important to note how benevolence differs from sympathy. According to Dooley, at the time Thompson and Wheeler were writing, benevolence meant wishing the best for others and valuing others as equal to one’s self (*Equality* 215). Benevolence might also be understood as enlarged sympathy, or using reason to impartially expand one’s sphere of sympathetic feeling.
to foster antipathy to protect and promote privilege. Antipathy used in this way enables the evaluation of others through categories of difference. Thompson explains that,

> [a]ntipathy is now used to a fearful extent in education as well as through the whole intercourse of life, leading one half of mankind to feel aversion to the other half, because they differ in wealth, in length of time during which wealth or power have been possessed by their respective predecessors, because they differ from them in place of birth, in belief, in colour, in artificial or conventional manners; without any regard to those moral or intellectual qualities which should form the whole estimate of judging individual worth (217).

Thompson argues that even if an antipathetic judgment of another is formed based on intellectual and moral qualities, instead of inciting antipathy, this evaluation of others ought to “…excite no other feelings than those of compassion, regret, and anxious desire…to implement everywhere those useful qualities which…must render all happy” (216).

Because human beings are also fundamentally social beings, the happiness of individuals in a community is promoted the more individuals exhibit sympathetic / benevolent characters as opposed to antipathetic characters. Thompson writes:

> [b]y an association of our nature, from which there is no escape, dependent partly on organization and partly on early inevitable habit, the usual indications, by means of the countenance and otherwise, of happiness in those around us, excite a glow more or less lively of kindred feelings in ourselves, whenever some real or supposed counteracting interest does not mar the effect. […] Scarcely any bounds can be assigned to the increase which individual happiness is capable of receiving, from the associations of reflected happiness: though minute, yet gentle and ever springing… What pleasures so cheap as these? requiring no purchase but yielding to their impulse (*Inquiry*, 421, *sic*)?

Here we see that indifferent self-interest as the basic natural human motivation can, through
certain circumstances, result in benevolent character development. If Thompson is right, and pleasure can be derived from the happiness others feel (when this happiness does you no harm), then there is no contradiction in his claim that benevolence and self-interest are compatible, benevolence can result from a combination of self-interest and particular social/environmental circumstances. The context Thompson envisions is one in which benevolent individuals experience happiness and pleasure from seeing others as happy or experiencing pleasure.

3.2.3 Power, Capitalism and the Formation of Character

The uneven concentration of power affects character in two ways, according to Thompson and Wheeler. First, it causes individuals to act against the interests of others in order to satisfy what they perceive as their own self-interest. When society is organized in such a way that interests are opposed, feelings of pleasure when others are happy (sympathy / benevolence) are unlikely to take shape. Secondly, it inhibits sympathy between unequal individuals and causes the more powerful to feel pleasure in the subordination of others.

The problematic pleasure of dominance, which they called a ‘vulgar’ pleasure, is a central theme in Thompson and Wheeler’s Appeal. They explain that, “[u]ncontrolled power necessarily hardens the heart and destroys sympathy for those subjected to it…” (100). In the workplace this power includes capitalist control over the products of labor, and in the family it includes men’s superior access to the means of subsistence and leisure.41 In Appeal they write

41 Power imbalances must be questioned in every corner, for Thompson, and this includes even the power parents have over their children. Thompson writes that, due to the dependence of children under competition “…all parents possess a tremendously despotic power over the minds as well as the bodies of their offspring… a power altogether independent of reason and justice…” (Inquiry 378). This enormous amount of power, usually in the hands of the male
that the despotic position of the male head of a household provides him with “… a vicious pleasure … in the contemplation of the inferiority, that is to say, of the comparative misery, of their fellow creatures…” (148). In excluding women from equal political and civil rights, men maintain this ‘vicious pleasure’. Thus, the family, structured by law and the competitive economy to include a dominant male and a dependent female, inhibits the cultivation of, or enjoyment of sympathy in favour of the cultivation of malevolence (149). They explain that a degree of equality is required for the exercise of sympathy to occur. The greater the power imbalance the more certain they it is to result in the abuse of power (12). Thus, equality is not only required for justice or happiness, but also to enable all an equal opportunity to develop sympathy, which they consider one of the highest human pleasures.

The lack of benevolence and sympathy from those in positions to abuse power towards their subordinates often also serves their perceived self-interests. A person in a dominant social position will often use power for their own benefit “…at the expense of all other sentient beings…whose interests may appear to them incompatible with their own” (Thompson and Wheeler 12). Thompson and Wheeler argue that the way one perceives his or her own interests is socially constructed. Oppositional social relations cause individuals to see their own interests as being opposed to the interests of others (43). They emphasize the role of the family and the capitalist economy in placing the perceived interests of individuals in opposition, making it

parent, is liable to be abused, whether the parent is wise or foolish. Thompson writes that while parents have as much power as is possible for one person to have over the character formation of another, over their children (Inquiry 304), it is institutions that hold most of the power of character formation. Unlike parental power, this institutional power goes largely unnoticed (Inquiry 285). He explicitly denies that character and habits are hereditary characteristics, and even if one were to prove that character was inherited, its influence ‘must be very slight’ (Inquiry 472).
almost impossible to cultivate kindness or concern for others (149). These socially imposed oppositions of interest produce feelings of personal antipathy, which are not essential aspects of human nature. For instance, the interest women might have in relating to other adults as equals is placed in opposition to the interest of men in maintaining their dominant position in the family, as well as in the economy. However, (and, as discussed in the section below on happiness), sympathy and benevolence are necessary to experience the highest form of happiness, thus, the opposition of interests is not ‘true’ in the sense that people in power are wrong about their own interests. In another example, Thompson argues that the slavery of Blacks, and the oppression of women have been implemented because power causes people, in these cases the power of white men, to err in determining their own interests. He writes, “[w]hy… has the slavery of the blacks, and of women, been established? Because the whites in the one case, because the men in the other, made the laws … the whites and the men erroneously conceiving it to be their interest to oppress blacks and women” (Inquiry, 303, emphasis in original). Power makes it seem as though oppressing others will further one’s own well being, but this is not the case, according to Thompson.

The competitive economic system, in general, they argue, is guilty of placing “…the interests of all, first for existence and then for splendour, … in .. rude opposition to each other, that they render almost impossible the development to any great extent of … kindly feelings of joy in the welfare of others” (149). In Labor Rewarded Thompson reiterates his view that competition creates feelings of antipathy towards others, and that these feelings are inculcated from birth. Under capitalism interests are opposed, and this plays an immense role in the way
we view and relate to one another (65). The main problem is that the economy is organized competitively, rather than co-operatively. Besides creating widespread, abject poverty, a capitalist economy needlessly pits workers against one another, and leaves them with no control over their working lives, over the products they produce, or the conditions in which they work. For Thompson, ‘freedom of exertion’ is an extremely important human good, and it is necessarily absent in a capitalist system (Labor Rewarded 117). The misery the system creates does not only affect the most oppressed within it. It creates a context of unhappiness for all participants. This context is what we now understand to be a culture of consumerism. For Thompson, this consumerism consolidates the unfreedom that capitalist social relations create by encouraging the belief that the interests of individuals are naturally incompatible. The emphasis on consumption for esteem fosters antipathy while energy that could be more usefully employed is used to create useless products for this purpose. Thompson laments that much production is geared towards useless articles that are made and loved because of their ability to distinguish the owner above others. These articles are produced and consumed to gratify antipathy, in contrast to useful articles produced and consumed for the real joy they provide (Labor Rewarded 101).

While Thompson and Wheeler do not directly credit Rousseau, some elements of their thought are clearly aligned with his earlier ideas. For instance, Thompson’s argument concerning the production of goods to satisfy antipathy and vanity, to raise one’s esteem in the eyes of others through the purchase of luxury goods, corresponds to Rousseau’s idea of ‘amour-propre’ – concern with how one is perceived by others (Discourse 61). Moreover, like Rousseau, Thompson argues that this concern can be employed as a benign rather than malignant force.
Through co-operation, Thompson believes that individuals will be motivated to work hard, be helpful and innovative, in order to be held in high esteem by other community members. This link with Rousseau is evident in his understanding of competition vs. co-operation on individual motives. He argues that it is competition for the sake of wealth and economic security, under capitalism, that is detrimental to individual and collective happiness. Competition in terms of talents and virtues that lead to greater overall happiness is beneficial, according to Thompson, and its primary motive is public esteem (Inquiry 284). Thus, competition itself is not considered harmful. As Dooley points out, Thompson’s ‘co-operative competition’ involves "...encouragement from others for a co-operating group to do better, individually or collectively, to continue efforts at human flourishing" (Dooley, Equality 299). Capitalism forces individuals to compete with one another for economic security and increased wealth, which is harmful to human happiness because it makes individual interests clash, frustrating utility. Thompson anticipates and responds to the common refrain that co-operation will not work because people are motivated to work more, or better, by capitalism’s promised increase in economic reward. Thompson argues that this motive is not actually operative under capitalism since most laborers are paid the same amount, and will often work harder or better because of the praise or admiration they expect to receive, not for an increased economic reward (Inquiry 470).

Capitalism produces two main, overarching motivations to engage with industrial production, according to Thompson: “…fear of want and death on the one hand, and the love of superiority to be derived from accumulation on the other…” (Labor Rewarded 29).42 This fear

42 This understanding of capitalism and the motivations it engenders continues to be highlighted by socialists in the contemporary period. See for instance Cohen, Why Not Socialism?
of want causes the majority to limit their expression and to guard their knowledge and skills in order to maintain or advance their economic position. Thus, Thompson explains that while co-operative socialists agree with liberal proponents of the free market concerning the importance of freedom of ‘thought, expression, and action,’ he also argues that this freedom is not possible under capitalism (Labor Rewarded 51). Freedom of expression is particularly limited for the working class, the poor, or those who aspire to access wealth and improve their situation. They inevitably find that their freedom to express their opinions is largely curtailed due to a ‘fear of ill offices of the wealthy and influential’ (Practical Directions 41). Similarly, this fear of poverty prevents the advancement of skills and the dissemination of knowledge throughout society.

Skilled laborers have an incentive to guard their expertise, because it helps to increase its value to the individual. Thus, the competitive system tends to create and maintain a hierarchy between skilled and unskilled labor, in turn keeping the level of skill within a community depressed, or stunting its development (Labor Rewarded 26). Moreover, in capitalist economies, “[t]he pleasures of skill and invention are not […] sought for their own sakes, but as the means of gratifying antipathy by rising above others, and becoming to them objects of envy and false admiration” (Labor Rewarded 27). When the interests of individuals are opposed, as Thompson and Wheeler argue they are under capitalism, people are led to feel that the happiness of others must have been achieved at their expense. Instead of rejoicing in the happiness of the success of others, they lament that, “[a]ll the blessings of life are turned into curses” (150).

For Thompson, human beings have a potential to be benevolent or selfish, depending upon the context where the self is developed. Under the competitive system, benevolent self-
interest is almost impossible. Thompson writes,

[s]uppose the principle of benevolence once established in the mind of any individual acting under the system of competition, its gratification must be soon checked by the want of individual means to gratify it, and by the penalty of personal distress warded off only by constant attention to individual gain. In all the pursuits of life under individual competition, this unhappy tendency to war with benevolence might be pointed out. … In every occupation and pursuit of social life, self must be, under the system of individual competition, the primary object of pursuit, and constantly opposed to the principle of benevolence (Inquiry 370-371).

The structure of power relations within fundamental social and political institutions of their time forced an understanding of individual interests as being in opposition, inhibiting sympathy and encouraging antipathy. Of course, for Thompson, those fundamental institutions also hindered happiness for the majority in a more basic way, by denying them civil and political rights, limiting their freedom, and maintaining economic insecurity. Thompson also allowed that his views were unproven, and could not be known for certain until they were tried. One cannot simply assert that human nature will change with a change in social context and political motives. But, similarly, one cannot simply extrapolate an essential and permanent human nature from what currently exists. Instead, Thompson argues that we have to experiment by implementing ‘the social motives’ which have not yet had a chance to be developed or examined (Inquiry 429).
3.3 Happiness

Unlike Thompson and Wheeler, Bentham does not consider the effect of power on character, motives, and interests. As a result, he does not advocate for substantial changes in fundamental social and political institutions such as the family, the economy, or the political system. In his view, happiness was a “matter of arithmetic”, pleasures minus pains for any given individual. How that individual came to have those preferences, or pleasures, was not an issue.\textsuperscript{43} Bentham argues that pleasure and pain can be measured individually using six circumstances: intensity, duration, certainty, proximity, productiveness and purity. By adding extent to the list, a legislator is able to measure aggregate pleasure and pain, and thus the overall happiness of a community. Bentham wrote that "...[t]hese are the elements of moral calculation;... legislation thus becomes a matter of arithmetic" (Bentham, \textit{Principles} 716). As noted above, Kaswan explains that, “…the differences between Bentham and Thompson rest on the fact that they are working with different conceptions of happiness” (19). For Bentham, happiness is subjective, it “…looks toward pleasure or a person’s level of satisfaction with their current state…”. Thompson, on the other hand, has a more objective understanding of happiness, which attaches well-being to ‘the general condition of life’ (19).

In his first book, Thompson defines happiness as: “…that continued state of well-being which is compounded of the different items of pleasurable feeling, experienced during a considerable space of time. Pleasures are the component parts, of which happiness is the

\textsuperscript{43} The idea that character is constructed is important for understanding how preferences and certain kinds of behaviour and pleasures are estimated. For instance, in Western culture, greed has historically been viewed as a vice or sin, however, with the rise of capitalism, profit-seeking behaviour is largely considered to be a virtue and is widely celebrated and encouraged.
aggregate, or the result” (Inquiry 17). He identifies four classes of pleasure: sensual, muscular, intellectual, and social. Thompson argues that the social pleasures “are of about equal importance perhaps with all the others conjoined”. Human beings are social creatures who depend mutually, for their well-being, on “…the opinions and actions of others…exemplifying sympathy and beneficence…”. Nobody is immune to the influence of ‘social feelings’ (Inquiry 459). Happiness, therefore, requires that social conditions promote sympathy and benevolence, which are only possible when power is shared equitably.

In Appeal, Thompson and Wheeler argue that happiness is promoted by the interaction of good characters in equal social positions. Thompson and Wheeler explain that if two people have equal power and equal inclination to promote the happiness of the other, each person’s happiness will be promoted to an equal degree (76). Social relations that are conducive to maximizing happiness are ones that inhibit arbitrary power relationships between people that cause pain. The greatest happiness for the greatest number requires a social context that protects and promotes the happiness of all members of the community.

There are two additional aspects of their utilitarianism that make it different from utilitarianism as it is commonly understood. The first is the role of self-government, and the second is the role of security. Without either of these, happiness is impossible in their view.

3.3.1 Happiness: Self-Government

In Appeal Thompson and Wheeler note that self-government is a pre-requisite to the enjoyment of any of the higher pleasures, including the pleasures of the intellect and the
pleasures associated with sympathy.\textsuperscript{44} As it turns out, sympathy, often described as the ‘highest pleasure’, actually requires self-government in order to belong to that category. Sympathy must be cultivated through education (broadly understood) and then felt voluntarily; otherwise, it is an amoral feeling incapable of producing as much pleasure as voluntarily felt sympathy. Developed sympathy, when combined with self-government, creates a beneficent morality that is required for ‘real, exalted happiness’. This kind of sympathy is a moral pleasure. As an acquired capacity, it requires a certain amount of education (xiii) or instruction (54), including an enabling social context. Echoing Wollstonecraft, Thompson and Wheeler emphasize that morality is not possible without freedom (89). Sympathy without freedom is sympathy without morality, and this compromises the amount of pleasure that feeling sympathy can produce in an agent. They explain,

\ldots that peculiar zest of sympathy which arises from the contemplation of the happiness which we have \textit{voluntarily}, and not as machines, co-operated to produce – are lost to the wife, as to any other human being, whose actions and beneficence are regulated by the judgment and volition of any other human being whatever. And yet these are the pleasures which, above all others, are requisite to real, to exalted happiness (90).

As their book shows, however, men have been deprived of sympathy and women deprived of self-government, through what they call the ‘sexual system of morality’ rendering this kind of exalted happiness near impossible for both sexes. Thompson and Wheeler’s focus on self-government and sympathy as crucial components of happiness might appear more like virtues than happiness. Indeed, for Thompson, a virtuous person is described as ‘benevolent’ and

\textsuperscript{44} I discuss the ranking of pleasures in relation to utilitarianism below in the section that compares their utilitarianism to J.S. Mill’s.
because benevolent, is considered to be happy (*Appeal x*). In this way, Thompson and Wheeler are not Benthamite utilitarians; virtues such as benevolence are understood to be components of well-being. But these virtues are not enough on their own. A non-dominating context is also required for happiness.

Voluntariness is the key to maximizing the happiness produced by all other pleasures. All pleasures, according to Thompson and Wheeler, are ‘pleasures of the slave’ without it (89). They write:

> [of] all our pleasures none is so delightful, so requisite to the enjoyment of all our other pleasures, as that of voluntariness, of regulating our actions according to our own views of interest and duty, and by our own will (89).

They also argue that self-government, the most important means for maximizing happiness, is a distributable good (47). Thompson and Wheeler share Bentham’s view that self-government is required for security, although as we shall see, they take this concern in a much different, and more egalitarian, direction. The next section explains how they understand the relationship between security, freedom, and equality, challenging the view, explained above, that utilitarianism was responsible for the conservative turn in liberal thought.

### 3.3.2 Happiness: Security

According to Bentham, security is the most important means to achieving the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Bentham linked security and liberty by emphasizing the importance of secure expectations, particularly against property infringements and misrule. This
type of security allows individuals to make choices regarding their future that have reliable expected outcomes (Bentham, *Pannomial Fragments* 243). Kaswan explains that the security of private property ownership, in Bentham’s view, is important in order to prevent the pain of disappointment (102).

While he thought a more equal distribution of resources would increase happiness, Bentham was reluctant to advocate a redistribution of private property. This was because he thought the balance of security and equality ought to be constrained by a ‘disappointment-preventing principle,’ which would view the interests of the possessor of property as more crucial than the interests of others. He writes, “…securing the nearest approximation to absolute equality in the distribution of the matter of abundance, and the other modifications of the matter of property; that is to say, the nearest approximation consistent with universal security, as above, for subsistence and maximization of the matter of abundance” (Bentham, *Pannomial Fragments* 243). Equality for Bentham is an important means of happiness, however, he places security, subsistence, and abundance ahead of equality in his ordering of the means of happiness. Thus security plays a primarily conservative role in Bentham’s work, according to Kaswan. Protecting property in order to protect secure expectations also maintains widespread inequality (104).

Thompson understood security and equality to have a different relationship. Unlike Bentham, he argued that greater equality might actually lead to greater security, and vice versa. Kaswan argues that Thompson was able to reconcile security with equality by demonstrating that they are ‘mutually constitutive’ (107). Indeed, Thompson and Wheeler argue that every
individual ought to have their ability to self-govern protected, and this premise leads to their argument for a cooperative society with an equal distribution of the means of self-government, both material and relational (47). Thompson and Wheeler understand the structure of politics, the economy, and the family as frustrating this essential component of happiness. They write,

Let wealth and all other means of happiness exist in ever such profusion in a family as in a nation, little is done as to happiness, until these means are rightly distributed. [This includes] . . . an equal share of all the means of happiness, and more particularly and above all, an equal share of the power of self-government, an ingredient without which neither intelligence, morality, nor happiness, can exist . . . (47).

The distribution of self-government must include the ability of individuals to determine how society ought to be organized such that their interests and well-being are taken into account and respected. Security for all, in Thompson’s view, requires that all are equally able to self-govern, not just the propertied classes, and not just men. He argues that:

[t]here can be no security from force and fraud, direct or indirect, till all laws are made by those whose interests they affect, and till those whose interests laws affect are sufficiently enlightened to permit none but equal laws to be made, and to cause the means of acquiring knowledge and skill, and all other conditions necessary to equal chances of happiness, to be afforded equally to all (Labor Rewarded 15).

Clearly for Thompson self-government cannot be sacrificed to other utilitarian ends, and must be available to all members of society.45 His understanding of security, therefore, was used to justify a radical transformation of existing power structures, and this is an important aspect of

45 As noted later in this chapter, Bentham also considered individual freedom as a good, however, he generally refrained from ranking pleasures, and did not share the view that self-government or individual autonomy could not be violated for other utilitarian goals.
their theory that sets it apart from other utilitarian thinkers of the time. Notably, it was their broader application of utilitarianism to the interests of all that helped push Thompson and Wheeler’s thinking in this direction.

In contrast, many utilitarian thinkers of the time used ‘security’ to support conservative viewpoints. For instance, some utilitarians used security to justify continued slavery.\textsuperscript{46} Thompson comments in \textit{Inquiry} on the slavery of the southern United States, and the argument that it ought to be maintained in the name of ‘security’. He responds by arguing that “[t]he greater security of the sentient and rational being, the slave, must be preferred to the smaller security of the sentient and rational being, the owner”. The slave’s security includes his human rights, his access to the means of happiness, including those means not derived from wealth. In contrast, the security of the slave owner is minimal pleasure derived from having a slave as opposed to hiring a voluntary laborer, a minor consideration given the many sources that comprise human happiness, which are entirely lost to the slave (149).

Thompson was very critical of the use of ‘security’ to uphold and legitimate any regime of security for only a few, at the expense of the many. He calls it ‘spurious security’, where “…all the productive powers of the human race have been relentlessly sacrificed” (\textit{Inquiry} 589). “Spurious security” upholds the interests of those who have power, whether political or otherwise. It controls exchanges and robs laborers of their produce (\textit{Inquiry} 586). For

\textsuperscript{46} Kaswan points out that Bentham’s concern for security led him to argue against the immediate emancipation of slaves (he was against slavery, however, the negative consequences of violent upheaval would be too great and therefore he wrote in favor of implementing incentives for slave owners to voluntarily end the practice) (104-105).
Thompson, the only valid methods of distributing wealth are those that contribute to a whole society’s happiness, including the happiness of the poor.

Thompson also expresses contempt for the use of ‘security’ to argue that private property rights are in line with utility. He argues that laborers whose produce is secure derive more pleasures from what they produce than do ‘plunderers’ because they do not feel fear from the indignation of others. The enjoyment of products acquired under a regime of insecurity brings with it feelings of fear and apprehension, knowing that “…the act of his acquisition has necessarily excited indignation, resentment, desire of retaliation on the part of him whom he has taken” (Inquiry 62).

At the same time, Thompson, like Bentham, did not advocate the forceful redistribution of private property. He did not think workers should take over their workplaces, let alone violently overthrow the state, but instead that they should create separate, voluntary communities of mutual co-operation where they would collectively own and control the means of production. Therefore, it seems important to note that the security that Bentham wanted to protect (except as it applied to women and slaves) was protected in Thompson’s theory. Thompson did not believe that wealth should be redistributed by the state, but that workers should unite together voluntarily to create their own communities, using either their savings to purchase shares, or their work-hours.

Wheeler highlights the importance of security for women’s well being in her 1830 public lecture “Rights of Women,” “…happiness is lost to all, because security is unknown to any” (14). Security in this sense includes both political and economic security; human rights, security
from want, and from arbitrary interference. Wheeler explains that because women lacked security, they were subject to legal punishments without legal protections. She admonishes the legal system for sanctioning abusive behaviour by men towards women both within the private sphere as well as throughout society more generally. Appeal also highlights security as crucial for women’s well being. The main reason women needed to have the vote was to provide them with security in the enjoyment of equal civil rights. However, it was the recognition that women’s well being necessitates greater economic security (not merely equal laws and education) that sets Appeal apart from other feminist texts of the period. I discuss this in more detail in the following two chapters.

3.4 Can we call them utilitarians?

Despite Thompson and Wheeler’s self-professed adherence to Benthamite utilitarianism, the differences in their approaches might lead one to ask how utilitarian they actually are. Bentham was concerned with utilitarianism as applied primarily through legislation. Property should be protected to protect security and prevent disappointment, and the preferences of individuals should be taken at face value. Thompson and Wheeler, on the other hand, believe that security should be understood more broadly, to take into account and reduce or eliminate the level of insecurity experienced by the oppressed. Equal security, in their view, would produce greater happiness for individuals. This requires equal political and civil rights, and workers’ control over their own labor and its produce. For them, self-government is more than freedom

47 This would include oppressors because without sympathy one cannot reach a state of ‘exalted happiness’.
from government interference; it includes the ability to influence one’s own social context, equally with all others. In sum, Thompson and Wheeler apply utilitarianism much more broadly—beyond mere preference and expectation satisfaction.

It might seem, therefore, that Thompson and Wheeler reject a core tenet of utilitarianism, and for this reason are not utilitarians at all. Thompson and Wheeler seem to agree with the liberal understanding that the essential interests of one individual cannot be sacrificed even if it would maximize aggregate happiness. For instance, they write, “[t]he happiness of every individual … ought to be promoted for the sake of such individual …, and not in subserviency to the happiness of any other individuals or classes whatever” (118-119). While this might lead us to question their commitment to utilitarianism as an ethical theory, Thompson uses an extreme example to demonstrate his attachment to the philosophy. He argues, that all things being equal (equal distribution, equal abilities etc.) “…if the slavery of nine out of ten and the superlative happiness of the tenth increased the sum of total happiness, that distribution, of slavery, should be pursued. All that is asked by this first principle, is, that the greatest quantity of agreeable sensations, both in intensity and duration, should be the object aimed at in the distribution of wealth” (Inquiry 20, emphasis in original). However, Thompson later writes,

[t]he simple question of justice to be asked is – “Is the sum total of happiness, including that of the slaves as well as of their masters, lessened or increased by substituting compulsory for voluntary labor?” To ask such a question is absurd, because, if compulsory labor produced more happiness, there would be no need of using compulsion, it would become voluntary. … Be the slaves the majority or the minority, the sum total of happiness is diminished, were it even by the existence of a single slave; his happiness is diminished, and that of the rest of the society is not increased, but
cankered by the example of permitted injustice (Inquiry 34).  

In this quote we see a combination of the idea that justice can exist apart from aggregate happiness, but also a consideration of the impact this has on the happiness of the entire community. As indirect utilitarians, Thompson and Wheeler would not support violating the rights of any particular individual even if such a violation would maximize happiness. The violation of one individual’s human rights causes all other community members to feel that their rights might also be violated, thus their feelings of insecurity would prevent happiness from being maximized. That being said, one might envision a legal framework where rights include the right to own other people – perhaps only people with specific characteristics - alleviating the insecurity of the majority. If insecurity is alleviated, and the happiness of the majority is maximized despite the suffering of the enslaved minority, would Thompson defend slavery? I do not think he would; however, it is unclear how he might use utilitarianism to make the case. Does this mean Thompson might not be a utilitarian? On this question I am in agreement with Mark Kaswan’s interpretation: that although Thompson’s utilitarianism is very different from Bentham’s he is still a utilitarian in the sense that every ‘good’ thing that is not happiness in itself – like democracy – is instrumental, or subsidiary, to the goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number (142).

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48 The only case when the happiness of the minority would be preferred to the happiness of the majority is when the minority is in the most need. However, under competition this will never be the case, those who are the least well off are also the majority and therefore they have “the double title…” (Inquiry 28).
3.5 Utilitarianism: Thompson and J.S. Mill

Thompson’s indirect utilitarianism is much closer to J.S. Mill’s than it is to Bentham’s, and Thompson anticipates many of Mill’s arguments in the latter’s famous tract *Utilitarianism*. This section briefly explores the similarities between Thompson and Mill’s approach, such as how pleasures are to be measured and ranked, as well as differences in the depth of their analysis and the application of the ethic.

Both Mill and Thompson agreed with the basic tenets of Bentham’s utilitarianism, but they disagree with Bentham’s famous argument that pushpin and poetry hold equal value if they produce equal amounts of pleasure. According to Bentham, the experiencing person will have preferences when it comes to different sources of pleasure, however the difference lies in the quantity of happiness the pleasure provides to the agent, rather than the quality, or categorical type of pleasure that makes it preferable (*The Rationale* 206). In *Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that the ranking of pleasure according to quality is not inconsistent with utility as an ethical framework. He defends utilitarianism against the claim that utilitarians are hedonists in the crassest sense, considering sensual pleasures as the only valid grounds for morality. Instead, he argues that utilitarianism recognizes that human beings have capacities to enjoy pursuits that other sensual creatures do not, including intellectual, imaginative, and moral pleasures (11). These pleasures are ones which human beings would not give up for any amount of sensual pleasures for, “[i]t is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied…” (14). Thompson had also advanced this claim, arguing that distinctly human pleasures, such as the intellect, ought to be valued for their contribution to happiness apart from the more sensual
pleasures. He uses the example of the pleasures of the oyster twice in *Inquiry*: first, to argue that the happiness of oysters is worth less than the happiness of humans, or the happiness of creatures with five senses (18); and second when explaining the importance of intellectual pleasures and the consequence of neglecting or losing them: “…loss of the pleasures of mental excitement…often constitutes the sole difference between a life overflowing with happiness….and a life joyless and monotonous as that of an oyster” (459). 49

Thompson and Mill both understand pleasure to be subjective; it can be most accurately measured through experience. Mill and Thompson agree that experienced persons are better able to judge particular pleasures. For instance, Thompson appeals to experience in arguing that those who have experience in feelings of sympathy and antipathy towards their neighbours should be the ones to judge which of the two “tends to human happiness” (*Labor Rewarded* 30). “Those with a deficient education, or only ever motivated by competition or emulation, can form no just estimate of the force of sympathy “ (*Labor Rewarded* 30). Mill shares with, or perhaps he drew from, Thompson the idea that experienced persons are better able to judge particular pleasures.

For Mill, competent experience is the only valid way to measure and determine whether one pleasure is more desirable than another. This means, where a majority of those who are capable of enjoying two or more pleasures prefer one over the rest, that pleasure can be

49 Note that here he is discussing pleasures as pleasures, rather than accounting for the value of activities that might be painful but valuable in the sense that their consequences increase happiness: for instance manual, monotonous labor like cleaning toilets. Thompson recognizes that intellectual pleasures can provide more happiness than sensual pleasures, without neglecting to account for the labor required to produce necessities, which in accordance with a utilitarian measure must take priority over engagement with intellectual activity, even though they might be less intrinsically pleasurable.
considered more valuable and more desirable than the others. Thus, most human beings would not give up the distinctly human pleasures of the intellect for any amount of animal pleasures, even if the animal can be considered ‘better satisfied’ (*Utilitarianism* 12). Thus intellectual and social pleasures are categorized as ‘higher’ than sensual pleasures because those competent to judge both – those who have adequate experience with both pleasures – would choose the higher over the lower or sensual. On this point Thompson and Mill agree, as Thompson explains, mental pleasures must be cultivated, when they are neglected “…they are little superior to those of the ape…” (*Inquiry* 21).

Like Thompson, Mill also recognizes that circumstances affect whether someone has the capacity to enjoy the ‘higher pleasures’, including poverty, occupation, and amount of leisure time (*Utilitarianism* 14). For Mill, the higher faculties are an essential aspect of human happiness for those who have the capacity to enjoy them. To withhold these pleasures violates the dignity of the person, as a human being (*Utilitarianism* 13). These higher pleasures ought to be accessible to everyone in a ‘civilized’ country, which should provide mental cultivation to all of its citizens. The higher pleasures are not the pleasures of the philosopher, they belong to “…any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught…to exercise its faculties…” (*Utilitarianism* 18).

Thompson and Mill are also both concerned with the problem of anti-social pleasures, but Thompson’s analysis focuses more on what he views as the source of malevolent preference development: the structure of the family and the capitalist economy. While Mill notes that individual desires such as greed and selfishness are harmful to the happiness of a community,
unlike Thompson’s, his theory emphasizes individual desires rather than the context wherein they were produced. At the individual level for Mill, there is no difference between the desire for virtue and the desire for things like fame, power, and money. However, viewed from a social perspective it becomes a different matter. Whereas a virtuous individual is considered a blessing to a community, a money-hungry power-seeker is often “…noxious to the other members of the society…” So utilitarians will tolerate any form of desire or pleasure for the individual so long as this desire does not lead to an increase in pain for others in the community. Because of the benefits of a virtuous character for the well-being of a community, utilitarianism “…enjoins and requires the cultivation of the love of virtue up to the greatest strength possible, as being above all things important to the general happiness” (Utilitarianism 46-48). For Mill, pleasures can be evaluated in three different ways: first subjectively by the individual; second by whether they increase or decrease the happiness or welfare of the community as a whole; and third whether they are of a higher quality, as determined by those with competent experience of the pleasures in question.

The difference between Mill’s account and Thompson’s is that Thompson stresses, to a much greater degree, the role that the economy and the family play in fostering undesirable preferences in the first place. Thompson and Mill agree that implementing legal reforms granting all adults equal status and using education to mold the character of individuals toward the belief that their interests coincide with the interests of all others, are important utilitarian goals (Labor Rewarded x; Utilitarianism 22, 41). However, Thompson rejects the view that education and formal legal reform are sufficient to this end. For him, inequalities of wealth will
trump these efforts, the wealthy will always be accorded greater sympathy, their happiness will always be considered of greater importance, and their selfishness will always be excused. Moreover, the vices of the rich have a tendency to spread throughout the other classes as well. He writes,

"[a]s long as excessive wealth is an object of desire, of admiration, so long will those qualities, good or bad, which the possession of excessive wealth engenders, be connected with it in desire and admiration … A pernicious preference of wealth as the only substantial good, in preference to those sources of happiness which are independent of wealth, becomes a characteristic feature of society…(Practical Directions 187-194)."

Foreshadowing Marx in his essay On the Jewish Question Thompson notes the emptiness of rights- and duties-talk as motives to improve morals and actions. For him, ‘substantial motives of interest’ will continue to exist which compel people to behave in ways that undermine these codes of conduct. Material circumstances must be changed in order to bring about moral improvement (Inquiry 429).

Thompson and Wheeler draw attention to another class of pleasures, which they term ‘vulgar’. These pleasures create more misery than they produce in pleasure and include pleasure derived from dominating others, ‘mere lust’, and excluding and oppressing others (70, 101, 126, 140). For Mill, too, anti-social pleasures must be considered less valuable than social ones (as shown above), but as noted, Mill does not inquire into how these pleasures may have been produced through social context and an individual’s position therein. He merely states that those who experience the ‘social feeling’ (feeling good when others are doing well) would never exchange this feeling for any amount of pleasure derived from antipathy. However, in many
cases, the pleasurable feeling of selfishness greatly surpasses any social feeling they may or may not have. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill does not elaborate on why antipathy might be a stronger sentiment for the majority; he merely argues that education and legal reform would provide a remedy to this widespread feeling (42). As I show in Chapter 5, Mill’s *Subjection* includes a critique of the family as a location where anti-social sentiments are produced; however, like in *Utilitarianism* he limits his reform prescriptions to formal legal equality and education reform.

Mill emphasizes in *Utilitarianism*, as in *Subjection*, his view that utilitarianism ought to be applied centrally to legal and educational reform. For Mill, society is progressing towards greater equality and well-being through ‘political improvement’ which removes “…the sources of opposition of interest and level[s] those inequalities of legal privilege between individuals or classes, owing to which there are large portions of mankind whose happiness it is still practicable to disregard” (*Utilitarianism* 41). Additionally, according to Mill, the utilitarian believes that education should be used to mold the character of individuals toward the belief that their interests coincide with the interests of all others (*Utilitarianism* 22). While legal reform could substantially alter a community’s social arrangements, Mill does not specifically discuss the types of legal reform that would be required to do so. Admittedly, Mill’s theory could theoretically include other social institutions such as the family and the economy, as both could conceivably be regulated by extensive and radical legal reforms. Moreover, Mill became more sympathetic to the idea of socialism in his later writing (Mill and Taylor-Mill, 301).

50 He also believes that humanity is progressing in such a way that eventually the social feeling will overcome antipathy.
51 I discuss Mill’s proposals for improving the circumstances of women in Chapter 5.
While there are more similarities between Thompson and Mill’s utilitarianism than between Thompson’s and Bentham’s, like Bentham, Mill’s utilitarianism does not lead him to advocate radical changes to the structure of the economy or the family. This different approach has important implications for women’s equality. In Chapter 5 I compare Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* with Mill’s *Subjection* where it becomes more concretely evident that limiting reforms to law and education might not be enough to promote women’s equal happiness.

### 3.6 Thompson’s Utilitarianism: Conservative?

E.K. Hunt argues that Thompson’s ideas are not really utilitarian, and that as far as he is a utilitarian, his theory is fundamentally conservative. E. K. Hunt understands Thompson as an inconsistent utilitarian because Thompson deploys the labor theory of value to undermine the legitimacy of capitalist accumulation without recognizing that the labor theory of value cannot, according to Hunt, be grounded in concerns for utility. He argues that in this way Thompson’s use of utilitarianism to justify socialism is faulty because he ought to have grounded his view of economic injustice on the labor theory of value instead. For Hunt these two normative theories are not compatible (“Utilitarianism” 547). Hunt also argues that Thompson’s adherence to utilitarianism led to conservative prescriptions (“Utilitarianism” 571). The remainder of this chapter aims to challenge this interpretation of Thompson’s work by arguing the following: that utilitarianism does not need to be grounded on a subjective calculus; it is possible to criticize exploitation on the basis of the production of pain and insecurity; Hunt misinterprets
Thompson’s explanation of the means of creating a society of mutual co-operation; and Thompson’s utilitarianism is, in many respects, less conservative than traditional understandings of the labor theory of value which cannot directly account for women’s traditional labor (including reproductive labor).

3.6.1 Thompson – not a conservative utilitarian

Hunt argues that utilitarianism can easily be used to justify extreme inequalities of wealth, the protection of private property, and capitalism. Economic theorists used utilitarianism to justify the free market by emphasizing the primacy of individualism, denying the claim that desires are socially produced, and promoting the claim that private property rights are natural. According to Hunt’s interpretation of Benthamite utilitarianism, the utilitarian calculus can only take into account existing desires, pointing to the ‘conservative nature of utilitarianism’ (“Utilitarianism” 563). In contrast to utilitarianism, which seems so readily to support inequality and injustice on Hunt’s account, the labor theory of value asks why laborers who contribute most of the effort into production receive so much less than capitalists who hardly labor at all.52 According to Hunt, this theory demonstrates that the laborer’s desire to work for the capitalist is socially produced and largely out of the worker’s control (“Utilitarianism” 567). Not only does

52 The labor theory of value compares the market value of a commodity with the amount of labor power required to produce the product. Through market exchange, surplus value is produced as profit that accrues to the owner of the means of production. Socialists and Marxists view this as evidence of an exploitative relationship between the laborer, who is forced to work long hours to produce a surplus, and the capitalist who owns that surplus. Hunt and Lautzenheiser explain that for Marx, “[c]apital and the laws of private property had become the mechanism … by which a ruling class coercively expropriated the economic surplus created by the working class” (232).
the labor theory of value present a more compelling case for the injustice of private property rights, according to Hunt, it also is better able reject “…the notion that the desires generated by a capitalist system can ever serve as the sole normative criterion for evaluating that system” (“Utilitarianism” 567-568).

Is it not possible that understanding wage labor (through the labor theory of value) as exploitative can be grounded in a utilitarian concern for pain and insecurity? Thompson provides two obvious ways the labor theory of value, that is, the exploitation of workers’ labor power, contravenes utilitarian principles. First, understanding that everyone has an equal capacity for enjoyment and pleasure and that through capitalism the majority of individuals suffer when a few have much more than they need, is not inconsistent with utilitarianism. Workers experience pain through a lack of liberty (they have no control over what they produce, how that production is exchanged, and little to no control over their working conditions), and through their subordinate position relative to the capitalist they work for. On Thompson’s understanding, as explained above, a context of inequality causes more pain and misery than a context of equality. Second, workers form the majority of the population; which makes the exploitation of workers doubly wrong. It is wrong because it causes pain to the individual worker, and it is also wrong because it causes pain to the majority of the population. Furthermore, Thompson considers the seizure of surplus value from laborers to be an injustice because this type of exchange is not voluntary and therefore prevents the realization of utility.53 Thompson explains, “[b]y unjust exchanges are the products of the labor of the industrious

53 Gregory Claeys points out that Thompson, “…was evidently the first … to use the phrase ‘surplus value’ (Machinery 91).
classes taken out of their hands” (*Labor Rewarded* 12). Capitalist exchanges run contrary to the principle of utility because they are not voluntary, and voluntariness is a requisite component of individual happiness. He argues that justice in the exchange of goods requires voluntary agreement from laborers as to the terms of this exchange, prior to production (*Labor Rewarded* 12-13). As explained in *Inquiry*, surplus value is that value-added by labor that produces a profit for the owner of capital, “[t]he materials, the buildings, the machinery, the wages, can add nothing to their own value. The additional value proceeds from labor alone” (166).\(^{54}\)

Hunt claims that the utilitarian basis for Thompson’s wealth egalitarianism is not possible because Thompson’s argument for egalitarianism cannot depend upon “subjective feelings of pleasure…which are inherently not directly empirically comparable”. Instead, arguments for the equality of wealth must be based on, “…some other moral principle which takes precedence over the utility principle” (“Utilitarianism” 563). For utilitarians, pleasures are subjective and must be ‘above moral judgment’. To say that one pleasure is better than another “…would be to admit that we judge[.] different pleasures on the basis of some higher criterion and that utilitarianism is not the basis of moral judgments” (“Utilitarianism” 563). For Hunt, it is unclear why Thompson did not see this inconsistency, especially given his explicit acknowledgement that capacities for pleasures cannot be measured or compared. Thompson instead argued that capitalism promoted selfishness and other socially harmful motivations that could be removed through the implementation of co-operation (Hunt, “Utilitarianism” 569). In this way, Hunt argues, Thompson is allegedly not a utilitarian because he assesses the way pleasure and preferences are produced and he qualitatively evaluates pleasures as higher or

\(^{54}\) King points out that, “…wages [are] out of place here” (351).
lower, instead of limiting his assessment to quantity and intensity. Hunt argues that this makes Thompson’s utilitarianism fundamentally inconsistent. Since we cannot measure the quality of a person’s experience of pleasures against those of any other person, it is impossible to say definitively that people do not have different capacities for experiencing pleasure. Therefore, it is impossible to justify equality of wealth on these grounds, because it is impossible to say that equality of wealth will produce more pleasure than any existing or future economic inequalities. For Hunt, “[t]herefore, any redistribution of wealth from any status quo is not defensible on strictly utilitarian grounds”. There is no way to compare the pain you cause a few in taking their wealth to the pleasure of those who receive it, following its redistribution. The endorsement of equality or inequality becomes merely an individual preference; one person might prefer inequality to equality and vice versa. “…utilitarianism [is] so incredibly restrictive that it permits us to compare two situations only when unanimity exists” (“Utilitarianism” 566). Because of this, Hunt asserts that Thompson’s arguments for co-operative socialism are more in line with the labor theory of value view of justice (“Utilitarianism” 571). Hunt is not wrong to suggest that Thompson used what we now, following Marx, identify as an argument for socialism based on the labor theory of value. However, Hunt overlooks the differences between Thompson and Bentham’s utilitarianism. By inaccurately interpreting Thompson’s utilitarianism as Benthamite, he is unable to see how Thompson’s indirect utilitarianism is not inconsistent with arguments concerning justice, including the labor theory of value.

Thompson’s utilitarianism is not necessarily strictly subjective in the way Hunt explains. An indirect utilitarian, like Thompson, interprets the principle of the greatest happiness for the
greatest number in light of concerns for freedom and security, because they “…tend to increase the mass of human happiness, or to produce preponderant good…” (Labor Rewarded, 13). Moreover, as Hunt explains but too easily dismisses as inconsistent with utilitarianism, Thompson does not value an activity for the pleasure it provides solely in the current context. He also asks how the preference for a particular activity (like pushpin as opposed to poetry) was produced, especially given that everyone (except the mal-conformed)\(^\text{55}\) has an equal capacity, when treated equally, ‘of enjoying equal portions of happiness’ (Inquiry 21). Thompson’s purpose, in making this statement, is to respond to those who would argue that wealth ought to be distributed so that those with capacities to enjoy more expensive things ought to be provided with the (unequal) means to enjoy them. He points out that, yes, there is no way to measure capacities to enjoy for there is no objective measurer. He asks: “Who are to be the measurers of these susceptibilities? the rich or the poor, the young or the old, the studious or the illiterate?” (Inquiry 23 \textit{sic}). Those with privilege cannot be trusted to determine what capacities for enjoyment other groups might have, particularly since capacities for the higher pleasures are not innate, but must be cultivated.

The inability to measure does not necessarily mean we have to take pleasure at face value. Thompson does not simply observe and measure pleasures without evaluating their origins, context, and effects on others. Thompson argues that instead of looking at the present capacities of individuals to enjoy particular things (of course those who have been taught the capacity to read will enjoy books, books are not useful to those not taught to read), it is better to

\[^{55}\text{It is not clear exactly what Thompson means by ‘mal-conformed’ although he does rephrase and state “…[a]ll sane individuals are capable of equal enjoyment from equal portions of the objects of wealth” (Inquiry 21).}\]
ask, “…whether similar treatment, operating on healthy organization, will produce equal capabilities as to the aggregate of enjoyment…” (Inquiry 23). Thus, if a social context provides some with capacities to enjoy a larger variety of pursuits, while others are excluded from developing those capacities, it is not enough to base utilitarian calculations on the present context, for it is obvious that if the context were made more equal, in a situation where more individuals were given the chance to develop those pleasure-experiencing capacities, then the aggregate of overall pleasure would be increased by creating a more equal context. While a ‘degraded’ portion of a community might not find certain activities more enjoyable than others, it must be proved that this difference was produced under conditions where everyone was treated the same. If the utilitarian thinker does not take present pleasures, tastes, and desires at face value, this does not mean the theorist is not utilitarian, however it might mean that he or she is not a Benthamite utilitarian. Thompson and Wheeler’s indirect form of utilitarianism enables them to consider the influence of different factors, such as experience, education, and power relationships when evaluating particular pleasures.

3.6.2 The means of social change

Hunt also argues that Thompson is conservative because he refrained from advocating a revolution and “insist[ed] that it would not be normally right to establish the new society of mutual cooperation until all capitalists voluntarily agreed that such a system would be best and thereby voluntarily relinquished all of their existing rights of ownership” (“Utilitarianism” 571). Thompson, however, did not think workers should depend on the rich to give up their property
to set up co-operative communities. In fact, he didn’t trust that the power of the rich wouldn’t seep into the structure of the community and corrupt it.

Thompson thought workers ought to unite and build separate communities of mutual cooperation on their own, by organizing themselves. An obvious difference between Thompson and Marx and Engels is the role of Unions and the means for achieving communism. Marx and Engels argued in *The Communist Manifesto* that workers should unite in order to execute "...the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions" which is the only possible way of attaining communism (859). For Marx and Engels, the time was ripe for a revolution including the seizure of bourgeois private property. After succeeding to become the ruling class, the proletariat was to: “...use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all institutions of production in the hands of the state ... by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property and on the conditions of bourgeois production..." (859). In contrast, Thompson envisaged a change in society that would be much more gradual and democratic. He thought laborers should join unions, as unions were the most appropriate vehicles for bringing forth co-operative institutions. However, he thought unions should use their dues to purchase capital and land firstly to provide work for their unemployed members, and finally to unite manufacturing and agricultural operations into co-operative communities (*Labor Rewarded* 78-87). Thompson argues explicitly against using force to implement a more just distribution of

56 Thompson disagreed with the way unions operated, in particular their policy of excluding unskilled workers and also because they inadvertently created more competition between workers in the same industry and between workers in other industries. The only solution is to create a central union for all workers; otherwise the only option available to unskilled workers will be to cooperate with the capitalists against the unions. The central union would also have to extend its membership to poorer workers in other countries (*Labor Rewarded* 80-82).
wealth and resources. The overarching reason is security, if force is used to form a new society, where is the guarantee that it will not be used “…by every succeeding majority, leading to the annihilation of industry and production?” (Inquiry 599). Moreover, he argues that co-operative associations can easily repay the cost of any capital expenditures owing through the generation of surplus (Inquiry 599). Thompson certainly did not share the view that the solution to the problem of capitalism and private property is embodied in the class struggle. If anything, Thompson thought unions should withdraw from struggling against capitalists, and instead invest money and time into creating more just institutions.

Thompson worked with various workers organizations to help them achieve this goal, donated his entire estate in his will to those organizations for the purpose of creating a community built on co-operative principles, and his last book outlines ‘practical directions’ toward achieving a functioning co-operative community created by those organizations. He was against the violent seizure of private property; his belief was that once a co-operative community was properly constructed and truly democratically controlled, that the movement would spread, with capitalists and workers alike becoming conscious that a happier existence was possible. In this sense one might consider Thompson to be a utopian, and in the sense that he was against violent revolution one might (like Hunt) also consider him to be conservative. However, considering his views on women, workers, and human nature in general, this estimation of his views seems quite inaccurate.
3.6.3 The Labor Theory of Value and Women’s Interests

Indeed, the labor theory of value has been shown to have its own limitations. Thompson’s understanding of the injustice of worker subordination is firmly rooted in the utilitarian concern for maximizing happiness, including security, and minimizing pain. The loss of liberty and the pain of subordination are important considerations for all social relationships, not merely those contained within economic relations that produce surplus value. In some ways Marxist and socialist economic thought can be conservative themselves, especially when capitalist-appropriated surplus value is the only focus and other forms of work such as reproductive labor are ignored despite a history of feminist economic thought.\textsuperscript{57}

Thompson’s utilitarianism is different from others at the time because he applies the theory to all aspects of social relations. If one considers all activity that increases human happiness as valuable and deserving fair recognition and compensation, one would have no valid justification for excluding work understood traditionally as women’s ‘natural’ activities. The labor theory of value, which explains why capitalist control over worker-produced surplus value is unjust, only tells us how the working-class are exploited under capitalism; it does not directly account for the lack of reward, or compensation for women’s labor. For Thompson and Wheeler,\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} For instance, Hunt and Lautzenheiser’s recent survey of the history of economic thought spanning from before the time of Adam Smith to the 1970s fails to mention the contribution and challenges of feminist economic thinking. The last two chapters of this book intend to “…provide a glimpse into the historical developments of non-mainstream economics,” however feminist economics is notably unmentioned. In a history of economic thought that includes non-mainstream theories, one might expect the authors to at least mention feminist economists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Ester Boserup. In their chapter on Thompson, they note Thompson’s \textit{Appeal} as a plea for women’s suffrage and a critique of gender inequality, but neglect the more radical aspects of the book where it demands compensation for women’s reproductive and domestic labor (\textit{History} 160-161).
utilitarianism may have allowed for a broader understanding of labor to include reproduction. From this socialist feminist standpoint, the labor theory of value looks conservative itself, for it cannot, at least not directly (only indirectly through the production of labor power), account for the value of reproductive and domestic labor, including their value for human happiness – a much broader measure than economic production merely.

One might argue that Thompson’s three natural laws of distribution as outlined in his first book *Inquiry* inform and bolster the feminism we see throughout his works including in *Appeal*. He explains that upholding these laws enables the realization of “…the greatest happiness derivable from wealth” (6). He lists these laws as:

First. All labor ought to be free and voluntary, as to its direction and continuance. Second. All the products of labor ought to be secured to the producers of them. Third. All exchanges of these products ought to be free and voluntary (178).

Kaswan unpacks these natural laws as encompassing the fundamental principles in Thompson’s thought: voluntarism, security, and equality (126-127). The principles of voluntarism and security are easily discerned from the list. For Thompson, labor should not be coerced but should be undertaken freely, or voluntarily, by the laborer. Moreover, exchanges themselves should be voluntary. The principal of security is also built into these laws, according to Kaswan, “…since labor is the source of value, then the surplus value should belong to the laborer” (126) and the requirement of voluntary exchange also upholds the principal of security (127). Kaswan interprets equality as a principal informing these laws because involuntary exchange implies coercion which, in turn, implies inequality. He explains, “…in order for someone to be induced
to act against their interest assumes that they are under some else’s power, who is dominant, which means that they do not have an equal relationship” (127).

The natural laws of distribution are only discussed in Thompson’s first book. In Appeal there are perhaps two reasons for foregoing this framework. The first is the rejection of natural law arguments. In Inquiry Thompson admits that the use of the term ‘natural laws’ can be problematic, and he states that for him, it means nothing more than his own opinion (4). In Appeal Thompson and Wheeler also argue that arguments that invoke ‘nature’ amount to ‘mystification’: “[t]he wisdom of following nature may generally be translated by the wisdom of adopting the opinion of the person using such phrases” (181). The second is that, in this book, while wealth is certainly important to its arguments, the concerns are broader than wealth and include, for instance, the distribution of self-government (47). There can be no doubt that the three principals Kaswan distills from Inquiry’s natural laws of distribution inform Thompson’s later writings. Equality, self-government, and security are certainly operative and crucial components underlying Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism. Indeed, one might surmise that Wheeler was attracted to Thompson’s understanding of the natural laws of distribution and how the principles underlying them might contribute to the cause of increasing women’s equality with men.

58 “No word has been more misapplied than the word Natural…it is arbitrarily allied to almost anything which it is sought to recommend. …if to [law] can be superadded the word, natural, no exhibition of consequences or uses is supposed to be requisite” (Inquiry 2-3).
3.7 Conclusion

I turn next to Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism, outlining its contribution to the history of feminist political thought through its radical proposal to maximize human happiness, for both men and women, through communities of mutual co-operation. Within their proposed communities, women’s self-government and economic security is better protected and men are more likely to develop sympathy and benevolence toward other beings. By submitting social institutions to the consideration of maximizing happiness, men’s and women’s, Thompson and Wheeler recognized earlier than others that there is an incompatibility between capitalism and women’s well being. They resolve the tension by advocating communities of mutual co-operation where economic and social activity is democratically controlled.
Chapter 4: The Private Sphere, Politics, and Mutual Co-operation

The previous chapter explored the utilitarian and constructivist foundations of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism. This chapter discusses their views on the family, economics and democracy/politics. In so doing, it reveals how Thompson and Wheeler responded to the problems of gender inequality Wollstonecraft had identified, but also how they overcome the limitations of her feminism identified in Chapter 2. While Thompson and Wheeler clearly drew from Wollstonecraft’s work, they also moved well beyond it in advocating equal civil and political rights, greater economic equality (including the recognition that women’s reproductive and traditional domestic work contributes to happiness and deserves compensation), and the elimination of the gendered public/private divide. Moreover, while Wollstonecraft argued that women require an education that fosters reason and independence to help them become better wives and mothers, Thompson and Wheeler ground their arguments for gender equality in the idea that women are individuals with their own interests who have an equal claim to happiness.

The chapter presents Thompson and Wheeler’s main criticisms of marriage, the family, the economy, and politics. It then looks at their co-operative vision, including their ideas concerning compensation for domestic and reproductive work. By subjecting society’s fundamental social, economic and political institutions to the requirement of utility, including the advancement of women’s happiness, utilitarianism supported their socialist-feminist proposals. Social and political institutions that are shown not to contribute to maximizing human happiness, they argue, must be changed. The realization of utility, or the ‘greatest happiness of
the greatest number’ depends upon an egalitarian, democratic social context. As noted in the previous chapter, apart from material needs, all other aspects of human happiness, for the greatest number of people, require a social context of equality and freedom that is secure. By analyzing the domestic sphere, the economy, and politics according to this criteria (their indirect utilitarianism that considers self-government and sympathy among the most important means of happiness) they find that male dominance prevalent in each sphere is detrimental to both women’s and men’s happiness. Only a radically democratic system of mutual co-operation will suffice, in their view, to fulfill the requirements of utility.

4.1 The Private Sphere and Women’s Happiness

Just as Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarian approach toward the economic realm does not view it as a natural fact, so too they do not view the family as a natural institution. Thus, like the economy, Thompson and Wheeler subject the private sphere to the requirements of utility, including the maximization of the happiness of all members. Their main conclusion is that the patriarchal family does not maximize happiness. Assigning rights to control over resources and the activities of other members of the household to its male head creates a great amount of unhappiness, for both men and women. In fact, they argue that there are two main ways that male dominance in the private sphere diminishes the happiness of both male and female members. First, the power relations that structure the institution inhibit self-
government and sympathy, both essential ingredients for the maximization of individual happiness. In the context of the male dominated household, the power of the male head inhibits his ability to sympathize with those not considered equal; this could include those in lower classes, as well as women, children, and animals. Second, because of the prevailing economic system, capitalism, the work women perform in the domestic sphere is not recognized or compensated, despite its important contribution to happiness. In conjunction with far fewer educational and economic opportunities, this leaves women dependent upon, and thus subordinate to, the men in their families, frustrating the happiness of both men and women.

4.1.1 A Utilitarian Evaluation of Marriage

While Wollstonecraft did not question, and actually endorsed, the institution of marriage as natural and good, Thompson and Wheeler evaluate it according to their utilitarian framework. Their utilitarian evaluation leads them to argue that marriage, in its patriarchal form, runs contrary to utility. One of Appeal’s main arguments concerns the injustice of the marriage contract, which they assert is no contract at all because women, “have [not] been consulted as to the terms of this pretended contract” (56). While the structure of marriage is determined by law and custom, and individual men are also left out of determining the terms of their own marriage contracts, Thompson and Wheeler’s point here is that women, as a group, have had no say in the formation of the institution. They compare this to the institution of slavery:

59 Self-government refers to both participation in government and the ability to choose one’s own life plan.
As little as slaves have had to do in any part of the world in the enacting of slave-codes, have women in any part of the world had to do with the partial codes of selfishness and ignorance, which everywhere dispose of their right over their own actions and all their other enjoyments, in favor of those who made the regulations; particularly that most unequal and debasing code, absurdly called the *contract* of marriage (56).

While individually men may have little opportunity to negotiate the terms of the marriage contract, it has been men who have excluded women from the formation of the laws and regulations that govern marriage. They explain, “[f]rom regulating the terms of this pretended contract, women have been as completely excluded as bullocks, or sheep, or any other animals subjugated to man, have been from determining the regulations of commons or slaughter-houses” (57).

Just contracts, they assert, ought to be made voluntarily. Most women have, in practice, no choice to marry or not. The situation is similar to the choice not to buy food when one is starving. Women have no choice but to marry for survival because other means of existence are unavailable to them; they are prevented from developing their intellectual abilities, from developing useful skills, from meaningful employment, from earning property and having that property protected, and they cannot inherit or exchange property with the same liberties as men. These exclusions are coupled with the woman’s promise to, “…renounce the exercise of that reason of which his vile practices have deprived her, to surrender the control over her voluntary actions, to be in all things, …in the minutest incidents of life, obedient to his will, be it wise or capricious” (65). They argue that this combination of exclusion and promise of obedience is meant to help him “secure…the advantages of superiority of strength [by making] the mind of
his victim as feeble as nature” (65). Women are trained very early in life to desire marriage as an end-goal, and their exclusion from the benefits of participating in the public sphere through education, employment or politics (which culminate in the promise to “obey” their husbands as an oath of marriage), are here understood to help men secure their dominant position by making the minds of women as weak and feeble as possible. For these reasons, they view the marriage contract as a forced union, rather than an agreement made by choice (57). Questioning why marriage would be couched in terms of contract in the first place, they conclude that the use of the word ‘contract’ helps to obscure what it actually is by “…sheltering their inequity under the pretended consent of each of their victims…” (73). As explained in Chapter 3, self-government is essential to happiness. However, women are socialized to want and have little choice but to accept a social arrangement that ends up depriving them of self-government. Women’s happiness is thus sacrificed for the sake of male dominance.

This injustice does not end, of course, with the signing of a contract. When examined through a utilitarian lens that considers women’s happiness, Thompson and Wheeler found that the gendered workings of marriage are more like slavery than a voluntary, free relationship. For Thompson and Wheeler, happiness requires a social context of relational equality. In marriage, the male is ultimately in a dominant position, making happiness practically impossible. Thus, the existing system of marriage runs contrary to the utilitarian goal of maximizing happiness. They explain that the ‘system of marriage’ puts husbands in complete control over their wives access to the means of happiness. Importantly, it is the power imbalance itself that prevents

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60 Carole Pateman discusses Thompson and Wheeler’s ideas concerning the marriage contract in The Sexual Contract. See Chapter 6, Feminism and the Marriage Contract.
women’s happiness, not the lack of benevolent masters. Thompson explains that through the marriage system “[w]omen are reduced to domestic slavery, without will of their own, or power of locomotion, otherwise than as permitted by their respective masters” (xi).

As explained in Chapter 3, self-government is one of the most important components of Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of happiness. As Thompson and Wheeler make clear, one cannot be both subordinate and self-governing. For instance, the existence of benevolent husbands cannot reduce the harm of the structural power imbalance between husbands and wives. Thompson and Wheeler point out that neither an “untormented slave” nor a “permitted wife” can be happy when they live under the power of another. They can only be happy once all “...despotic and unequal restraints are taken out of the hands of the wretched masters...” (105). By permitted wife Thompson and Wheeler are referring to a wife who, by chance, has a benevolent husband who refrains from using his social and legal power to control her actions or deprive her from resources. Moreover, Thompson and Wheeler advocate for an equal distribution of self-government, which must therefore preclude unequal relationships of domination and subordination (47).

They also use utilitarianism to evaluate the way marriage, in concert with broader cultural values, influences the ability of men and women to experience pleasure. In marriage, men have control over the means of sensual and intellectual pleasure, and may withdraw from women access to these sources of pleasure. Rarely does a husband permit his wife to enjoy an equal amount of pleasure as he enjoys, they argue. It is both the institution of unequal power between married partners and what they term the ‘sexual system of morality’ that upholds this
differential access to pleasures. Thompson and Wheeler define the ‘sexual system of morality’ as the “…means of which man has made his share of morality to consist of activity and enjoyment, and woman’s to consist of passive endurance and submission…” (108). Not only are women taught to desire marriage as the only means for them to achieve happiness, they are also taught that it is improper for them to enjoy it (41-42). For instance, “[e]ating or drinking to excess, either in quantity or quality of food, … or to be limited only by a prudential regard to immediate health, is looked upon as disgusting in woman: whereas, if wives had an equality of enjoyment in this respect with their masters, excess would be in public opinion, equally pernicious and vicious in both” (76). This moral system is inherently hypocritical and ‘domineering’ because for women, the enjoyment of pleasure is often considered a vice, while the same pleasure enjoyed by men is considered either a virtue, or an innocent gratification (189). Through the power imbalance between men and women in marriage and cultural understandings of gender and pleasure (the ‘sexual system of morality’) women are prevented from enjoying self-government and other pleasures. Their utilitarian analysis considers women’s happiness to be important in its own right, and therefore reveals gendered cultural double standards that uphold male dominance and restrict women’s access to happiness. Male dominance also inhibits the happiness of both men and women because dominance prevents the development of sympathy over whom one has power.

4.1.2 Domination and Sympathy in the Private Sphere

It is obvious that social, political, and economic structures at the time Thompson and
Wheeler were writing were extremely oppressive to women who saw their freedom and happiness curtailed (as compared to men’s). While making clear their intention is to increase the happiness of women for their own sakes, Thompson and Wheeler argue that women’s equality will increase the happiness of men as well. As I explained in Chapter 3, for Thompson and Wheeler, sympathy is one of the highest pleasures, however, those who hold the power to dominate others are prevented from developing feelings of sympathy for their subordinates (100). This problem of power, they argue, is particularly acute in the case of husbands because, for instance, unlike the power of employers over their employees, husbands are granted intimate and unbridled control over their wives on a daily basis. Thompson and Wheeler write that,

…by the continued practice of domestic caprice and despotism, by the habit of substituting force for reason, of making his own will the standard of rectitude, of neglecting the cultivation of the art of reasoning, of persuasion, and of the pleasures of sympathy, by constantly referring all actions to himself alone as possessing that interest which ought to be, in his law-supported estimation, their exclusive object, the whole moral structure of the mind of man is perverted (70-71, emphasis in original).

61 During the period Wollstonecraft, Thompson and Wheeler, and John Stuart Mill were writing, the doctrine of coverture was in effect. Sir William Blackstone explained the common law as follows:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being, or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything; and is therefore called … a feme-covert … her husband, [is called] her baron, or lord (quoted in Pateman, The Sexual Contract 91).

In the United Kingdom, the Married Women’s Property Act was introduced in 1870 providing married women with the right to inherit and keep their own wages, marking the point when the doctrine of coverture began to break down in women’s favour (Combs 1028 and 1031-2).
Power obfuscates moral knowledge and the capacity for sympathy by blocking awareness of a shared 'comprehensive interest' with others. “Unrestrained power is…the surest method of destroying…intelligence and benevolence” (50). Power not only prevents the exercise of knowledge and sympathy, but it also prevents their very formation (13). Thus, men in marriage are prevented from developing a capacity to sympathize, preventing them from realizing their own interests. Men and women’s happiness is thus thwarted by the social position men are granted within the private sphere.

The harms caused by the despotic power of husbands are not limited to members of the private sphere. Training in ‘masculine domination’ causes all kind of social ills as well. These include the inability for such men to,

> [c]onsider[] the effects of his actions on all whose interests they may reach: he calculates their effects with reference to himself alone...he carries forth that rule of force and notion of the superior importance of his own happiness to that of all around, which leads him in all his actions to substitute power for right; and which, continually checked and opposed by similar pretensions of his fellow-man, equally formed by domestic despotism, is one of the most fruitful and perennial causes of personal annoyance, mutual depredation, and misery (71).

Hierarchy, they argue, tempts the powerful to abuse their power: the more extreme the hierarchy "the more infallible will be the certainty of, abuse of power" (12). This power inhibits the development of sympathy and benevolence, and negatively affects men’s abilities to co-operate in general. Here, Thompson and Wheeler reveal how power relations in the private realm spread to and influence relations in the public realm as well. Thus, the hierarchy in the private sphere doubly affects men’s happiness. First, men’s potential to develop sympathetic feelings for other
human beings is hindered because power prevents this development and in turn the pleasure or happiness it brings. Second, men’s inability to develop sympathy in the private sphere affects their relationships outside the sphere. Implicitly they are pointing out that if men engaged in more egalitarian relationships in the private sphere, they would be better equipped to co-operate in the public sphere, once more enhancing men’s happiness by enhancing happiness overall.

4.2 Political Rights

Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* spends less time legitimating the view that women are equal human beings with men than Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. As utilitarians, they ground

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62 In her “Rights of Women” lecture, Wheeler turns to the writings of a French Naturalist to support her contention that women have an equal capacity to reason. She quotes M. Bory de St. Vincent at length, who describes the African Caffres as a tribe considered less rational than the rest of humanity, but that proves itself otherwise in rejecting and revolting against white people who abuse their power. The Caffres will only engage with whites when whites acknowledge their natural equality. Bory de St. Vincent is quoted by Wheeler as stating consequently that, “…we have then no right…to assign to any particular country, or sex, intellectual capacity above the other, the whole of our species is as capable of improvement as any part of it…” For Wheeler, this analysis condemns civilization, and proves that it is “nothing but the perfection of vice, that is, the triumph of injustice throughout” (Wheeler, “Rights of Women Part II” 33).

Furthermore, women have an equal intellectual capacity that, without a right to a decent education, remains undeveloped and contributes to women’s insecurity and their slavery to men because ‘knowledge is power’ (Wheeler, “Rights of Women Part II” 34-35). Wheeler explains that men, understanding the relationship between knowledge and power, believe it is in their best interest to ensure women are ignorant in order to maintain them in slavery. She argues, however, that, “…ignorance makes a bad servant and a vexatious companion…” (Wheeler, “Rights of Women Part II” 35). Thus, she argues that women’s oppression is ultimately bad for men, and like Wollstonecraft, extends this by arguing that the public realm suffers when women and men lack virtue. She also argues that granting women equal civil and political rights, and subjecting them to the same moral standards as men, would reduce the crime rates, in addition to other beneficial consequences (Wheeler, “Rights of Women Part II” 35).

Wheeler ends her speech by calling on women to agitate for an equal and high quality education for their children:
human equality in the capacity to experience happiness (14). Perhaps because Wollstonecraft and other feminists had made such strong arguments for women’s equality, coupled with a utilitarian framework that assumes equality based on human feeling and experience, Thompson and Wheeler were able to side-step this question and focus on an argument for women’s political rights. Political rights are necessary, they argue, because women as a group have different interests than men and because women, as individuals, also have different interests from one another. More obviously, they point out that a lack of political rights leads to a context of domination, which in their view always runs counter to the principle of utility. They articulate this argument in response to James Mill’s assertion that women do not need political rights because they have an ‘identity of interest’ with the men in their families. Their interests are “involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands” (Thompson and Wheeler, 9). Thompson and Wheeler counter his argument against women’s equal political rights by pointing out some of the more obvious ways women’s and men’s interests are not congruent. They argue, for instance, that there can be no existing ‘identity of interest’ when one party of a partnership has the power to command another party. An identity of interest necessarily accompanies relationships where parties have equal power over one another, and where neither

[to woman I would say (If there be any here, who, like myself, feel their degraded social condition) continue not to leave the bitter inheritance of ignorance and slavery to your daughter; plead for their rights and that most precious of all, a sound and liberal education. Obtain this for your children and you secure the liberties of mankind!” (“Rights of Women Part II” 36).

63 For instance, Mary Astell, Olympe de Gouges, among others.
has power to harm the other. There are additional conditions as well: the parties must be governed by well developed sense of both benevolence and reason so that “they shall both perceive that it is in their mutual interest to promote in every thing the real happiness of each other” (48).

There are two main reasons for extending political rights to women: the first is to protect women’s civil rights and security of the person. While Thompson and Wheeler support the reform of civil and criminal laws, they argue that without political rights women will not enjoy an equal chance of happiness alongside men. Without political rights, women would remain in a state of insecurity. Any civil or criminal laws that protect them or promote their happiness could be changed at any time without their input. Political rights are declared necessary because without them the security of having civil rights, property rights and security of the person are impossible (121). Thus, even if equal laws and equal morals governed women and men, women would have no chance at acquiring equal happiness with men if these were not also accompanied with equal political rights. Without these, women cannot be deemed men’s true equals; they would be without equal respect and dignity, which would lessen the guarantee of equal laws and morals (182).

Another key reason for equal political rights is that they will encourage the development of sympathy and benevolence, and the exercise of the intellectual faculties. Equal political rights would grant all the opportunity to become intellectually engaged with others, aiding in enlarging sympathy for human beings, becoming attuned to the interests of others (121). Granting political rights to women will also quicken the pace of the reform of public opinion and
private morals, which can only be achieved through “...comprehensiveness of mind and sympathy which political rights are the most efficient means of unfolding” (170). Thompson and Wheeler argue that confinement in the private sphere prevents women from developing benevolence and leads them to have more narrow, selfish views. Thus, the effect of political rights on individuals includes "...the development of character, of intelligence, and benevolence" which occurs only through their exercise (123).

Thompson and Wheeler suggest that men’s dominant social position, which prevents them from cultivating a capacity for sympathy, enabled the continued exclusion of women from political and civil rights. Power, they argue, affects both knowledge and sympathy, and the ability for agents to learn and regulate their actions accordingly. When sympathy has not been cultivated, when its pleasures are unknown to the agent, it leads the agent to “...render his fellow-beings, as well as brutes and ...nature, subservient to his immediate gratification”. Those with strength and knowledge have always required ‘checks’ on their behaviour (54). The check on behaviour can only be secured by granting all adult members of community equal political rights.

Intellectual engagement and enlarged sympathetic capacities, alongside secure civil rights, were Thompson and Wheeler’s central justifications for extending political rights to all adults (121). These justifications for political rights might seem contradictory given their views of men as selfish and dominating rather than sympathetic, despite their ability to participate politically. Thompson and Wheeler realize that the men they criticize, as having hardened hearts

64 Dolores Dooley argues that utilitarianism leads Thompson and Wheeler to undervalue women’s activities in the private sphere, as evidenced by their disdain for women’s alleged selfishness. I address this critique in Chapter 6.
with little capacity for sympathy (100), would have been enjoying the same political rights for many years. The failure of privileged men to act benevolently towards their family members and other members of society throws into question the ability of the public sphere to foster benevolence. It is evident that they were aware of this seeming contradiction because they also write that the sphere of benevolence among political rights holders only extends toward others who possess the same rights.

*Appeal* explains how men are unable to develop and experience sympathy toward women, which they argue harms both sexes and influences relationships in other spheres. As noted in Chapter 3, sympathy is required to experience exalted happiness (Thompson and Wheeler, 90), thus making it in men’s own interest to forgo their powerful position relative to women. Men’s status as ‘monarch’ of the domestic sphere, Thompson and Wheeler argue, leads them to bring this attitude into their other relations, as shown by their inability to consider the interests of others when deciding upon their own actions. However, they point out that through political participation with other similarly situated men who are, in the same way, constituted by their dominating position in the private sphere, this attitude is checked and opposed (71). Thus, given that they share the same context of political and economic freedom, as well as sharing a similar constitution, men when participating politically, do feel an interest and sympathy for one another. One of the products of political participation, therefore, is increased sympathy with those who enjoy the same political rights. Meeting one another as equals in determining how society will be governed allows citizens to hear and understand the interests of others that arise in the experiences of their daily lives.
4.3 The Economy

While Thompson and Wheeler were clearly critical of the patriarchal nature of the family and politics, which excluded and oppressed women, they also argued that the structure of the economic system, capitalism, is fundamentally patriarchal. Thus, for Thompson and Wheeler, capitalism can only hinder women’s social and economic position relative to men’s. Some might argue that capitalism cannot be blamed for the patriarchal exclusion of women from enjoying equal legal rights, educational and economic opportunities. A system of private property and markets, one might argue, is not responsible for the historical oppression of women, because women had been oppressed long before the rise of capitalism, in non-market societies. While Thompson and Wheeler do not solely place the blame for women’s inequality on the economic system, they are emphatic that capitalism is inherently patriarchal because of the way it narrowly determines the labor it will reward. The economic system must change in order to fulfill utilitarianism’s promise of maximizing the happiness of all individuals, including women.

Capitalism, as an economic system, will, they argue, maintain a private sphere of male dominance because of the way labor is rewarded. Women’s work will not be granted the same status as men’s work under capitalism, despite the use-value it provides to society, or its contribution to the happiness of communities and families. Moreover, because this work cannot be adequately compensated, women who bear and rear children will continue to be dependent
upon an income earner, meaning they will continue to find themselves in a subordinate position relative to male income-earners. Thompson argues that justice requires women be compensated for their role as reproducers; but instead of economically compensating women’s contributions, men have tended to aggravate women's station (xi-xii). That women are not afforded compensation for their role is a symptom of capitalism, and is ‘irreconcilable with equality’ (xi). 65 To resolve this issue, they argue, will involve re-fashioning not merely the family and politics, but also the economy, to enable compensation for reproductive and domestic work.

Appeal refers to the compensation of women’s reproductive work at least eight separate times, either to indicate that capitalism does not adequately compensate women for their work, and rather aggravates their situation, or to indicate that under a system of mutual co-operation reproductive work will be more adequately compensated. In his introductory letter Thompson explains, for instance, that “…the present arrangements of society, founded on individual competition, and of course allowing no real compensation for these impediments, are absolutely irreconcilable with the equality…of women with men” (Appeal xi). Later, Thompson and Wheeler explain that a system of mutual co-operation,

…is the only [system] which will complete and for ever insure the perfect equality and entire reciprocity of happiness between women and men. Those evils, which neither an equality of civil and criminal laws, nor of political laws, nor any equal system of morals upheld by an enlightened public opinion, can entirely obviate, this scheme of human exertion will remove or abundantly compensate” (Appeal 199).

65 In the introductory letter of Appeal, Thompson blames both systemic causes as well as ‘men’ as a category, for women’s oppression.
They elaborate that, in their view, compensation includes the provisions supplied by the community: “…if every possible aid of medical skill and kindness is afforded impartially to all, to compensate for the bitterness of those hours when the organization of women imposes on her superfluous sufferings…” (Appeal 201). In Thompson’s final book, *Practical Directions* where he most clearly outlines his vision for how a co-operative community should be organized and should function, he explains that,

> differences of organization, of previous culture amongst the first members, of age and accident, will inevitably cause equal wants of happiness to fail in producing to all an equal result of enjoyment. But, instead of aggravating, as is now done under the existing system of individual accumulation and contending interests, these natural and unavoidable sources of inequality of physical and mental power and enjoyment, it will be our object to alleviate these natural evils, and even as far as possible to compensate for them (*Practical Directions*, 10).

In my view there can be no doubt that Thompson and Wheeler consider that under mutual co-operation women’s reproductive work will be much more adequately compensated than it is under capitalism.⁶⁶

Despite criticizing capitalism for failing to compensate women adequately for their labour, Thompson and Wheeler were not arguing that individuals should be compensated in direct proportion to their contribution. Compensation does not mean an equal share, nor does it signify an amount of resources congruent to the amount of hours worked, for instance. Their point was that because women labour for the common good, they also have a right to a fair share of the community’s resources. Thompson writes that distribution in a co-operative community

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⁶⁶ For other instances of similar uses of this term, see *Appeal* pages xi-xii, 120, 156, 197, and 198-199.
will be determined democratically and, instead of an equal distribution, the allocation of resources will depend on an individual’s requirements (taking into account, for instance, their age and activities) (“Lease … IV”).

For Thompson and Wheeler, one of the main reasons why legal reform to extend civil and political rights to women is insufficient is because wealth accumulation, in the competitive system, is the primary motivator for exertion and this prevents compensation for women's necessary reproductive activity. Thompson explains in the introductory letter to Appeal that legal reform cannot eliminate women's oppression because, "inferiority of strength, and occasional loss of time in gestation and rearing infants – must eternally render the average exertions of women in the race for the competition for wealth less successful than those of men” (x). He argues that, although women may become equal to men in “knowledge, talent, [and] virtue’, they will always be at a disadvantage in gaining independence through wealth. Because of this, they will remain men’s inferiors within a competitive system (xi). Later, Appeal states: “[t]hose evils, which neither an equality of civil and criminal laws, nor of political laws, nor an equal system of morals upheld by an enlightened public opinion, can entirely obviate, [mutual co-operation] will remove or abundantly compensate. Even for the partial dispensations of nature it affords a remedy” (199).

More than economic insecurity, male domination in the private sphere, enabled by economic dependence even if other patriarchal exclusions are removed, creates conditions that make women more susceptible to domestic abuse. They highlight this susceptibility, which, they argue legal reform alone would be insufficient to eradicate. They write,
[you] you [women] will always, under the system of individual competition and individual accumulations of wealth [capitalism], be liable to the casualty of misery on the death of the active producer of the family, and occasional injustice from domestic abuse of superior strength and influence, against which no laws can entirely guard (198).

Moreover, while women must often ‘choose’ to marry in order to enjoy relative economic security (even, Thompson and Wheeler would argue, in a context of equal laws), they often will face a life of destitution if their partner dies.67

Because the capitalist economic system does not promote, let alone maximize, women’s happiness (and Thompson also outlines many ways it hinders the happiness of men) it cannot be justified using their indirect form of utilitarianism. In addition to women’s access to happiness, they also argue that by rewarding men’s work over women’s work, the capitalist system harms men themselves. Men’s ability to earn more than women due to the latter’s role in childbearing leads men, they argue, to continue to think themselves superior, particularly with regards to the women they co-operate with in raising a family. This is because individual wealth, in the capitalist system, is what is needed most, and aspects of human life that do not lead to wealth even if they increase general happiness, are disregarded and unrewarded. They explain,

[s]uperiority in production or accumulation of individual wealth will ever be whispering into man’s ear preposterous notions of his relative importance over woman, which notions must be ever prompting him to unsocial airs towards women, and particularly towards that woman who co-operates with him in the rearing of a family: for, individual wealth being under this system the one thing needful, all other qualities not tending to acquire it, though

67 As we see in Chapters 2 and 5, although Wollstonecraft and Mill propose education and economic opportunities be opened to women, they (and especially Mill) do not view women’s economic dependence on a husband, while married, as problematic.
contributing ever so largely to increase the common stock of mutual happiness, are disregarded; and compensation for the exercise of such qualities or talents, for the endurance of pains and privations, would scarcely be dreamed of (198).

For these reasons, Thompson and Wheeler are emphatic in their assertion that reforming institutions but maintaining a capitalist economy would not solve the problem of women’s oppression, would not be able to maximize the happiness of men or women. Achieving equal economic opportunities, equal education, and equal legal rights would not prevent male dominance and the exploitation of women’s labor. They argue that nothing short of ‘mutual cooperation’ is capable of such a task.

They do, however, recognize that equal opportunities and legal rights would alleviate some injustices faced by women, and would improve social relations between the sexes. Thompson and Wheeler consider legal reforms to be a necessary step in establishing a society based on voluntary association and cooperation (151). Thus, they argue for the necessity of “negative advancements” in order to lead to the one positive advancement: “…the voluntary establishment of co-operative associations” (182). Thus, removing unjust and unequal laws, and creating a situation of formal legal equality would, in their view, change the world to such an extent that it “…would be no longer recognized for the same” (151).

Removing exclusions and unequal laws might enable women to exercise and develop their bodies and minds, and to work towards achieving happiness alongside men. However, because “…unequal powers under free competition must produce unequal effects…” women will still be unable to realize equal happiness with men (Appeal xiv). As Nancy Folbre recently
remarked: “Over the course of capitalist development women gained “self ownership” but remained subordinate to men in large part because they continued to specialize in producing something that could not be easily bought and sold – the next generation of citizens and workers” (xxi). Thompson explains that the lack of compensation for women’s work is a symptom of the competitive nature of capitalism, and it is ‘irreconcilable with equality’ (Appeal xi).

Capitalism, by only rewarding labor that produces a surplus, renders women subordinate, limits their freedom, and hinders their economic and personal security. Because women’s domestic and reproductive contributions are not rewarded by the society it benefits, women are often rendered systematically dependent upon an income-earning male within a private sphere that, for this reason, he controls. Patriarchal male domination of the private sphere is enabled, in their analysis, by the economic system. Even if other patriarchal exclusions are removed, women’s economic dependence upon men will remain unless the economic system of private property and markets is changed so that other work, work that does not directly produce a surplus, can also be recognized and rewarded for its contributions.

4.4 Mutual Co-operation

Through the proposed establishment of communities of mutual co-operation, Thompson and Wheeler argue that women and men will enjoy equal access to the means of happiness, including economic security. In these radically democratic communities, women and men will
decide how labor is organized and compensated. In their vision, reproductive labor will be both recognized as contributing to the happiness of the community, and will be compensated in the same way as other forms of useful labor. Unlike how it is within capitalism, women’s work would be recognized and compensated as work that is necessary for the happiness of all, even though it is not directly surplus generating.

Thompson explains that mutual co-operation is, “…the voluntary union of the industrious or productive classes, in such numbers as to afford a market to each other, by working together for each other, for the mutual supply, directly by themselves, of all their most indispensible wants, to the way of food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture” (Practical Directions i). In another text he describes it as:

[t]he only just system of industry [based on] voluntary exchanges founded on equal means of knowledge and skill, on an equal command of the means of production, and on equal freedom from all mental or physical restraints of law, superstition, or public opinion (Labor Rewarded 11).

Communities of mutual co-operation will provide all members with an equal and rational education, and allow them, as equal possessors of political rights, to determine the way work is organized and wealth is distributed. Beyond the legislative sphere, community members will democratically govern the economic activity of the community. Democratically controlled labor, Thompson argues, ensures laboring activity is healthy, and never forced. Moreover, all work, not just that which produces a surplus, is rewarded equally; this means that women’s
traditional labor would be recognized and compensated. Economic dependence would no longer be an issue for women and children, for all community members would mutually depend on one another. Thompson and Wheeler believe that freedom would be increased in a co-operative through equal rights to democratic participation, a robust education system, as well as an increase in freedom that flows from economic security.

Thompson’s argument for the feasibility of mutual co-operation forms the basis of his argument for economic democracy. One of his main criticisms of the capitalist economy is that it operates through negative motivations to exertion: competition for security and status. Under mutual co-operation, negatively motivated competition would be largely replaced with cooperation between individuals and groups. Competition in his ideal co-operative would still exist, but it would be for public esteem through contributions to the well being of the community. The goal of increasing profits for the private enterprise, or increasing economic status for the private individual or family, would be replaced by the goals of increasing the health, longevity, and happiness of all members of the community.

Thompson responds to the common refrain that co-operation will not work because people are only ever motivated to work more, or better, by the promised increase in economic reward. To the contrary, Thompson points out, most laborers are paid the same amount, and will often work harder or better because of the praise or admiration they expect to receive, not for an

68 Thompson explains that profit, or surplus value is ultimately produced by labor – machinery and buildings cannot themselves produce additional value, “[t]here can be no other source of this profit than the value added to the unwrought material by the labor guided by skill expended upon it” (Inquiry 166). One of Thompson’s central claims is that surplus value is ‘forcibly abstracted’ from laborers, an idea that many suggest is the pre-cursor to Marx’s theory of alienation (Kaswan 112; Claeys, Machinery 91; King 350-351).
increased economic reward (*Inquiry* 470). He argues that our ideas concerning motives required to maintain or further production are, themselves, products of social context: the ‘competitionist’ argues that wealth to gain distinction is the only way to motivate workers to labor; meanwhile slave drivers argue production can only be assured through the use of, or threat of, physical punishment (*Labor Rewarded* 65-66). Actually operating motives can be evaluated and categorized as good or bad. Motives to produce ought to always be positive, rather than based on fear of poverty, punishment, or starvation. Healthy, or good motives, that drive people to contribute to production include: “…love of enjoyments, pleasure of active and successful exertion, pleasure of public opinion, sympathy, beneficence, and pleasure of our interests being identified with the interests of those around us” (*Labor Rewarded* 27).  

While Thompson recognizes that people must be motivated to continue to work, he thinks it is equally important for the system of production to be “…subservient to the happiness of all the industrious” (*Labor Rewarded* 36). Because the major contribution of any wealth production is due to inputs from labor, Thompson believes that laborers have a moral right to the products of their labor, including the right to enter into voluntary exchanges of the products their labor has produced. Thompson agrees that, in principle, workers are entitled to the whole produce of their labor (*Labor Rewarded* 14). However, Thompson also recognizes that a literal  

69 Thompson also rejects the notion that labor be rewarded according to merit, instead of equally. For the most meritorious person is the person who orders his actions according to their consequences on others. This person is most sensitive to the happiness of others and works ceaselessly to promote their happiness. Thompson does not believe that this person deserves more wealth than other people because he already knows how better to be happy. He is already enjoying life more than the average person. Indeed, such a meritorious person wouldn’t want to take away the wealth from other, less considerate people, because by being ignorant and vicious, they are necessarily also less happy (*Labor Rewarded* 18-27).
enactment of this entitlement would leave no remaining wealth to provide care to the elderly, the very young, the sick or disabled, nor to women who are bearing and rearing children (*Labor Rewarded* 13). Thompson explains that these two concerns can be resolved through the democratic organization of production and distribution of wealth.

**4.4.1 Self-Government through communal ownership, education, and democracy**

Rejecting the idea that workers should be allocated the entirety of the wealth they produce, Thompson points out that in order for the human race to survive, wealth must be to some extent shared by society as a whole (*Labor Rewarded* 13). Democratic control over production and consumption would provide workers with control over the products of their labor, as well as providing economic security to those who are not able to labor. This control, through voluntary agreements and democratic decision-making, secures to laborers the product of their labor on a collective, as opposed to an individual, level (*Labor Rewarded* 37). Equal ownership over the community’s resources, and equal influence over the governance of the community is what Thompson means by securing to laborers the whole produce of their labor on a collective level. As owners of the means of production, they retain influence over how items are produced, and what happens to those items. Under co-operation there would be no clear division between the economic realm and the political realm, for economic activity would be democratically controlled. In a co-operative society, educated community members, with equal rights, would determine the distribution of wealth prior to its production (*Labor Rewarded* 37). This enables workers to enjoy security in the products of their labor by providing them with
control over the wealth that they produce (*Labor Rewarded* 14-17). Thompson is an egalitarian insofar as each member enjoys equal ownership and equal influence over community governance. This type of equality can legitimately result in inequality, particularly when different people have different needs. He recognizes that sometimes distribution should not be equal, suggesting that the distribution of items, such as food, ought to be considered on an individual basis. Some may require more or less than others depending on age, work, and other circumstances (“Lease … IV”).

Thompson and Wheeler’s vision for a more just society includes universal suffrage in an extensive democracy where educated individuals are empowered to influence decisions that affect them. This democracy eliminates the lines that are often drawn between politics, the economy, the family, and social life or civil society. This system of mutual co-operation includes representatives; however it would be necessary for these representatives to be responsive to their constituents not only in order to be re-elected, but because laws could not be passed without the explicit consent of the governed. For instance, Thompson argues that a truly democratic society would have the working classes making those regulations that affect their happiness. Otherwise regulations are made by representatives who do not have enough sympathy with the wants and wishes of the working class to make ‘beneficent and equal laws’ (*Labor Rewarded* 43). In a co-operative community, however, this would not be an issue because all would belong to the same class, as each owns an equal portion of the shares in the community.

To join a community, prospective members would acquire ownership through an initial investment, or through labor hours (*Practical Directions* 35). Each member would own an equal
share of the community’s resources and have an equal say in how the community is organized and resources are distributed. Thompson did not envision state ownership of resources; his communities of mutual co-operation communities were envisioned to be quite small, with a maximum supportable number of 2,000 members (Practical Directions 34). 70 Unfortunately Thompson says very little about relationships between communities and larger organizations. In his third book he writes that communities would elect representatives to county or provincial legislative assemblies, representing between 200,000 to 1 million people. State legislators would be elected as deputies by counties or provinces, representing approximately 2-6 million people. He envisions a “central or National Assembly or Congress” to which inhabitants make appointments through democratic elections, “…securing the cooperation of hundreds of millions of people” (Labor Rewarded 122). 71 Except in emergency situations, the National Assembly or Congress should not pass laws but rather deliberate upon proposals. Each level below the National Assembly or Congress would have the ability to make laws that concern themselves only (Labor Rewarded 122). Thompson argues that legislation ought not be undertaken until those most affected by it, and who wish to think upon it, are convinced that it promotes their interests. To achieve this he proposes that,

[all legislators should be elected for a year, but removable at pleasure. Under such a system of union, no power being reserved to enforce the execution of unjust or unequal laws, reason and interest of those whom laws affect, must be the sole guides in the making of the laws. … above all, knowledge would be universally

70 However, in Labour Rewarded he new co-operators to “Unite in Large Numbers” (108-115).
71 His ideas on the functions of democracy outside of a small community are not well developed, and represent a short addendum to his third book. Other interpreters have flagged this omission as a major weakness in his work (see, for instance, Kaswan 130).
diffused, and individual happiness would at length become the avowed and real object of legislation (*Labor Rewarded* 124).

In response to the argument that this process of consultation would be too time consuming, Thompson and Wheeler point out, in *Appeal*, that the evil of waiting for assent to a law is far less than the evil of making laws "... for the pretended benefit, but in contempt of the will of human beings". This is the only way to reduce false judgment and mischief on the part of legislators (176).

Thompson was directly involved in writing the London Co-operative Society’s “articles of agreement...for the formation of a community...on principles of mutual co-operation” (*Articles*) of 1826 (Dooley, *Equality* 370). This document dictates that the community “...will be essentially *self-governed*: all its internal regulations will be formed, and its proceedings conducted, by the adult members themselves, or by committees, or individuals of their appointment, periodically reporting, and periodically renewed” (4, emphasis in original). The power of democracy is also limited within these principles; the drafters recognized the possibility of a majority to abuse its power. Thus, the *Articles* states:

> [w]e engage to abide in all cases by the votes of the majority; but the majority engage never to require the concurrence of the minority in any measures but those in which the interests of the majority are incompatible with the gratification of the wishes of the minority (4).

The principles also stipulate that all deliberations be public and held regularly in order to prevent ‘abuses and misgovernment’ as well as to increase sympathy and improve the faculties of all members of the community. The provisions in the *Articles* are subject to change with majority
consent (4).

In addition to collective ownership of resources\textsuperscript{72} and extensive democratic processes, an important mainstay to Thompson’s community is a rigorous education system intended to foster ‘mental liberty’ through the ‘free development’ of children’s faculties, including the ‘free exercise of … judgment’ without prior claims of value placed on any object to influence the child in one direction or another (\textit{Practical Directions} 219). In this way, the children base their understandings and their values upon their own reasoning faculties, rather than the opinion of their instructors (\textit{Practical Directions} 219).\textsuperscript{73} For co-operators such as Thompson and Wheeler, equal and extensive freedom is considered among the most important social concerns and equal access to knowledge forms an integral part of their understanding of freedom. Wheeler writes (as Vlasta):

\begin{quote}
Liberty becomes a tyrant unless possessed by all. It is the soul of a community; its body is universal knowledge. Without liberty, there can be no virtue: without knowledge there can be no liberty. But it should never be forgotten, that if ‘knowledge is power’, power only ceases to be dangerous when held by the instructed many (\textit{Letter by Vlasta}).
\end{quote}

Thus, a robust democracy must be accompanied by a robust education for all in order for liberty to be secured to individual members of a co-operative community.

\textsuperscript{72} Thompson and Wheeler did not foresee the risk that private ownership of the means of production could emerge over time. Presumably, communities of mutual-co-operation would take their own steps to avoid this situation and maintain equal ownership.

\textsuperscript{73} Here Thompson acknowledges Fanny Wright and General LaFayette and their co-operative community in Nashoba, Tennessee which provided equal education to both black and white children (\textit{Practical Directions} 219).
In addition to resolving the tension between labor and the allocation of the wealth it produces, equal ownership of the community’s resources ensures personal independence, Thompson asserts. There would be greater freedom of opinion and expression in a co-operative because, unlike under capitalism, nobody is so dependent upon the middle and upper classes that they are inhibited from speaking their minds due to fear of lost opportunities. A co-operative community that is owned by capitalists or landlords could not grant the members of the community true independence because they would be subject to the whim of the landlord or capitalist. Their comfort and survival would be impossible to guarantee and therefore, the opinions and actions of community members would of necessity be unfree (Practical Directions 41).

4.4.2 Women’s Work and Women’s Freedom

Under Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of utilitarianism, all labor that contributes to human happiness, not merely labor that produces a profit, should be recognized and rewarded. The traditional activities of women – bearing and rearing children and domestic work, all contribute to the happiness of the community. Democratically controlled production and consumption, where goods are distributed equally, or according to need, would promote women’s happiness, according to Thompson and Wheeler. Unlike the family under capitalism, no members of the community would be dependent on the income of any one person; and marriage, at that time compulsory for most women’s economic survival, would be a more voluntary relationship. In addition, they advocate community-shared child rearing where men or
women could act as superintendents. They write:

[a] superintendent only would be wanting, man or woman as may be most convenient, intelligent in the theory and practice of physical and mental culture, or if necessary both, surrounded with favourable circumstances merely, and thus giving an impulse to the development of minds of hundreds indiscriminately of both sexes... (179).

Thompson revisits this issue in a later (1828) article for the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* 74, where he argues that an equal number of men and women ought to educate children who are too young to work (“Proposal for a Community” 44). Once more in his final work he re-iterates this view, that teachers can be male or female and either sex can instruct the old and the young (96). In his first book, Thompson suggests that women will be relieved from the burden of childcare once the child has reached the age of two (*Inquiry* 382). Most importantly, in this system of mutual cooperation, "...all useful talents and efforts for the common good will be equally appreciated and rewarded..." (Thompson and Wheeler, 202). Thus, the system would be capable of recognizing the contributions of women’s traditional work (that, outside of reproduction, would not necessarily be performed by women).

Thompson’s views on gendered domestic labor seem to have evolved through his writings, gradually granting women greater freedom from what he considers ‘drudgery’. For instance, the gendered division of labor is assumed and maintained in Thompson’s first book, *Inquiry*. There is no discussion of sharing domestic labor, only freeing women from it so they can make more valuable contributions to the community. However, this changes in *Practical

Directions, and in the 1826 Articles drafted by the London Co-operative Society\footnote{As noted earlier, Thompson played an integral role in the drafting of these articles.} where domestic labor is shared equally by the community.

All useful services, called menial, and all others to which unpleasant associations are attached, will be performed (in want of volunteers by rotation, or otherwise, from amongst the adult members,) by the youth of the Community, or such portion of them, by rotation or choice, between ten and seventeen years of age, as may be necessary for the due performance thereof.

Women will be freed from the forced labor of maintaining the private sphere and its occupants by a combination of voluntary or (ungendered) youth labor and a restructuring of the activities, moving them out of the private sphere and into the public realm where they can be more efficiently and economically performed (as well as being democratically controlled).

Women’s freedoms are explicitly protected in the Articles. Many of the articles include provisions for protecting the equality of women, including number VIII “Rights of Women”:

To women, forming half the human race, equally capable with men of contributing to the common happiness, and equally capable of individual enjoyment, we guarantee eligibility equally with men, to every situation within the Community, to which their individual talents and inclinations may adapt them. We also guarantee to them equal means of acquiring knowledge and social pleasures, and of individual freedom of opinion and action, as well as an equality of property, and of the physical means of enjoyment, with men.

The final article (XXXVI) requests the signature of individuals and reads as follows: “Individual happiness being the object of the Association, and the voluntary co-operation of women being as necessary as that of men for its success, every woman joining the Association, married or not, must individually assent to, and sign these articles”.

\footnote{As noted earlier, Thompson played an integral role in the drafting of these articles.}
In addition to these explicit protections for women, Thompson’s proposal for living quarters promotes women’s (and men’s) freedom. The living quarters in Thompson’s proposed community are designed for maximum independence, with each person having their own private ‘sleeping room’ and ‘sitting room’ with larger sitting rooms for socializing. Each individual would have these private spaces, whether married or not. Married persons, however, could have their rooms in close proximity to one another, to share space at will (Practical Directions 62). The individual controls all access to his or her own private space. Co-operative members would have the freedom to pursue their enjoyments in private, or socially (Practical Directions 44).  

Thompson and Wheeler’s analysis of women’s position in the context of male dominance, for instance their exclusion from economic and political opportunities, the false choice to marry or not, and the oppressive character of the nuclear family, I argue, was enabled by their indirect utilitarianism which viewed women’s access to self-government and economic security as paramount to maximizing happiness. Moreover, their proposed community of mutual co-operation, which would, in their view, alleviate all the sources of women’s oppression, was also couched within utilitarian justifications.

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76 Interestingly, in his first book, Inquiry, he presumes that married people will want to share a living space, but in making this presumption he does not presume that married people will be opposite-sex. He explains that, “…single adults shall have one private apartment each: if married, or two men or two women living together, to have two rooms between them, with use of the public rooms for dining, reading, lectures, amusement, &c.” (Inquiry 388). As explained above, in his last book he moves away from the view that married people should share living quarters and instead advocates individual apartments regardless of marital status.
4.5 Conclusion

While Thompson and Wheeler’s main aim in writing *Appeal* was to demonstrate that arguments against equal political rights for women are also arguments against utility, the book’s reach extends much further than questions of suffrage, examining realms often considered untouchable because natural: the nuclear family and the capitalist economy. *Appeal* illustrates the particular challenges women face in a capitalist and patriarchal context wherein they have few rights or freedoms. The book argues for full equality, beyond legal reform, recognizing that under capitalism women will still enjoy less happiness than men due to their role as reproductive laborers. *Appeal* also argues for the establishment of communities of ‘mutual co-operation’ which would be radically democratic, where women would have greater control over their own work and would be compensated for their reproductive labor. Perhaps the most obvious way women’s lives would be transformed is through the removal of the source of their economic insecurity and dependence for their well being on an income-earning man. Self-government then becomes a greater possibility for women, the coercion to marry for security is removed and therefore their susceptibility to abuse is diminished if not eliminated entirely.

Contrasting *Appeal* with the only other full length feminist book published when *Appeal* was written, Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, demonstrates how radically empowering their ideas were. Thompson and Wheeler clearly drew from Wollstonecraft’s analysis of power, particularly her point that arbitrary power imbalances lead to a loss of humanity. For Wollstonecraft, these imbalances stunted the quintessential human capacity to reason and to cultivate improved reason leading to virtue. For Thompson and Wheeler, self-government and
sympathy, considered the highest pleasures, are blocked by gendered power imbalances: male dominance inhibits women’s access to self-government and men’s access to sympathy. Power needs to be checked for Wollstonecraft in order to enable all individuals the opportunity to develop virtue. For Thompson and Wheeler, power must be checked in order to maximize the happiness of all individuals. Thus, in line with Wollstonecraft’s insight that equality is necessary for virtue, the bulk of Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* advances the argument that circumstances and social positions between individuals will determine how they are motivated to act towards one another. In societies that are ‘secure,’ which have minimal to no hierarchies of status, wealth, race, or gender, individuals will be more benevolent and will enjoy greater happiness. In contrast, in societies structured through aristocracies, patriarchy, capitalism, or slavery, the tendency will be that whatever power a person may possess, they will use that power to further their own interests, at the expense of others. Thus, Thompson and Wheeler’s book more fully addresses women’s disempowerment by examining the effect all social institutions have on the happiness of women – the family, the economy, and politics. In the end, Thompson and Wheeler argue that legal reform to grant women equal civil and political rights with men will not be enough to maximize women’s happiness, or to give them an equal chance at happiness with men. Nothing but mutual co-operation, in their view, can accomplish that goal.

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77 Self-government and sympathy might also be considered virtues. In Thompson and Wheeler’s view, virtue is important for happiness, however, because they are utilitarians, virtue cannot be the ultimate end in itself; it is subordinate to happiness or well-being. If, however, virtue is required for happiness, and nobody can be happy when society and individuals lack virtue, whether or not one is subordinate to the others matters little.

78 As I discuss in Chapter 3, security for Thompson and Wheeler includes equal political rights, equal control over productive forces and equal access to the means of happiness.
The next chapter looks at the ideas that emerge from the next full-length feminist text of the period: Mill’s *Subjection*. This book has largely overshadowed Thompson and Wheeler’s contributions to feminist thought, and, I argue, neglected their insights while reproducing problematic aspects of Wollstonecraft’s proposals. Mill, like Wollstonecraft, is unable to square women’s reproductive difference with women’s equal freedom. His book, I argue, thus represents a regressive step in the history of feminist political theory.
Chapter 5: *Appeal and Subjection in the History of Feminist Political Thought*

At the time *Appeal* was written and published, the only full-length text advocating greater equality and rights for women was Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. *Appeal* both draws from this book, and moves beyond it in substantial ways. *Appeal* proposed more radical changes to society’s fundamental institutions in order to adequately address the problems Wollstonecraft had identified, as well as moving beyond those problems to address issues Wollstonecraft did not explicitly tackle. Women’s subordination within the dominant family structure, headed by an income-earning husband and a wife whose main occupation was bearing and rearing children could not be resolved by equal education and equal civil rights, for Thompson and Wheeler. The power imbalance between men and women would remain, they argue, because of women’s continued economic dependence. This dependence and inequality is largely due to the lack of compensation for women’s traditional labor, including reproduction, not to mention women’s lack of political rights. *Appeal* thus represents a progressive step forward for feminist political thought in the following ways: it presents an argument for equal political rights; it considers women as individuals whose happiness is as important as men’s; and it argues that women’s work is economic in the sense that it is understood to make a substantial contribution to the well-being of society, and as such, should be compensated.

The contribution of *Appeal* is, however, almost entirely overshadowed by the later *The Subjection of Women (Subjection)* written by the more famous philosopher John Stuart Mill. *Subjection* is often viewed as having taken feminist political thinking the next step forward
following Wollstonecraft’s groundbreaking work. In this chapter I argue that relative to *Appeal*, *Subjection* in some senses takes feminism a step backward. Despite its virtues, *Subjection* preserves the power relationships within the private sphere, fails to advocate for compensation for domestic and reproductive labor, and does not grant women, particularly married ‘unexceptional’ women, equal freedom with men. In addition, Mill’s proposal rests on an unarticulated understanding of motives or behaviour ordered through sexual difference. As a consequence of his not pursuing a utilitarian concern for women’s interests, his proposal ends up being surprisingly similar to Wollstonecraft’s. When compared with *Appeal* the main flaw of both *Vindication* and *Subjection* is an inability to treat women as individuals with their own interests, which ought to be equally weighted with the interests of men.

While *Appeal* owes much to Wollstonecraft, it was also influential in its own right. Approximately forty years prior to the publication of John Stuart Mill's celebrated *Subjection*, Thompson and Wheeler published their treatise on gender inequality and male domination; at this time, Mill and Thompson were well acquainted. Both had engaged in the same public debate between liberal political economists and Owenite co-operative reformers in 1825. In his autobiography, Mill reflected on this debate:

…it was a perfectly friendly dispute…the principle champion on their side was a very estimable man, with whom I was well acquainted, Mr. Will Thompson, of Cork, author of a book on the Distribution of Wealth and of an “Appeal” on behalf of women
Susan Okin argues that despite Mill’s reference to Thompson’s book that there is “no evidence that Mill ever read … Appeal…” This seems odd given that Okin highlights Mill’s disagreement with his father on this subject and argues that the controversy James Mill’s essay caused within utilitarian and radical circles “…must surely have stimulated John Stuart Mill’s concern with feminism.” (John Stuart 27-28). Mill’s obvious concern with women’s equality, his immersion within utilitarian circles from a young age, his father’s status as a leader in utilitarian thinking about government, and his public debates with leaders of the co-operative movement in the same year Appeal was published, make it highly unlikely that Mill would have ignored Thompson and Wheeler’s book. Appeal combines utilitarianism, feminism, and co-operative arguments, which were all themes Mill had written upon. Moreover, Mill wrote that he was ‘well acquainted’ with Thompson and held him in high esteem. Unfortunately Mill does not quote Thompson or Wheeler directly. However, his intellectual and social context coupled with his acknowledgement and engagement with Thompson, render it very probable that Mill would have carefully studied Appeal. This is important to keep in mind when evaluating Mill’s feminist contribution.

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79 For the transcript of Mill’s rebuttal of Thompson’s criticisms of competition, see Mill Cooperation. Unfortunately, the transcript of Thompson’s contribution to this debate cannot be found.

80 Moreover, in his closing speech to his debate against Owenites, where he rebuts Thompson’s criticisms of competition, he alludes to Appeal twice. See Mill, Cooperation 314 and 321.
5.1 Gender, Power and the Private Sphere

While feminists have debated Mill’s contribution to feminist political thought, only one other scholarly work has read Mill’s *Subjection* in light of Thompson and Wheeler’s earlier *Appeal*.\(^8^1\) Some of this scholarly work on *Subjection* attempts to exonerate Mill from his feminist critics by arguing that his book was the first comprehensive feminist work to question gender and its relationship to sex, to uncover patriarchy’s corrupting influence on men’s character, and to offer a critique of the family (Nadia Urbinati, Maria Morales, Susan Okin, and Mary Shanley).

Maria Morales points out that Mill drew attention to the way the social construction of gender encourages vice. She notes that Mill viewed it an injustice that character traits such as, “…self-denial, dependence, and submissiveness” are encouraged for women while for men some vices are deemed virtues, for instance: “self-worship and numbing of the mind” (106-107). Urbinati argues that it was Mill who “introduced the distinction between what we call today sex and gender…[by]… plac[ing] the sexual moment among the ‘mechanical’ or pure physical factors”. This analysis is enabled by his assumption that psychological characteristics are the outcome of social and cultural context rather than of biology, and it is here where, according to Urbinati, we find the first admission that gender, masculinity and femininity, are not essentially tied to physiology (629). She writes,

Mill understood earlier and more clearly than his contemporaries that biological sex should not be the criterion for attributing gender characteristics. … In breaking the connection between sex and gender, Mill liberated human beings – women, above all – from the rigid distinctions imposed by sex roles (631).

\(^8^1\) See Coole 158-163.
Similarly, Keith Burgess-Jackson argues that *Subjection* should be considered a radical feminist text, mainly because of Mill’s position on gender and human nature. He argues that Mill’s approach to sex, gender and human nature is largely agnostic (79). Morales and Burgess-Jackson highlight Mill’s insight into the different socialization processes of men and women while Urbinati argues that Mill was the first writer to conceptually separate sex and gender.

While these insights are important contributions to feminist political thought, they did not originate with Mill. Thompson and Wheeler expressed similar ideas, and, at the outset of *Appeal*, Thompson acknowledged Wollstonecraft’s influence (vii). As explored in Chapter One, Wollstonecraft presents a detailed analysis of the formation of femininity through gendered and unequal power relationships between men and women. Thompson and Wheeler build upon Wollstonecraft’s analysis, but present a more balanced criticism of gender, interrogating both femininity and masculinity. For instance, the introduction of *Appeal* states that,

…really enlightened women … would find it difficult to meet with associates worthy of them in men as now formed, full of ignorance and vanity, priding themselves on a sexual superiority, entirely independent of any merit, any superior qualities, or pretentions to them, claiming respect from the strength of their arm and the lordly faculty of producing beards…(xii).

Like the inculcation of femininity, the character of men is also formed through education and the prevailing system of morality (xii). The formation of masculinity in this way is directly related to the formation of femininity. Feminine qualities such as "[b]eauty, cleanliness, grace, obedience, [and] modesty" are encouraged in women because they enhance men’s view of their own superiority while at the same time gratifying them sensually. In contrast, women are
discouraged from cultivating qualities which would be good for a human being to possess in their own right because they are deemed to be unfeminine (192-193).

All three books extensively criticize women’s subordinate status and provide prescriptions for what is necessary to achieve gender equality. Like *Appeal*, Mill’s *Subjection* is highly critical of women’s subordinate status, comparing marriage to slavery, criticizing women’s inability to own and control property once married, and women’s lack of opportunities outside the domestic sphere (500, 503, 588). Despite critiques of the family in both Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, and Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, Susan Okin writes that, to her knowledge, Mill was the first “…in the Western context … who wrote of the 'perverting influence' of the typical English family of his time – which he termed "a school of despotism" (*Gender Inequality* 12). Similarly, Nadia Urbinati writes that as “… a modern interpreter of ancient political thought, and by attributing moral virtues to women, [Mill] universalized the notion of equal and of friend. This allowed him to consider marriage as a kind of friendship” (637). Urbinati argues that “…it was only Mill…” who combined the ideals of “voluntary association” and “…the notion of an ideal marriage … into an instrument with which to denounce the reality of family life as it really was” (638). This depiction, she writes, was one that “…equated married life … with despotism and slavery” (637).

One key difference between Mill’s analysis of dominance and subordination in the private sphere, and Thompson and Wheeler’s, was that Mill considered that despotism could have favourable consequences. While Mill is critical of the power imbalance in the private sphere, he also argues that despotism can produce virtues in the despot, alongside vices. He
points to the family as "...a school of despotism, in which the virtues of despotism, but also its vices, are largely nourished" (Subjection 518). Interestingly, much earlier than Mill, in 1826, Thompson had written something similar in The Cooperative Magazine and Monthly Herald:

> [e]very family is a centre of absolute despotism, where of course intelligence and persuasion are quite superfluous to him who has now only to command to be obeyed: from these centres, in the midst of which all mankind are now trained, spreads the contagion of selfishness and the love of domination through all human transactions... This great obstacle must be removed before any real advance can be made to human happiness: not even Cooperation, without it, would produce happiness or virtue (“Physical Argument” 257).

It is notable that despotism is not once described as having virtues in the writings of Thompson or Wheeler. Subjection is rightly critical of the formation of gendered characters and the inequality of the family. However Mill, unlike Thompson and Wheeler, also believes that power

82 According to Yvonne Chiu and Robert Taylor, for Mill, “…despotism can only be justified when its end is improvement, its means are fitted to that end, and its beneficiaries cannot be helped by other, less coercive means, such as persuasion” (1244). While Mill does not clearly elaborate on how the private sphere nourishes ‘the virtues of despotism,’ that despotism within a family might cultivate virtues of the despot indicates that Mill may not be as egalitarian as is often assumed. However, one might argue that he refers to the power of parents over their children, a temporary but perhaps necessary form of despotism. Unlike Thompson (see Chapter 3, footnote 41), Mill does not elaborate on the possible harms that might follow from the absolute power of parents over their children.

83 Like Mill, Wollstonecraft believes that the position of male head can produce admirable qualities in the position holder: ‘a sober manliness of thought, and orderly behaviour”. However, these positive qualities often do not materialize due to “lax morals and depraved affections of the libertine”. Often, male heads are absorbed by their concern for their own rank and gratifying their own tastes. Wollstonecraft calls this family form a ‘system’ and argues that women, as well, are equally corrupted by it. “Girls are sacrificed to family convenience, or else marry to settle themselves in a superior rank, and coquet, without restraint, with the fine gentleman whom I have already described” (Vindication ... Men 22).
imbalances may be beneficial in some circumstances, otherwise he could not describe despotism as having virtues.

Similar to Wollstonecraft, Thompson and Wheeler argue that hierarchies produce misery. In any social setting one’s social position is responsible for creating one’s motivations, thereby influencing behaviour. Having a dominant social position, such as being a husband under patriarchy, or a capitalist within capitalism, produces motives that are antithetical to happiness for all influenced by the relationship. Dominating power leads to feelings of selfishness, entitlement, and a love of superiority that block an individual’s ability to develop knowledge, sympathy, and benevolence – three necessary components for experiencing ‘exalted happiness’ (Thompson and Wheeler, 90). Thus, we can see that, contrary to the claims of contemporary feminist scholars, Mill’s critical analysis represents not only ideas that were presented earlier by Wollstonecraft and Thompson and Wheeler, but his comment regarding the virtues of despotism might also indicate a less substantive commitment to equality between individuals.

5.2 Mill’s Recommendations for Change

For Mill, as well as Thompson and Wheeler, women and men should receive the same education, employment opportunities, and have the same civil and political rights. Despite these similar claims, Mill’s vision of what is needed to achieve gender equality is inadequate. Mill argues that the best division of labor for an income-dependent married couple is to have the husband earn the income while the wife cares for children, performs or supervises domestic
labor, and superintends the family’s finances. Mill expects women to remain the primary nurturers of children, however he does not want women to feel forced into the role of wife and mother. By granting women equal education and employment opportunities, he suggests that marriage would become a vocational choice for women, one among others. He writes,

[1]ike a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes the choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call on her exertions, during as many years of life as may be required for the purpose; and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this (Subjection 523).

For Mill, once marriage is chosen, women should not engage in any other occupations that might interfere with its requirements. Otherwise, he felt nobody would do the labor, and the children and household would suffer, thereby outweighing the advantage of an extra income. “The care which she is herself disabled from taking of the children and the household, nobody else takes;… the management of the household is likely to be so bad, as even in point of economy, to be a great drawback from the value of the wife’s earnings” (Subjection 522). While it is indisputable that Mill was genuinely concerned about the inequality between men and women, this concern is overshadowed by his maintenance of a romantic view of the family, which does not adequately address the unequal, gendered power relations within it. As Annas points out, “…how can it be argued that women really do want to be free and equal with men, and have political and

84 While the conservatism of this point is obvious, the extent of its conservatism is even more apparent when we consider that this argument was used against the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. See for instance, Croswell Doane.
educational parity, if it is taken to be a fact that the reformed state of affairs will make no
difference to the majority of women?” (64).

Wheeler takes the ideology of gender differences as ‘complementary’ to task. She
complains that if a man is dissatisfied with his marriage, he can easily leave his home and go
elsewhere. Women do not have this luxury. Some argue, she says, that this is simply the result
of “uncongenial unions”. She points out, however, that there are no incentives for men to wish
for a congenial relationship. In fact, because men want a woman to perform domestic duties,
which are very different from the duties prescribed for men, they might seek out “contrast rather
than uniformity” (To the Editor of the Crisis 278). Wheeler’s analysis reveals three aspects of
gender inequality that Mill’s subjection inadequately addresses: the division of labor in the
household (something which Mill seems to have thought was naturally ordained), its effect on
the relationship between a married couple, and the unjust power that income earners have over
the characters and activities of non-earning dependents.

Similar to Wollstonecraft, Mill includes a caveat in his vision: exceptional women are
exempt so long as they can ensure "due provision [is] made for supplying any falling-short
which might become inevitable, in her full performance of the functions of mistress of a family"
(Subjection 522). Di Stefano explains that,

[Mill's] feminism fails women just at the point where modern feminine specificity and “difference” cannot be ignored. Instead,
[w]omen must be disembodied, desexed, degendered, and made over into the image of middle-class and upper-class men if they
are to benefit from the promises of rational liberalism as Mill envisions them (Configurations 176).
To be an exceptional woman, she must have the means to purchase a domestic worker, only then can she be as free as men are to enjoy any other opportunities that may be open to her. Mill ignores that the choice he offers women, to have a family or to have a job, is a choice that men in most circumstances would not have to make. Thus, Mill weighs the interests of men and the family unit above those of women who are interested in equal access to the means to choose their own happiness and to have their work appropriately recognized and rewarded.

Nevertheless, Mill believes that his proposal for legal change will equalize the power dynamics within the private realm while at the same time maintaining a gendered division, rather than a shared division, of housework and childcare among married partners. Mill assumes that women's status within a marriage will equalize due to her capacity to work outside the home. He writes: “[t]he power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, if she has not independent property” (Subjection 522). This capacity alone is enough to provide the foundation for her husband's respect, even if it is unlikely that any but the most privileged among married women will enjoy the actual opportunity of exercising it.

Mill’s assumption here overlooks Thompson and Wheeler’s analysis of the impact that women’s economic dependence has upon male income-earners. With regard to the function of power in the private sphere Thompson and Wheeler recognize that men's ability to earn more than women due to the latter's role as child-bearer leads men to continue to think themselves superior, particularly regarding the women they cooperate with in raising a family. This is because individual wealth, in the current system, is what is needed most, and aspects of human life that do not lead to wealth, even if they increase general happiness, are disregarded and
Mann and Spinner-Halev suggest that the conservative elements in *Subjection* are due to Mill’s understanding that the state should not enforce progress outside of the provision of legal equality. Rather, the family should play the main role in fostering social progress. They argue that Mill viewed the family as a form of public institution necessary to foster the development of virtuous citizens, not only by “inculcating norms and values but as a site where those values must be taught and upheld” (258). In their view, Mill wanted to challenge the public/private divide by infusing the private realm with greater equality and removing the domination that existed between men and women / husbands and wives (255). They point out that Mill considered the choice to become a wife and mother unproblematic only “if it [were] made under conditions of equality”. Mill thought this choice was valid only if “the household and the world beyond are egalitarian” (258).

While Mill advocated greater equality, by his own admission he did not think his proposal would result in a completely egalitarian relationship between husbands and wives. Mann and Spinner-Halev overlook Mill’s own claim regarding the continuance of male dominance in the private sphere following the reforms he recommends. Mill explicitly notes that inequality in marriage will continue due to the man’s economic role and his greater age (*Subjection* 514). It is Mill's own insight that the partner who provides economic support to the family will naturally have more 'voice' (*Subjection* 514). That Mill envisioned the family as an egalitarian institution is questionable because, by Mill’s own admission, the heterosexual unit would most often be composed of an older male and a younger female, and the male income
earner will enjoy more decision-making power.

Coupled with the power differential that age brings, it is difficult to see how Mill envisioned the private realm as one that is devoid of domination, or one that is structured through equal relations between the sexes. Mill sought to grant women the option to leave the private sphere, but did little to change the economic and cultural forces that inhibit women from exercising this option. While Mill was concerned with the way masculinity is inculcated, his reforms would do nothing to change the fact that children will continue to learn that fathers earn the income and therefore are entitled to more power.

Mann and Spinner-Halev interpret Mill’s argument as not merely requiring an egalitarian context of equality where women choose to become wives and mothers or not, they also argue that Mill wanted to “elevate the importance of running the household and spending time within it” (259). To support this view they quote Mill directly: “...that there should be no option, no other career possible for the great majority of women, except in the humbler departments of life, is a flagrant social injustice” (259). If Mill thought the occupation could be elevated he ought to have argued in favor of both sexes becoming household managers and child-rearers, or for the socialization of household labor, or for economic compensation equal to or above ‘humbler’ occupations. Many of these solutions are outlined in Appeal and had been discussed in radical circles, including the co-operative movement and their publications. It is not simply that Mill did not think of these alternatives. It is much more likely that he consciously overlooked them, leaving the unfreedom of mothers without an independent source of income firmly intact.

Surely Mill must have understood that the reforms he recommended would provide
inadequate assurance that wives would be treated equally in the private sphere, that they would have access to their own funds or that they would have protection against abuse. Mill’s vision for the ideal family is as "a school of sympathy, tenderness, and loving forgetfulness of self" (Subjection 510). It is clear, however, that the educators in this school will be women, perpetuating the socialization of women as self-sacrificing nurturers while men will be socialized to compete for employment rather than in the virtues of care.\(^85\) This is problematic because it serves to reinforce gender stereotypes about talents and capacities, thereby culturally (as opposed to legally) inhibiting the freedom of both men and women.

Despite the shortcomings in his vision, Mill did acknowledge the problem of women’s unrecognized household labor when he explains women’s lack of achievement in comparison to men. That women have achieved less does not mean they are naturally inferior. He reasons that, “very few women have time for [extra pursuits]” because their minds are so consumed by practical things such as “…the superintendence of the family and the domestic expenditure, which occupies at least one woman in every family…” Even when this work is not “laborious, [it] is extremely onerous to the thoughts…from which the person responsible…can hardly ever shake herself free”. Even privileged women who do not have to labor or think as much on domestic concerns, still must be preoccupied with “dinner parties, concerts, evening parties, morning visits, letter-writing, and … the engrossing duty which society imposes exclusively on women, of making themselves charming”. Moreover, women are expected to be available to whoever may need them, whereas men are not as susceptible to interruption and it is more

\(^{85}\) Aside from those exceptional women who, in his view, after securing someone else to take care of their domestic responsibilities, can then compete in the public realm. Or, those who decide to forego marriage and a family in favor of participating in the public realm.
acceptable for men to refuse to answer the demands of others. The only valid excuse for a woman not to be at the “beck and call of somebody” is family illness or “something else out of the common way” (*Subjection* 552). While Mill laments women’s lack of opportunity to achieve success outside the private realm, he neglects to ensure all women and all men have the same opportunities to strive for, let alone to achieve such successes. His prescription for women and families would hardly change the social fabric that creates it. Moreover, his definition of ‘achievement’ upholds the view that public pursuits are more valuable than private ones, once more rendering Mann and Spinner-Halev’s interpretation of Mill as advocating the elevation of the activities in the domestic realm questionable.

Like Wollstonecraft and Thompson and Wheeler, Mill also notes the effect relations in the private sphere can have in the public realm. He argues that equal rights in marriage would prevent the development of selfishness and self-worship that men learn because their will is considered law for another human being. This learned egotism is prevalent in all privileged persons and classes (*Subjection* 516). Presumably, with greater equality in the private sphere, society will see greater equality in the world outside. As we’ve seen, however, Mill’s proposal will actually do little to change the power dynamics within the family. Moreover, as Thompson and Wheeler had previously argued, the maintenance of gendered roles in the private sphere, particularly where women are in an economically dependent role relative to their husbands, leaves women susceptible to domestic abuse.

Mill’s understanding of the problem of domestic abuse in the private realm is instructive. While it may or may not have been empirically true, it reveals another key shortcoming in his
proposal – that the conditions of life for working class women would hardly improve. Mill argues that lower class men are more prone to commit domestic violence than upper class men.⁸⁶

There is nothing which men so easily learn as ... self-worship: all privileged persons, and all privileged classes, have had it. The more we descend in the scale of humanity, the intenser it is; and most of all in those who are not, and can never expect to be, raised above anyone except an unfortunate wife and children (Subjection 516).

He repeatedly argues that men of the lower classes believe the law gives them an excuse to engage in domestic violence against their wives. In one instance he writes:

…in the most naturally brutal and morally uneducated part of the lower classes, the legal slavery of the woman, and something in the merely physical subjection to their will as an instrument, causes them to feel a sort of disrespect and contempt towards their own wife which they do not feel towards any other woman, or any other human being, with whom they come into contact; and which makes her seem to them an appropriate subject for any kind of indignity (Subjection 520). ⁸⁷

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⁸⁶Perhaps he thought that middle-class or upper class men are more immune to this type of character corruption under a liberal democratic system. Recent Statistics Canada research states that this was likely a dubious empirical claim, “… household income and education levels, were found to have had little impact on experiencing spousal violence… Regardless of whether Canadians belonged to the highest or lowest household income category, the proportion of victims of spousal violence was between 1% to 2%” (Family Violence 11). Statistics Canada also published a report stating that, “income was not related to women’s risk of either spousal or non-spousal violence” (Measuring Violence 60).

⁸⁷Mill does not admit that middle or upper class men might also engage in this type of violence. He only frames the problem as one that only plagues the lower classes. Mill offers no evidence that abuse, physical or mental, is more widespread among the lower classes, and presumably it would be impossible to determine given his own admission that men act differently in public among their male peers than they do in private. Indeed, as Di Stefano points out, Mill’s scathing critique of lower class men ignores the rampant sexual exploitation of lower class prostitutes by bourgeois men (Configurations 184).
While his assumption is an empirical one, which may or may not have been correct, as it is today, abuse survivors with more economic resources will find masking the abuse or escaping from it easier than those from less fortunate economic backgrounds.\textsuperscript{88}

The key issue here is not Mill’s classism, but his inability to see the shortcomings of his own recommendations. Given his belief (correct or not) that powerlessness in the economic realm leads to an exercise of despotic power in the private realm, it should lead him to advocate more than simply legal change. While criticizing lower class men for being more abusive toward their wives, his vision barely addresses what he views as the source of the problem. A change in laws will not help working class women who already must work and who would have no access to legal recourse due to limited income or economic dependence. By advocating legal reform that does not address economic inequality, Mill's feminist analysis does not address the actual reason why poor women would have little recourse against violent spouses.\textsuperscript{89} Mill's feminist vision would thus continue to chain poorer and less educated wives and mothers to the private sphere and correspondingly to potentially violent spouses.

Thompson and Wheeler understood that legal reform alone would be an inadequate solution to the problem of women’s vulnerability to domestic violence. They predicted that changes in laws and public opinion would result in a form of 'indirect domination' within the secrecy of the private sphere, mainly due to women's continuing economic dependence (203).

\textsuperscript{88} Anna Wheeler was one such privileged woman who escaped an abusive marriage by moving in with her wealthy uncle (Dooley, \textit{Equality} 60).

\textsuperscript{89} While it is true that vulnerability to violence could still exist under more equal circumstances, women’s economic dependence upon a man who could commit domestic violence with impunity would be alleviated. Mill’s proposal would not alleviate working class women’s vulnerability to domestic abuse as economic dependents.
Perhaps because Wheeler was both a victim of domestic abuse and a member of a privileged class, they make no distinction between the prevalence of violence and abuse in different classes.

Mill's class bias is not entirely surprising; he makes clear that he does not intend to substantially remove the privileges of already privileged men. He writes that with equal opportunities, women would only fill a minority of positions, mainly because the majority of women will prefer to engage in "...the one vocation in which there is nobody to compete with them," motherhood (Subjection 525). He must mean that women will prefer not to compete with men, for clearly women will continue to compete with each other for economically successful men, or 'good providers'. Even Wollstonecraft recognizes this when she writes that although men compete with one another for wealth and power, competition is normally limited to men within the same profession. When men are not competing, it is relatively easy for them to become friends. For women, however, the situation is much different, ‘they are all rivals’ (Vindication 187). Women are rivals because, in order to have a family and survive economically, they require a husband (not to mention the social status marriage brings). It is unclear how or why Mill thought women would not be in competition with one another in this way, especially given that he ought to have had a preliminary understanding of the reasons why femininity emerged as it did, as explained by both Wollstonecraft and Thompson and Wheeler.

Competition between women in this way is considered by Wollstonecraft to be an effect of their socialization. We find similar analysis in Thompson’s Inquiry, another work Mill would have been familiar with. Thompson argues that because women are barred from developing
their mental capacities, their exertions are pointed towards bodily adornment and attracting the attentions of men. This, in turn, leads women to believe that, “[w]hatever, not them, man sets his ear upon, is with them a rival…”, the consequence being that women view all outside interests as a rival, and fail to develop a sense of benevolence (299). Thompson believes that the only way to prevent this is by granting both men and women equal political and civil rights, as well as granting to all the children of a family a right to inherit an equal share of their parents’ property (300).

Mill did intend to challenge the power dynamics within the private realm, hoping that this would change the character of citizens for the better. However, he thought this was possible without challenging the gendered public/private divide itself or eliminating the power relations that this division itself creates. By Mill’s own admission the family is not a school of sympathy, but a school of dominance. Both Wollstonecraft’s and Mill’s proposals subordinate women's self-government to the interests of their husbands and children by portraying a social choice as natural fact. Whether or not women are innately predisposed to want to care for children, it is because of social norms and institutions that they perform this important social function in conditions of personal dependence, without recognition of their labor as genuine work. Like Wollstonecraft, Mill thought the family should be the institution responsible for inculcating the value of sympathy, perhaps to counter the unsympathetic relations cultivated through the marketplace and public realm in general. What both he and Wollstonecraft clearly overlooked is the role of public institutions in educating and forming the character of individuals. If care and competition are relegated to separate spheres/institutions, then competition will tend to dominate
care, especially given that the spoils of competition grant the winner, or earner, power to dominate those who are both dependent but also occupied in unpaid caring labor. Thompson and Wheeler point to problems in the economy as well as the private realm, noting that power relations overlap and affect the other. Because of this, both private and public realms require significant change before women's equality can be realized.
5.3 Feminism and Utilitarianism in the 19th Century

In both Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* and Mill’s *Subjection*, despite the good intentions of their respective authors and the progress their proposals would have achieved, women would remain less free than men. In both theories, women’s self-government is compromised by familial duties and a lack of compensation for women’s reproductive contributions.\(^{90}\) Thompson and Wheeler apply a utilitarian calculation to the context of women’s choices. In *Subjection*, Mill does consider choice to be an essential element for women’s happiness; however, he does not consider the unequal context of choice wherein men have the opportunity to have family and career, rather than one or the other. Instead of granting women’s interests, as individuals, equal weight with men’s, he implicitly grants the happiness of men and children more weight rather than granting women substantive and equal freedom. It could be argued that Mill deviates from his utilitarian framework in his prescription by not providing a context where women’s preferences and experiences, as individuals, are granted equal weight with men’s. Indeed, Mill’s proposal was very similar to Wollstonecraft’s.

For Wollstonecraft, justice requires that women have the opportunity to become virtuous, whereas for Thompson and Wheeler justice requires that women and men have equal access to the means of happiness. Thompson and Wheeler advocate equal freedom for women by eliminating their bondage in the private sphere, whether they choose to become mothers or not. In considering women to be equal human beings with their own interests, and in weighing their interests and the contributions of their reproductive labor equally with men’s, their combination

\(^{90}\) Chapter 4 explains Thompson and Wheeler’s views on the compensation of reproductive labor.
of feminism, socialism, and utilitarianism led them to a more prescient and effective proposal to end women’s subjection. In this way, indirect utilitarianism, as opposed to Wollstonecraft’s virtue ethics, provided a clear avenue toward women’s empowerment. Far from leading Thompson and Wheeler toward a conservative view of women’s role, their indirect utilitarianism (which held that the self-government of all individuals had to be protected to promote both security and happiness), provided them with more effective arguments for protecting women from the claims of the community against their bodies, than a virtue ethics standpoint such as Wollstonecraft’s, which begins with a sexual division of duties.

The inequality of Mill’s proposal has been attributed to his utilitarianism. Nathalie Sigot and Christophe Beaurain point to Mill’s earlier writings in order to find evidence for this claim. In 1832-33 Mill argues that women should be capable of supporting themselves, but "...it does not follow that a woman should actually support herself ...in the natural course of events she will not. It is not desirable to burthen the labor market with a double number of competitors" (quoted in Sigot and Beaurain, 288, sic). Sigot and Beaurain argue that here Mill is justifying women's reduced opportunities on utility for male workers (288). It is possible that Mill's prescription for improved gender relations is limited because of his concern for overall utility, including what a flood of women workers would do to wages, although he does not make this argument in Subjection. Instead, he uses the language of choice and an understanding of the different gender-ordered motives to justify the maintenance of gendered public and private spheres. In

91 See Chapter 3.

92 See Chapter 2 for more on Wollstonecraft, as well as Chapter 6 for an analysis of reproductive freedom in Thompson’s co-operative community.
my view, then, the inadequacy of his vision may stem from his view of women's nature, as indicated in the quote above – suggesting that a majority of women competing in the labor market is not part of the ‘natural course of events’. This biologically essentialist view of gender complementarity, coupled with a failure to address women’s continued economic dependence following her ‘choice’ to become a wife and mother, may be more at fault than his utilitarian framework. Utilitarianism, particularly the indirect form of utilitarianism that recognizes the importance of the protection of individual rights for the purpose of security, and one that also recognizes women’s equal entitlement to happiness, could not support his view.

Indeed, it is instructive to note that Thompson and Wheeler anticipated the arguments above concerning women's competition and denounced them as unjust consequences of the capitalist system. They argue that not only do men dread competition from each other, but also even more would they dread the additional competition of women. Under the competitive system it is highly unlikely that men would agree to admit women into the labor market on equal footing, let alone share their income with their wives as "...compensation for the loss of time, pain, and expense incurred by them in bearing and rearing children..." (197). A comparison of Appeal and Subjection can illustrate that Mill’s conservative views are not the result of adhering to a utilitarian framework. Instead, Thompson and Wheeler frequently repeat their view that happiness ought to be promoted for the sake of the individual, each individual, and not for the interest of a group or the whole. They also explicitly state that women’s happiness must be secured for their own sakes as individuals (119).

The combination of a commitment to utilitarianism and to gender equality also seems to
have enabled Thompson and Wheeler’s more modern understanding of sexual pleasure. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the key to Thompson and Wheeler’s more effective feminism is their focus on unequal power relationships, on how social systems produce those relationships, and how the systems can be changed to prevent the harmful effects that the concentration of power often brings. This lens on the problem of gender inequality also led them to consider sexuality as a ‘system of morality’ replete with unequal power relationships that inhibit the enjoyment of pleasure, including sexual pleasure. Thompson and Wheeler link heterosexuality, as a system, with gender socialization. Under what they term ‘the sexual system of morality’; women are unjustly barred from enjoying sexual pleasure.

Like other sensual pleasures, Thompson and Wheeler argue that sexual pleasure ought to be regulated by the consequences it produces. If the consequences are judged to be negative, then one should resist yielding to the pleasure. However, “[w]here the yielding to immediate inclination … is attended with no ulterior mischief to the agent or others, it is the part of benevolence to feel pleasure and to delight in promoting the gratification of such natural inclinations” (181). Therefore, it is unjust that women are expected to “…cast nature, or feign to feel, or desire”. Women are trained to be an ”...instrument of man's sexual gratification, [they are] not permitted even to wish for any gratification for [themselves]” (64). Under mutual cooperation, sexual morality is “just and equal in her awards”. Men cannot use wealth (because they have it in an equal amount) to access sexual pleasure with a woman; they must attract her voluntary affection. In this way, they argue, “…in proscribing her indiscretions, … he must proscribe his own”. If they require repression, repression of men and women would be equal,
only to the extent that they decrease, rather than increase, the “common happiness” (201).

In addition to expressing the radical notion that women’s sexual pleasure is important, and that it is neglected through the “sexual system of morality”, Thompson and Wheeler also hint at recognizing that not all sexual relationships are, or ought to be, heterosexual. They argue that freedom and perfect equality would lead to relationships where neither party had power to refuse or grant harmless pleasures\(^93\), where neither would wish to lessen the happiness of the other, and where ‘perfect equality of reason and affection should regulate and restrain... the feelings and wishes of both...’ This, they argue, should be the way relationships are governed for “two persons of the same or different sexes living together” (95-96). It may be unlikely that they were referencing homosexual relationships here; however, they were both very well acquainted with Jeremy Bentham, who did write in favour of decriminalizing homosexuality (Boralevi, 37).

Thompson explains that since all pleasure is good; and the ‘only rational object of living,’ sexual pleasure must not be viewed as repugnant, but instead it ought to be raised in esteem. This becomes possible in mutual co-operation because choice is expanded to ‘all members of the community’. Sexual pleasure helps to motivate people to maintain their ‘health, intelligence, and benevolence’ such that, “…the attractions of the lowest and the capacity to increase mutual happiness, must exist in a higher degree than amongst the best gifted with these qualities in general society” (Inquiry 555). Considering the 19th century context, it is remarkable

\(^{93}\) They are not only referring to sexual pleasure here, but pleasures in general. Importantly, they would consider unwanted sexual activity as harmful. This passage is to be read as a comparison of what an equal partnership would look like, as opposed to one where control over all the pleasures of life are held by the male head of household.
that they would argue for sexual liberation where sexual activity is constrained only by a prohibition on harm.

This is in marked contrast to Wollstonecraft’s ideas on the subject. Wollstonecraft is so wary of sexual pleasure she even argues in favor of abstinence between married partners. Parents, she writes, should abstain from “lov[ing] each other with passion,” in order to properly fulfill their duties (Vindication 30). Thus, the consistent application of utilitarianism to all pleasures and weighing women’s capacity to enjoy pleasure equally with men leads Thompson and Wheeler to a much more progressive and open-minded view of sexuality and human equality. Thompson and Wheeler’s stand on gender and sexual pleasure represents a significant leap forward from the stand taken by Wollstonecraft in her feminist writings. Similar to his understanding of gender and the composition and role of the private sphere, Mill’s views on sexuality mark a significant regression in the trajectory of feminist political thought. While Mill suggests men’s desire for women to be their willing slaves produces femininity by convincing women that their ideal character is the opposite of men's (486), he does not explicitly link this to sexual morals. As Okin notes, Mill and Taylor-Mill wanted sexuality to become a private affair in order to lessen “…what they saw as an unhealthy preoccupation with sexuality…” rather than to secure sexual freedom. Instead of recognizing sexual pleasure as an important aspect of women’s, as well as men’s, well being, Mill and Taylor-Mill hoped that women’s equality would bring about greater “sexual ascetism” (John Stuart 44-45).94

94 Wollstonecraft’s unconventional relationships (see Chapter 2) and Mill’s relationship with Harriet Taylor while she was married, possibly indicate that they were less conventional than their writings imply.
5.4 Subjection in light of Appeal

Some of Mill’s supporters have excused the shortcomings in *Subjection* by arguing that it is not fair to criticize him from a contemporary standpoint (Burgess-Jackson, Mann and Spinner-Halev, Shanley, and Urbinati). Urbinati notes that "...Mill's critics are implicitly saying that he is not our contemporary and that there has been some progress since his time, at least concerning beliefs on women's roles inside and outside the family" (639). Shanley states that "[o]ne cannot ask Mill or any other theorist to "jump over Rhodes" and address issues not put forward by conditions and concerns of his own society" (243). Mann and Spinner-Halev suggest that Mill’s ideas regarding women and household labor might be due to a lack of imagination given his historical context. They further argue that contemporary theorists who characterize Mill as a conservative liberal are enabled mainly by their ‘contemporary lens’ which does not recognize “Mill’s vision of progress and of what he thought constitutes sites of political action” (262). This view of Mill, they argue, is challenged when we consider that Mill did not view the state as the most appropriate vehicle for social change, and that “...the legal removal of barriers to women's advancement...[are] more than superficial”. They point out that Mill thought the “most” the state ought to do is remove legal barriers (263).

It might make sense to excuse the feminist deficiencies in *Subjection* were it not the case that Mill would have been aware of its problems given his familiarity with *Appeal*. It may not be appropriate to judge a 150 year-old text through a contemporary lens, but it should be appropriate to judge the merits of a text through one written decades earlier, one with which it is

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95 That Mill did not view the state as a legitimate agent of substantial social change constitutes a weak apology for his reform proposals. To be sure, Thompson and Wheeler also did not view the state as the agent capable of bringing about a regime of gender equality.
highly likely Mill was most familiar. While Mill can be praised for much of his critique of power and inequality, the more comprehensive analysis of sexual inequality and the requirements for its remedy are more effectively stated in *Appeal*. In this way, *Appeal* demonstrates that Mill’s *Subjection* represents a step backwards in the trajectory of the history of feminist political thought.

Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* addresses the problem of women’s inequality in a more concrete and effective way by advocating the release of women and other members of a family from dependence on the income of one person, from coercion into marriage for economic survival, and from the narrow choice of marriage and motherhood or a career. Moreover, they argue for the importance of recognizing and rewarding all efforts that contribute to human happiness, not only those that result from market exchange. Mill believes legal reforms that promote the formal equality of women, but which maintain a gendered public/private divide, are capable of bringing about a new social order characterized by justice, equality and sympathy. He argues that “[t]he family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom” and that this school would be much more significant than the practice of citizenship in free countries (*Subjection* 518). Thompson and Wheeler also believe their feminist vision will lead to greater happiness and justice for all, but only by dismantling the public/private divide, democratizing the economic system, and granting men and women equal freedom. In this way, Thompson and Wheeler have built upon and greatly advanced the critique and proposal Wollstonecraft advocated 33 years earlier. Mill’s vision makes equal happiness between men and women impossible since it does not recognize the need for a change in how work is
organized and rewarded in the economic and private spheres as necessary for improving the
plight of women (as well as men and children). Mill’s vision maintains not only a romantic
view of the private sphere as an ideal place for the education of citizens, but also sustains a strict
gendered divide between public and private spheres and the traditional division of labor in each.
In contrast to Subjection, Appeal offers a more robust challenge to the injustice of the gendered
public/private divide. It is this insight that makes Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism a more
significant contribution than the liberal feminism of their time. Many of those liberal feminists,
including Mill, have come to dominate our views of feminism in the 18th and 19th centuries, as
well as continuing to ground much 20th and 21st century feminist thought.

Some of Mill’s defenders point out that his principle of ‘perfect equality’ is what grounds
his arguments against the subjection of women, making his prescription, which leaves many
women locked in the private sphere, inconsistent with the foundational principle of the book’s
arguments. They interpret this to mean that the prescription is unstable and changeable
(Shanley, Morales, Burgess-Jackson, Urbinati). For instance, Urbinati writes, “our
dissatisfaction with Mill’s feminism is, in fact, a dissatisfaction with particular opinions that he
expressed on specific problems rather than with his principles per se..” (629). The problem with
this view is that his principle of ‘perfect equality’ is limited to legal equality. While Mill’s
opinion might change, as Mann and Spinner-Halev rightly point out, his principle of ‘perfect
equality’ is a formal, legal principle – not a substantive one. He only mentions ‘perfect equality’
only in Subjection when he writes:

...the principle which regulates the existing social relations
between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the
other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and ... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other” (471, emphasis added).

It is clear that Mill meant a principle of perfect equality in law, given his explicit indication that he is interested in replacing a legal principle. That his principle of perfect equality is a formal or legal one is also confirmed in his prescription, where he argues that the gendered division of labor ought “…with perfect safety [to] be ... regulated by opinion, without any interference of law” (Subjection 523). In my view, it is unlikely Mill would agree to change his prescription if public opinion and other extra-legal constraints maintained the division of labor in the unequal state he recommends.

5.5 Are the Limitations in Mill’s Subjection Strategic?

There are a number of reasons scholars might consider the limitations in Mill’s Subjection strategic. While the reforms proposed in Subjection are explicitly limited to legal reforms in favor of extending legal equality only to women, in his Autobiography he explains that he was concerned with “…complete sexual equality in all legal, political, social, and domestic relations…” (Coole, 133). As a prominent and influential philosopher and legislator, Mill was also quite likely concerned with his ideas being adopted into mainstream society. For instance, Coole explains that, 

During Mill’s lifetime, feminism developed from an idea in the minds of scattered individuals to a well-organised movement. Mill was involved in this development in a practical as well as a theoretical capacity. As MP for Westminster, he spoke to the House on behalf of (single) women’s suffrage. He also gave
evidence to a Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Act … and contributed towards scholarships which would assist women’s entry into the universities. The areas on which his published writings concentrated were those of marriage, employment and the vote – all subject to agitation by the fledgling women’s movement which was aided by the theoretical arguments that Mill presented on its behalf (143).

While Mill must have been concerned with the adoption of his proposals and the perhaps greater possibility of improvement through gradual change, there is little indication that Mill understood the division of labour along gendered lines as problematic. Coole argues that it was Harriet Taylor-Mill who provided the more radical proposition of ensuring women’s independence within marriage by arguing for their right to earn a living outside the home (145).

Mill was also not committed to the continuance of a capitalist economy. His views changed over time, and in his later writings he became more sympathetic to the idea of socialism. Mill's "Principles of Political Economy," contains a chapter titled "the Probable Future of the Laboring Classes" which he acknowledges was co-written with Taylor-Mill. They argue that it is unacceptable for any 'class' to be non-laboring unless they are unable to do so or have toiled enough to earn retirement (293). Eventually, workers will not be satisfied as wage laborers (299). Given that the idea of equality is spreading within the poorer classes, a system of unequal classes will not survive. Instead, they believe that society will gradually progress to an "association of laborers among themselves" (301). They view this form of association which "must be expected in the end to predominate" as one where laborers collectively own capital, relate to one another as equals, and elect and remove their managers. They also thought that this
form of economic association would not come about by workers 'robbing' the capitalists, but instead through "...honestly acquiring capital for themselves" (305).

Mill and Taylor-Mill share with Thompson and Wheeler the idea that co-operative socialism can be instituted peacefully and without violating laws that protect private property. They do not agree with Thompson and Wheeler, however, on the evils of competition. They argue that competition should be valued, not derided:

...every restriction of it is an evil, and every extension of it, even if for the time injuriously affecting some class of laborers, is always an ultimate good. To be protected against competition is to be protected in idleness, in mental dullness; to be saved the necessity of being as active and as intelligent as other people... (Mill and Taylor-Mill, 315).

While often competition harms the wages of the upper-working classes, the artisans, and tailors, competition which benefits all enlarges the sympathies of the privileged working classes for those less privileged, enticing them to, "resort for the improvement of their condition to the same remedies, as the less fortunately circumstanced and comparatively helpless multitude" (Mill and Taylor-Mill, 315). From this it is clear that Mill and Taylor-Mill did not envision workers under a cooperative regime receiving equal remuneration, at least not at first. Instead, they view economic competition as having an equalizing tendency, which Thompson and Wheeler would not accept.

Mill and Taylor-Mill’s writings on socialism are brief and, unlike Thompson and Wheeler’s explication of the system of mutual co-operation, there is no clear indication of the treatment of reproductive and domestic work in Mill and Taylor-Mill’s vision. As Coole explains, “[m]uch
more clearly than J.S. Mill, Thompson sees that women’s economic dependence on men must be broken, as must the exclusive bond between labour and wages” (162).

5.6 Conclusion

Wollstonecraft and Mill were clearly concerned with proposing reforms that would be adopted given the climate of public opinion at the time. There is no question that their proposals were more likely to be adopted by the social and political institutions of the time, as compared with Thompson and Wheeler’s more radical proposals. Thompson and Wheeler’s work, in contrast, aimed to convince their audience that more radical change is required for equal happiness. They understand that formal equality under capitalism cannot realistically solve the problem of women’s subordination. The alternative offered by Thompson and Wheeler is that all labor, including domestic labor, be democratically controlled and equally rewarded. If one wants to be a child-rearer, a person of either sex is welcome to do so. Integral to their analysis is the idea that economic and social systems (competition and male dominance, for instance) provide the motivations for why people treat one another in specific ways. Thus, in changing these systems to create greater equality and democracy in work and the home, they believe social relations will change to such an extent that the well being of all individuals will be improved. They explain,

[then shall you [women] and men salute each other with a real and mutual modesty, founded on mutual benevolence, on a just estimate of your several characters, and a knowledge of the mutual dependence of each on the other to elicit the highest degree of happiness; not, as now, with an air of superiority and condescending bounty on the one side, and on the other with downcast eyes, the willing and ignorant slaves of men’s pampered
and brutalizing appetites (204).

Thompson and Wheeler were among the first to argue that because reproductive and domestic labor contributes to happiness, that it, like other forms of useful labor, deserves compensation. Without compensation for this work, they write, all other things being equal for men as for women, women will not become the equals of men in terms of independence arising from wealth.
Chapter 6 Utilitarianism and Thompson and Wheeler’s Feminism: Contemporary Critiques

So far the dissertation has argued that Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism illuminates a tension between capitalism and women’s happiness and equality, in ways that other feminists of the period naturalize or overlook. Throughout the dissertation I have also pointed to the ways, relative to other feminists of the period, they challenge gendered power relations, ultimately empowering women. I suggest that these insights were enabled by a combination of their understanding of human nature and indirect utilitarianism that takes women’s interests, as individuals, seriously. Despite this, some commentators have argued that their utilitarianism was a conservative influence on their thought. While few scholars of the history of feminist thought have yet to engage with Thompson and Wheeler’s writing in much depth, in this chapter I review two interpretations of their work that argue Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist writings maintain gendered power relations and that connect this interpretation to an incompatibility between feminism and utilitarianism. The chapter defends Thompson and Wheeler from these critiques, arguing that where the critique is accurate, utilitarianism itself is not to blame. The chapter concludes by offering my own interpretation of the limitations in their feminist thinking: ambivalence concerning reproductive freedom, the exclusion of women based on inferior strength, and their argument that middle-class white women are more oppressed than female slaves in the West-Indies.

In her book *Equality in Community* Dolores Dooley argues that Thompson and Wheeler
overvalue the public sphere and undervalue the private, deny women moral agency, and devalue women’s traditional work. More recently, Catherine Villanueva Gardner’s *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy*, argues that Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* maintains traditional gendered roles, focuses more on changing men than on empowering women, and fails to adequately compensate women for reproductive labor. Both interpretations argue that these flaws are at least partly a function of adhering to an abstract utilitarian framework. 96 This chapter defends Thompson and Wheeler against these claims. To begin with, there are other reasons, besides utilitarianism, for Dooley’s accurate observation that Thompson and Wheeler devalue the private sphere. Second, Thompson and Wheeler do not deny that women have a capacity to act; they simply insist that full, or meaningful, moral agency requires a social context of freedom / non-domination. Third, the claim that they devalue women’s labor does not take into account Thompson’s distinction between useful and productive labor. While Catherine Villanueva Gardner’s proposed feminist philosophical lens might be useful, I argue that her analysis of *Appeal* is flawed because it is not supported by the arguments in the text itself. Villanueva Gardner’s interpretation of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist utilitarianism as abstract and individualist overlooks important aspects of their writing. While concerned with the well-being of individuals, their feminist utilitarianism is not abstract but rooted in both a recognition of women’s difference from men and each other, and in the view

96 For Dooley and Villanueva Gardner, abstract utilitarianism refers to utilitarianism that considers individuals outside of their particular context and universalizes the human self as having a set of characteristics, often conforming to the self-image of the dominant group. An abstract, masculinist theory will understand the dominant male experience as the universal experience, leaving little room to consider experiences that do not conform to this universal norm. I argue in this chapter that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism cannot be understood as abstract and/or masculinist. See Pateman, *The Problem* 24-45.
that women, as human beings, are embedded in social systems that produce their interests, but also have the capacity and right to self-determine and participate in politics.

6.1 Dolores Dooley

Dolores Dooley’s *Equality in Community* is a formidable book that analyzes not only Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist insights, but also provides extensive biographical information on the writers. This dissertation is greatly indebted to Dooley’s in-depth research and analysis. While *Equality in Community* is generous in its praise for Thompson and Wheeler’s positions on women, it is not uncritical. Dooley highlights three areas where she believes Thompson and Wheeler unintentionally maintain those gendered power relations they vehemently reject. First, the utilitarian emphasis on impartial benevolence leads them to overvalue the public sphere and undervalue the private by arguing that the private sphere cultivates almost no virtues in women and instead makes them selfish and narrow-minded. Second, they characterize women confined in the private sphere as lacking moral agency. Third, Thompson devalues the private sphere by labeling domestic work ‘unproductive’ while men’s work in the public sphere is considered in a more positive light as ‘productive’. I address these points in turn by advancing the view that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism cannot be blamed for the shortcomings Dooley identifies. There are other factors to consider. The first is context and strategy, the second is the role of republican ideas of freedom built into their utilitarian understanding of happiness, and the third is Thompson’s distinction between useful and productive labor.

Dooley argues that by over-emphasizing the positive traits developed through the public
sphere, alongside the vices that are fostered in women in the private sphere, Thompson and Wheeler undervalue women and their traditional activities. She argues that it is Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarian philosophy that leads them to insist that women’s traditional role in the domestic realm fosters a form of selfishness that lacks an enlarged benevolence. This demonstrates, she argues, that they had trouble recognizing the value of women’s work. She writes, “…it may turn out that the utilitarian emphasis on benevolence results insidiously in the devaluing of women’s traditional roles as mother, nurturer, home-keeper with all the contributions to human development that these imply” (*Equality* 217). Dooley points out that most of the descriptions of women’s activities in *Appeal* characterize women and their activities in the private sphere as selfish or as promoting selfishness and narrow-mindedness. For instance, in promoting the idea that women need political rights Thompson and Wheeler write,

> [t]his vice of character, want of interest in any thing out of themselves or of their own little domestic circle, -the necessary result of the state of barbarous exclusion, of domestic imprisonment, in which women have been kept, -can never be cured by the enjoyment by any others than themselves of those opportunities for unfolding their power, which enlarged social, including political interests, can alone create. ... Without them they can never have enlargement of mind, they can never have expansive benevolence; because without them they can never pass through those incidents which are necessary to unfolding of such qualities. ... From the casualties of gestation, women are necessarily ... more stationary and confined than men, and more inclined to mere local and personal sympathies. To counteract then this tendency of their physical situation to confined views and feelings, a greater necessity than in the case of men, rather than a less, exists, that opportunities should be afforded them for overcoming this tendency to selfishness, and for cultivating the enlarged and benevolent affections (122-124, emphasis in original).
Dooley contrasts Thompson and Wheeler’s depiction of women and women’s activities in the private sphere with their depiction of the political sphere as largely a sphere that nurtures virtuous character traits such as benevolence. Implicitly, Dooley argues, Thompson and Wheeler are guilty of devaluing women’s traditional contributions within the private sphere such as child rearing, domestic chores, and reproduction itself (*Equality* 223).

While I agree with Dooley’s observation that Thompson and Wheeler consider the private sphere as largely responsible for cultivating selfishness in women, I do not fault utilitarianism for their failure to highlight the virtues of the private sphere and women’s traditional activities therein. As discussed in previous chapters, Thompson and Wheeler’s insistence that women’s traditional labor in the private sphere be compensated indicates that they consider the work itself to be highly valuable. The real issue, for Thompson and Wheeler, is the conditions under which this useful work is undertaken. These conditions lead to, they argue, character deficiencies in women (and also to men as they shared the common view that power corrupts). Utilitarianism, a system that values everything for its propensity to promote happiness, prompts Thompson and Wheeler to recognize the contribution that women’s labor makes to overall happiness. Moreover, Thompson and Wheeler understand the dictates of utilitarianism to apply equally to men and to women, thus they were also able to see that the oppressive social context in which this valuable work is conducted limits the happiness of half the population.

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97 It is also important to keep in mind that in *Appeal* we find an equal amount of emphasis on the vices the power imbalance in the private sphere produces in men as well as in women.
Dooley anticipates and rejects the obvious justification for their devaluing of the private sphere: that it must “…follow from the criticism of its confinements, its isolating effects, its often coercive atmosphere” (Equality 226). She argues that by characterizing women (as formed in the restricted private sphere) as selfish they are also denigrating women’s traditional activities which cannot be considered as undertaken for moral reasons and therefore, which must fall outside those activities considered benevolent: “…money management, fondling, reprimanding, cooking, loving, cleaning, washing, and endless interpersonal refereeing…” (Equality 223). While Thompson and Wheeler question women’s moral agency given their lack of freedom, it does not necessarily follow that the activities undertaken to support life and well being within the private sphere, are, in themselves, denigrated or that those activities might not, in a different context, be undertaken for benevolent reasons. As Dooley notes in another chapter, Thompson and Wheeler are equally critical of the kinds of characters fostered by other institutions, including the capitalist economy (Equality 291). She notes that according to Thompson, “[c]apitalism affects ways of thinking, ways of acting, ways of desiring, ways of looking upon others which are antithetical to equality, security, co-operation: in a word prospects for human happiness” (Equality 292). By criticizing capitalism as an institution that produces particular vices, Thompson and Wheeler are not arguing that the activities themselves, undertaken within capitalist production, are at fault. It is the way the activities are organized – hierarchically and competitively – that produces the vice. Thompson and Wheeler are denigrating the effects of women’s subordination and forced confinement.

Dooley views this aspect of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism as threatening the status
of women as moral beings. Since Thompson argues benevolence can only be developed in a context of free education and social participation, it follows that women, excluded from this context, might not be considered moral persons (Equality 137). She explains,

> [i]t seems important to argue that it is possible to be benevolent and therefore moral without engaging in the public sphere of political activities or else we are left with a rather damning indictment of women’s capacities to be moral agents and an indictment that would have obtained for all the centuries when women did not enjoy political rights (Equality 227).

It is not just Thompson who challenges the view that one can be moral when one is not politically free. Wheeler also challenges women’s ability to be moral while being trapped in the private sphere. In 1833 she argues that,

> …the present system … sinks to the lowest possible degree that nature will admit the intellectual and moral nature of woman, (I say the moral nature, -for it must be admitted that the slave, whose every feeling and action is dictated by the will of others, cannot rank as a moral being)…” (To the Editor).

This idea resonates with their earlier assertion in Appeal that voluntary sympathy, sympathy felt in a context of freedom (where women enjoy basic civil and political rights), rather than bondage, is required to experience ‘exalted happiness’ (90).

For Dooley, this depiction of women is unfair; their inability to recognize women’s capacity for benevolence is a consequence of their adherence to abstract utilitarianism that cannot recognize the value of special relationships. She writes:

> [i]f utilitarian moral theory is going to be women-friendly, it would have to revise its conceptualization of benevolence to more clearly include activities that allow for partiality towards persons of one’s own family, for special relationships of love or friendship
and does not denigrate these as selfish attention to particulars (\textit{Equality} 227).

Dooley acknowledges that Thompson and Wheeler also admonish men’s inability to act benevolently toward their wives, daughters, and domestic servants, but she questions whether this inability is also not somehow connected to a definition of benevolence that fails to value special relationships and commitments of a more confined, rather than expanded, nature, such as those within one’s own family (\textit{Equality} 228).

However, utilitarianism does not lead Thompson and Wheeler to believe women are incapable of morality because they are family-oriented; it is because they are unfree. As noted throughout the dissertation, freedom, understood by Thompson and Wheeler as voluntariness and self-government, is an integral and essential part of their understanding of happiness. Rather than utilitarian benevolence, in my view this results from their republican understanding of freedom and its integration into their indirect utilitarian understanding of happiness. For Thompson and Wheeler, women’s perceived interests are limited due to their lack of freedom and self-government within the private sphere. They are prevented from caring about anything more than their families because they lack access to education, most meaningful occupations outside the private sphere, and the ability to participate in politics. Family is all women are capable of caring about because of their forced confinement, thus their concerns are narrower and develop within a context that inhibits freedom of thought and action.

Since benevolence requires rational education and social and political freedom, it would have been difficult for women to develop this virtue because of their social and political
exclusion. This does not necessarily mean they do not act morally, for benevolence is not the same as altruism or selflessness or acting out of feelings of sympathy. Benevolence requires cultivated reason, including the ability to understand the reasons for one’s actions as well as an understanding that the happiness of others is connected with the happiness of one’s self. Benevolence also requires a context of freedom, with meaningful options. Capitalism and patriarchy are systems that Thompson and Wheeler understand to hinder the development of benevolence in both the oppressors – who have political freedom – and the oppressed. Thus, benevolence requires more than political freedom, it also requires a context of relative equality such that interests are not systematically opposed.98

Moreover, Thompson and Wheeler do recognize special relationships and partiality are inescapable among community and family members; however, their indirect utilitarianism strengthens, rather than weakens, their feminist arguments. They point out that an ‘identity of interest’ between people increases as you zoom in on a nation, more when you look at a community, and an even stronger identity of interest exists within a single family. Importantly, however, interests do not end here, and individuals must form the basis of any calculation of interests (47). The individualism expressed here is not easily characterized as either abstract or

98 One might ask whether it is possible for those in a dominating position to show benevolence. Thompson and Wheeler do provide us with clues as to how they might respond to this difficult question. Chapter 3 discusses their understanding of the effect of power on those who have too much, that it prevents the development of sympathy. In Chapter 4 we see that they understand political rights as necessary to develop the capacity for benevolence, but only between those in equal social positions. Thompson and Wheeler would have considered benevolence between agents in dominant and subordinate positions as rare.
concrete. Granting women, as individuals, their own, proper interests, enables a consideration of the concrete realities of women’s lives as individuals within a particular social context.99

In my view it is not unfair or inconsistent for Thompson and Wheeler to argue that women, being made into slaves through marriage and confinement to the private sphere, lacked moral agency. While women would have felt sympathy for others, often confined to family members, many could have lacked the ability to feel beyond the family, thus the sympathy they felt was more natural or forced than voluntary, and their actions could not be considered benevolent on Thompson’s definition. If freedom is necessary for morality, and if women were unfree, then it is possible that women lacked moral agency.100 Importantly, this view held not just for women. Thompson’s understanding of benevolence would have also excluded working class men; anyone excluded from rational education and equal participation in the public sphere would be considered incapable of developing benevolence on this account.101

There are times when Thompson seems to devalue domestic labor, in particular when he labels the work ‘unproductive’. However, Thompson does not equate ‘productive’ labor with ‘useful’ labor, thus in describing women’s work as unproductive he is not necessarily devaluing

99 Of course the risk is equally great in valuing the ‘special relationships’ of family against broader justice concerns. Families can elevate the value of family to such a degree that the crimes of individual family members are hidden and excused, frustrating the ability of communities to achieve justice.

100 One might also speculate that moral agency was of little importance to Thompson and Wheeler, who were more interested in how social contexts promote or inhibit personal freedom or autonomy. Some contemporary feminists call this understanding of freedom ‘relational autonomy’ (MacKenzie and Stojlar, Oshana).

101 See Chapter 4 for a discussion of political rights, benevolence, and oppressive behaviours of political rights-holders.
it as less useful. By ‘unproductive’ Thompson merely means to distinguish it from labor that produces a return on capital invested. Since this labor does not produce a profit, it remains unrewarded by the capitalist marketplace, despite its usefulness and value to society.

According to Dooley, when Thompson argues in *Inquiry* that the time spent by women on caring for young children should be “as much as possible abridged,” he overvalues the public sphere and its activities, and devalues of women’s activities in the private sphere. She cites Thompson’s understanding of domestic labor as ‘useless’ and labor in the productive sphere as ‘productive’ (*Equality* 182). In Thompson’s first book, *Inquiry*, he has a clear understanding of domestic work as inefficiently organized. For Thompson, the nuclear family is a product of the economic system, and it hinders the productive efforts of the community by confining women to the domestic sphere, and wasting approximately three hours per day of her labor which could be “more usefully” employed. He argues that communities should pool their domestic tasks as much as possible, thus freeing women from “…a considerable portion of unproductive domestic drudgery, and of course rendering much of their time disposable for useful pursuits” (372). Thompson explains that confining women to the domestic sphere is such an enormous waste of potentially productive labor, especially considering that the development of machinery enables women to participate and become ‘as productively employed…as men” (372). Thompson makes a similar comparison between motherhood and more productive labor. In *Inquiry* motherhood is considered more akin to a curse than a blessing. Thompson writes that ‘those doomed to be mothers,’ ought to be educated on how to properly rear and educate their children (341). He also explains that in a co-operative community women will be freer from the
constraints of motherhood than is otherwise possible, and the community will benefit from her more ‘productive’ contributions:

...in order...to increase the useful products of the labor of the community...women shall be relieved from the care of children over two years old, and from the drudgery of family cooking; the children being to be educated in common under a proper number of superintendants, but always under the eye of the parents, and the culinary arrangements for the whole community to be performed in a common kitchen: meals to be taken in the common sitting-rooms, or in the private apartments of the co-operators, at their pleasure. The departments of labor, agriculture and manufacturing, or otherwise, to be done by women to be such as is best suited to their physical and intellectual powers (389).

This is not, however, his final statement on the value of women’s work in his first book.

Thompson’s criticism of domestic labor largely concerns its inefficient organization. Thompson revises his stance on the usefulness of women’s domestic labor in a later chapter where he explains that while machinery enables women to participate in productive labor alongside men, it must be recognized that women are needed “…in the production and care of very young children; an occupation more useful, not to say more necessary to human existence and happiness, than any other whatever”. He concludes this acknowledgement, however, with the following: “It is evidently desirable for the happiness of all, that this time should be as much as possible abridged” (401). Under co-operative arrangements, married women would be freed from much of the domestic work they undertake in the system of individual competition, enabling them to ‘co-operate almost as effectually as the men, in contributing, by productive labor, to the common happiness’ (401). Too much labor is being input by women in private when it could be organized on a broader, and more efficient scale.
Dooley responds to Thompson’s outlook on women’s labor by writing,

[w]hy is child-minding by women not given the favoured adjective of ‘productive’?  In the moral economy of Thompson, time-wasting is eschewed and so is unproductive work.  Who determines what is productive?  Obviously there must be production of goods, materials and foods to live and flourish so reproduction and rearing of children who ultimately produce these goods would seem eminently productive (350).

Thompson’s definition of ‘productive labor’ might be helpful in understanding why he did not call domestic work productive.  In his final book, *Practical Directions*, he writes,

[u]seful labor is that which affords more pleasure in the use of its products than pain in their production.  Productive labor is that which replaces in exchangeable value, as much as or rather more than, it consumes.  Productive labor, in a mere economical wealth-producing sense, may therefore be utterly useless as the term useful is here applied (1).

When Thompson labels domestic work as unproductive he means one of two things, the work is inefficiently organized, and/or the work does not produce a material surplus that can be accumulated.  His definition of ‘productive’ would have excluded all private sphere activities because they do not produce surplus through exchange.  Unproductive labor is not necessarily useless.  As noted above he refers to domestic work as the most useful form of human labor.\(^{102}\)

In the London Co-operative Society’s 1826 *Articles of Agreement (Articles)* (to which, as noted previously, Thompson contributed substantially), Article XV stipulates that where there

\(^{102}\) While Dooley highlights Thompson and Wheeler’s characterization of domestic work as drudgery, an interesting passage in the introduction to *Appeal*, written by Thompson as a tribute to Wheeler, characterizes intellectual work as drudgery, perhaps implicitly equalizing his own work and his characterization of domestic work.  He explains that Wheeler did not write most of the book because, “leisure and resolution to undertake the drudgery of the task were wanting” (vii).
are no adult volunteers, youth between the ages of 10 and 17 will be required to perform useful work that is considered menial and unpleasant. In this passage, domestic work is described as ‘drudgery’. Article IX states:

[t]o secure to the Community the efficient cooperation of one half its adult members, women; to afford them an opportunity of acquiring equal respect and sympathy, by means of equal usefulness with men; and to give them equal facilities with men, of social intercourse and of acquiring knowledge; we guarantee to them freedom from the domestic drudgery of cooking, washing, and of heating apartments, which will be performed on scientific principles on a large economical scale, for the whole community (5-6).

Notably the unproductive drudgery described above does not include reproduction or child rearing, but menial tasks such as cleaning. Unless adult women volunteer to perform what was once labor they had no choice but to perform, they will be spared the obligation. Instead, youth – notably an ungendered category – will be assigned all menial tasks when adult volunteers are lacking.

Another way to understand Thompson and Wheeler’s position on this issue might be to view it a strategic response to their social and political context. The omission of a positive evaluation of women’s activities in the private sphere could be a strategic response to the more pressing goal of freeing women from forced confinement to the sphere. Given women’s social position at the time, it is not surprising they chose not to emphasize the virtues of the sphere they characterize as despotic and oppressive. While they might overlook the positive contributions of women’s activities in the private sphere, if Thompson and Wheeler were to elevate women’s activities in the private sphere, would that not risk, at the same time, bolstering the arguments
that women were naturally fit to undertake these tasks, that they ought to be confined for the
good of society, and so forth? Considering their main goal was to advance women’s political
rights, it was important that they refrain as much as possible from glorifying women’s tasks
within the domestic sphere.

The private sphere of home and family is often characterized as a natural realm for
women, and those women who agitated for more rights and opportunities outside of that sphere
risked being characterized as selfish. By arguing the opposite, that confinement produces
selfishness, not the desire for political empowerment, Thompson and Wheeler were taking a
strategic political stand. Hammerman points out that most early 19th century writing on the ideal
domestic situation included scrutiny of women in particular, and their tendency to exhibit selfish
behaviours. These writers were mainly concerned with bolstering a romantic view of the
domestic sphere, and thus were concerned with discouraging women from agitating for greater
access to the public sphere. They argued that women’s inherent selfishness made them unfit for
life outside the family (64). Thompson and Wheeler, by arguing that exclusion from politics
produced this selfishness, were turning this conservative argument on its head. By concentrating
on the stultifying effects of the confinement and drudgery of the private sphere on women, while
at the same time explaining the necessity of political rights in order to correct the vices that are
fostered in women due to their confinement, they succeed in making a stronger argument for
women’s freedom. Explicitly praising the private sphere and women’s role within it would have
undermined their political goal of freeing women from forced confinement to it.

Dooley’s book is a comprehensive, insightful, and analytically rigorous look at
Thompson and Wheeler’s lives and writings. Her work has been invaluable to my own study of Thompson and Wheeler’s ideas, and while I disagree on the points discussed above, I do not think her interpretation is implausible. I turn next to a more recent interpretation of Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, which draws extensively from Dooley’s interpretation, but extends her criticism of Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism beyond what can be supported by the text.

6.2 Catherine Villanueva Gardner

Catherine Villanueva Gardner’s recently published book *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy*, examines and analyzes 19th century utilitarian feminist books, including Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, through what she considers a new philosophical lens that asks “Does it empower women?” (462). She argues that ultimately Thompson and Wheeler’s ideas in *Appeal* fail to empower women; and this failure is due to the essential conservatism of adhering to an abstract and masculinist utilitarian framework. According to Villanueva Gardner, *Appeal* advocates the maintenance of traditional gender roles. To the extent that it does advocate social change, she argues that the book focuses more on changing men than on empowering women and by compensation for women’s reproductive labor Thompson and Wheeler meant simply a reward for knowing the good it provides for the community. Their ‘abstract utilitarianism’ prevents Thompson and Wheeler from addressing women’s concrete realities (1197). Moreover, she argues that *Appeal* fails to empower women because it does not argue for women to become politically dominant. She
writes, “Wheeler and Thompson’s form of utilitarianism cannot allow them to … argue for women to be the dominant political group” (1074). In addition to identifying that many of these points are conjectural, without hard textual evidence, I challenge the claim that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism in Appeal is inherently abstract. I argue that their indirect utilitarianism enables their progressive analyses and proposals to advance women’s happiness. By combining concrete feminist individualism, a recognition of the value of women’s reproductive and domestic labor, and a concern for women’s self-government, they advance a socialist vision that would ultimately empower women, as well as the working class.

While acknowledging that Thompson and Wheeler’s proposed community of mutual cooperation would improve women’s lives substantially, Villanueva Gardner argues that, “…the philosophers remain stuck in traditional female roles and rely on men to provide the necessary impetus for social change”. Their adherence to a ‘fundamentally masculinist’ form of utilitarianism, she argues, can account for this shortfall (559). She extends Dooley’s interpretation which links utilitarianism to Thompson and Wheeler’s tendency to undervalue the private sphere, and argues that their utilitarianism is too abstract to further the goal of women’s empowerment. Feminist philosophers, she argues, “…need to be able to include the concrete elements of women’s lives and have the flexibility to introduce new issues as [they] identify them” (1197). Abstract utilitarianism is incapable of providing sufficient grounds for women’s empowerment, which would include such things as “…autonomy, a thoroughgoing moral agency, dignity, respect, and self respect” (1147). Drawing from Dooley’s analysis, Villanueva Gardner argues that because Thompson and Wheeler are concerned with the development of
benevolence, and have noted that the private sphere limits women’s freedom to develop an enlarged benevolent worldview, the theory itself must be masculinist because it is ‘based on male experience.’ She writes, “…the moral philosophy of the Appeal is fundamentally masculinist”. Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is thus both abstract and masculinist and therefore, incapable of empowering women (1272).

Aspects of Thompson and Wheeler’s theory may seem masculinist because, as Dooley points out, they over-value the public sphere and under-value the private. In contrast to this view, I have suggested that their argument is more focused on the inability of the capitalist economy to recognize the value of the work and compensate it accordingly. Instead, women find themselves forced to perform this labor under conditions of personal dependence. If, however, we took Dooley’s interpretation as given, it still would not follow that women are nonetheless disempowered in Appeal (an argument Dooley did not make), nor does it mean their theory is based in abstract utilitarianism. As this dissertation has emphasized, Thompson and Wheeler do account for women’s reproductive difference and their different social positions given gendered power relations. Moreover, Thompson and Wheeler argue that happiness ought to be promoted for the sake of the individual, each individual, and not for the interest of a group or the whole. Thus, they write that, "[w]omen are ... as much entitled to happiness on their own account, for their own sakes..." (118). For Thompson and Wheeler, women, as individuals, are understood to have their own concrete interests. Women are not understood as a homogenous group, nor are women understood as essentially the same as men. Rather than upholding abstract utilitarian reasoning, they challenge its ability to secure the greatest happiness for the
greatest number by recognizing women’s difference from men (reproductive capacity); that women, as individuals, have interests that differ; and that oppressive social systems construct the interests of the dominant and oppressed in negative ways, as well as hindering overall and individual happiness.

Villanueva Gardner interprets Appeal differently. She claims that instead of integrating women’s empowerment into their writing, they, “…employ utilitarianism to argue for feminism”. The political goal of women’s empowerment, which is fundamentally reliant on concrete, as opposed to abstract, analysis, is subordinated to their adherence to rule utilitarianism (1410). In her view the problematic issue with Appeal is its handling of the intersection between utilitarianism and feminism, which she argues is framed as changing men’s understanding of the impact gender equality will have on their own happiness (897). Appeal fails, according to Villanueva Gardner, because it is more concerned with changing men than it is with empowering women. “[I]t is clear that women’s subordination will be alleviated only through social changes aimed at restricting men’s power and persuading men of the pleasures connected with association with women as equals” (1259). In this way, Appeal loses focus of the feminist goal of empowering women by adhering to its utilitarian framework and advocating, more strongly, a change in men and in the economic and political spheres (1005). Villanueva Gardner reads Appeal as problematic for women’s empowerment because it advances women’s rights for the sake of men’s happiness.

While it is true that that when arguing for gender equality Thompson and Wheeler point out the benefits for men, it is not the case that this is the only argument they present. Thompson
and Wheeler believe that greater equality enjoyed between men and women will result in greater happiness for all, mainly because the social pleasures are among the most important for happiness (see Chapter 3). They explicitly point out, however, that there is no need to justify women’s equality on the grounds that it will make men happier. They write:

It is not necessary here to discuss whether it would promote the happiness of men that women should under such circumstances enjoy political rights. Women are one half the human race, and as much entitled to happiness on their own account, for their own sakes, as men. Just as necessary would it be to inquire whether the possession of political rights by men would tend to promote the happiness of women. The happiness of every individual, and of course of all classes, of the human race, ought to be promoted for the sake of such individual or individuals, and not in subserviency to the happiness of any other individuals or classes whatever (118-119, emphasis in original).

Notably, this would have been considered among the book’s most important arguments, from the point of view of the authors, seeing as they included it in the book’s title. It is true that *Appeal* advocates the need for men to change, however, it is unclear how exactly this detracts from the feminist goal of women’s empowerment. In my view this is one of the more prescient dimensions of their feminist thought. Their arguments anticipate contemporary feminist understandings of the ways gender inequality both produces masculinity (in Thompson and Wheeler’s language this was expressed as the character of men) (De Beauvoir, Kimmell), and inhibits women’s autonomy (MacKenzie and Stojlar). Thompson and Wheeler recognize that without changing men/masculinity, not much can be expected to change concerning women’s empowerment. Gendered power relations are, after all, relational. It is difficult to imagine advocating for increased empowerment for women without also acknowledging that this power
will need to be, to some degree, accepted by those who might lose power, in this case, men. Moreover, Thompson and Wheeler recognize that the gender system itself, which necessarily includes men, needs to be changed – not just women, and not just the law.

Importantly, Appeal does not focus so much on changing men that women’s empowerment, on its own and for its own sake, is ignored. They also discuss changing women and institutions. Most of the book focuses on advocating equal rights and opportunities for women, and ending the subordination of women in the private sphere, which can only empower women relative to their position at that time. In my view, Appeal presents a more balanced criticism of gender than other major texts of the period. For instance, like Wollstonecraft, they do discuss femininity, but argue that to change femininity cultural ideas about gender and the structures that uphold those ideas need to change before the problematic issues with femininity can be addressed. Thus, they provide a more complete and complex account of the relationship between gender and power, furthering women’s empowerment by arguing for a change in the gender system. For Wheeler, women must be the agents who expend their energies and efforts to ameliorate their situation. While experience shows that this is unlikely to happen, Wheeler argues that if women make gains through no effort of their own, the gains made will not be appreciated, protected or most usefully employed, “[t]herefore the Emancipation of

103 The weakness of Villanueva Gardner’s claim becomes more evident by examining Wheeler’s other writings. For Wheeler, women must be the agents who expend their energies and efforts to ameliorate their situation. While experience shows that this is unlikely to happen, Wheeler argues that if women make gains through no effort of their own, the gains made will not be appreciated, protected or most usefully employed, “[t]herefore the Emancipation of Women till they win it by their own resolute efforts to obtain it would, even were it likely to be granted by men prove a useless boon” (Letter to Monsieur Jullian 21).
Women till they win it by their own resolute efforts to obtain it would, even were it likely to be granted by men prove a useless boon” (*Letter to Monsieur Jullian* 21).

Villanueva Gardner mis-interprets *Appeal’s* central question and its main objective. She believes *Appeal’s* central and implicit question was: “…how are other men to be brought to understand that the equality of women will bring about happiness for both sexes” (897)? In my view the question Thompson and Wheeler are asking and answering in *Appeal* is closer to this: Does it ever increase overall happiness to exclude adult members of a community from decision-making power in the social and political institutions of which they are a part? And their answer is a definitive ‘no’. The book explains the reasons why, with particular reference to women’s situation.

Villanueva Gardner’s interpretation is also flawed because it does not recognize the important role of extensive and egalitarian democracy in Thompson and Wheeler’s vision, which extends beyond a narrow understanding of the political realm to include the economy and the family. Her main claim is that Thompson and Wheeler do not go far enough in empowering women politically. She centers this critique on a short section of *Appeal* where they engage in a hypothetical thought experiment, examining which sex should be granted political rights if it were necessary that only one sex could enjoy them (a prospect they vehemently reject). They conclude women would make better legislators. Villanueva Gardner argues that their “…utilitarianism cannot allow them to take the next step and argue for women to be the dominant political group” (1074). She also faults them for not dealing with whether women should contribute to the community as leaders or as mothers. Her analysis overlooks their main
point, that for Thompson and Wheeler it is unjust to exclude any adult from the franchise. Villanueva Gardner, at this point, takes their arguments out of context by failing to point out to her readers that this section is construed as a hypothetical, largely to show the hypocrisy of excluding any adult from enjoying political rights.

While it is my view that Villanueva Gardner concentrates too much of her analysis on this section, it might be worthwhile to examine the ideas there in more detail. In this short part of the book Thompson and Wheeler seem to deviate slightly from their commitment to gender equality (in favor of women) as well as from their view of gender as a product of socialization. One of the main aims in writing *Appeal* was to contest James Mill’s view, outlined in his *Essay on Government*, that women should be excluded from political participation because the interests of men and women are involved in one another. They ask whether, if we accept the premise in his essay to be true, "...to which...women or to men... ought the exercise of political rights to be confined?" (126). They qualify the rest of the chapter by asserting it is never legitimate to exclude one half of the human race, men or women,

...with exclusive power of making regulations affecting the actions, the property, and ... the happiness of the whole. ... No one can suppose that the writer of these pages is not an utter enemy to the exclusion from political rights of any one rational adult being of the human race (126).

With this in mind, they argue that women's weakness would make them better exclusive legislators than men because, given women's inferior strength, it is not possible that they could
rule by force. Instead, they must rule by persuading, "...they must calculate ...the effect of their regulations on the feelings, on the real happiness, of men as much as of women" (132). Women would be forced to rule in this way because otherwise men would not submit to or respect their regulations (134). Because of women's inferior strength and the consequent necessity that they consider the effects of their regulations on the excluded portion of the human race, men, women must have a superior 'moral aptitude' (135). Of all the qualifications necessary to be a good legislator, they argue, the most valuable is the ability to "sympathize with all and promote the happiness of all, whom the laws...are to effect" (128-129). Without this quality, other useful qualities would likely be damaging to happiness, rather than helpful - as has been shown where women are excluded from exercising political rights (129). Women have become men’s slaves and disenfranchised portions of the male population have also been oppressed when only an exclusive portion have political power (130-131). Thompson and Wheeler argue that women are less likely to be corrupted by legislative power and more likely to retain their capacity for sympathy and benevolence because, out of necessity, any power they gain from convention, such as exclusive legislative rights, is checked by men’s natural superiority of strength. They write,

104 Even within this deviation they question the strict understanding of the difference in strength between females and males. Importantly, they recognize that this generalization is not universal, that there is a diversity of strength between individuals regardless of sex. They argue that if superior strength is what qualifies men for the franchise, then a strength test should be open to both men and women, with weaker portions of the male population also facing exclusion (120). Importantly, here is the recognition that the line between female/male in physical capacity is not so definitive, when the differences in physical strength among men are accounted for, some will be excluded from political participation when strength is the qualifier. Thus, they do not make the error of universalizing their generalizations on difference between the sexes, even differences in physical strength.
[m]en, as exclusive legislators, have always the physical power to trample on the happiness of the weaker half of the race: women are necessarily, and fortunately for such functions, divested of the power, and are therefore driven to political probity as a succedaneum for the want of force. If...desirous of promoting the equal happiness of all...consisting...of an equal number of men and women, were driven to the absurd necessity of investing all political rights exclusively in the stronger or the weaker portion of the race, instead of investing the best and most intelligent with them, whether stronger or weaker, it would be evidently the interest of the whole to choose the weaker part, women, rather than the stronger part, men, for the exercise of such rights, both as electors and elected. ...there is a strong probability that the moral aptitude would be greater on the side of the weaker (141).

Thompson and Wheeler speculate, given their analysis of the ways power corrupts and destroys sympathy, that women, as the weaker half of the human race (in terms of physical strength), would be less corrupt and therefore more fit to rule. Of necessity they would be less selfish because they would be physically unable to enforce a regime of injustice that oppressed men, or the excluded half.

They also address the then-common reason for excluding women from political participation, their lack of ‘active talent’, meaning “patience and perseverance” (139). They point out that women have more of this talent because domestic labor, which has been "...universally thrown down by [men] as drudgeries upon women" fosters this quality:

[t]o endure privation and wrong, to return contumely with never-tired, never-ending submission, to sympathize with and soothe, the distressed in pains of mind or body, to embrace, and with a strong sympathy to share, the evils of others, even with an unshrinking firmness superior to that of those whose misfortunes or vices induced them – are amongst the qualities which the actual treatment of women has developed in them; and in which men are wretchedly deficient. In passive courage, in enduring, persevering, fortitude, women are undoubtedly superior to men.
Even to death, the number of heroic submissions have been greater in proportion to the number sacrificed by the brutality of their fellow-creatures, amongst women than amongst men (140-141).

Thus, a combination of biology and social conditioning foster in women a political morality superior to men.\footnote{Thomas Laquer also focuses on this section of the book, using it to argue that Thompson and Wheeler consider women as more naturally moral, sensitive, benevolent and as possessing a more developed moral aptitude. This is chiefly because women, as mothers, and as the weaker sex, need peace more than men. Thus, he argues that Thompson and Wheeler’s \textit{Appeal} puts forth a ‘construction of woman not very different from that of the domestic ideologists’ (23). However, Laquer overlooks that women were considered better legislators because they had less power and therefore a particular standpoint that understands the abuse of power from the point of view of the oppressed. They do not argue that this is some sort of eternal or fundamental difference, although they do argue that because women are weaker they would be better legislators due to the threat of a revolution from men. However, women’s weakness is not understood as entirely natural, but also a social construction (see note 104 above).} This argument is a very small part of their book and the only part where they advocate any form of gender inequality as beneficial for the whole. Notably, they emphasize the absurdity of even contemplating the exclusion of any rational adult member of society from full political rights.

Villanueva Gardner does not object to their analysis, but rather their failure to empower women by arguing that women are better suited to be political leaders, but then declining to grant them this power exclusively. Utilitarianism, she argues, limited their ability to advocate for women’s political dominance. This is problematic because, she argues, Thompson and Wheeler limit women’s potential as more adept political leaders, and therefore, they fail to truly empower women (1074). Instead of granting women exclusive legislative power, she argues that Thompson and Wheeler place too much emphasis on women’s reproductive and domestic contribution. They fail to empower women, despite their admission that women would make
better legislators, by failing to advocate women’s potential for involvement in organizing and in leadership. In a new community, this kind of change is what would really offer empowerment to women, she argues, “[a] truly progressive, feminist society would allow women the opportunity to break away from their traditional roles and assume leadership positions” (1254).

It is true that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism would prevent them from arguing in favor of women’s political domination over men, or inequality between men and women with a simple reversal of the current state of affairs. Any kind of inequality, especially of power and domination, leads to unhappiness for all parties, no matter who they might be. Thus, if they were to argue for inequality in political rights, with men excluded, their argument for women’s inclusion in the political sphere would not make any sense. If this is what she means by empowerment, then Thompson and Wheeler have certainly failed. Equal happiness, including equal freedom, for Thompson and Wheeler, is more important than increasing the rights of women over and above the rights of men. Moreover, the hypothetical scenario does not argue that women, as exclusive legislators, would be better apt to maximize happiness than all other configurations of the distribution of political rights. They simply claim that, if faced with an either/or choice between granting exclusive rights to one or the other sex, women should be granted the rights. It is worth emphasizing that they did not argue that this would result in better legislation than political rights for all adults.

Taking her criticism even further, she blames Thompson and Wheeler’s “own particular version of utilitarianism,” for not adequately addressing whether women would contribute more
as mothers or as leaders (1254). Notably, this is a question they never asked. Villanueva Gardner reads the “mother vs. leader” dichotomy into the text; it is indicated nowhere in *Appeal* (nor in any of Thompson and Wheeler’s other writings). She continues this line of criticism by noting that, since they do not take the position that women should be leaders, rather than mothers, “…most women will remain restricted to their traditional gender roles” while men enjoy more occupational choice. Therefore, she argues, under their proposed mutual cooperative, women and men will remain unequal (1249). Her analysis here is simply nowhere to be found in *Appeal*. To the contrary, Thompson and Wheeler aimed to free women from their confinement to the private sphere and its activities.

Villanueva Gardner claims that the emphasis Thompson and Wheeler place on changing men (so that they understand why women should be their equals) fails to empower women. She objects to the fact that the achievement of equality for women depends on what happens with men’s understanding. She explains that for Thompson and Wheeler, women’s equality rests on the widespread development of benevolence, which is only possible through mutual cooperation, where women’s reproductive contributions might be considered more valuable than men’s, but where women will be limited to this role. However, she argues that benevolence for

106 In her discussion of their depiction of women’s skills, Dooley notes that Thompson and Wheeler thought women had developed superior leadership skills because of their experience with oppression. She notes that this is an example of their ambivalence regarding women’s talents and characters. Thus, she argues that Thompson and Wheeler ought to have placed more emphasis on women’s ability to think through their situations, rather than merely becoming selfish while engaged in their domestic responsibilities (*Equality* 337). She concludes, however, that their ambivalence is a result of valuing traditionally male activities within the public sphere more highly than women’s traditional activities (*Equality* 338). I discuss these ideas above and provide reasons why it may have been necessary for Thompson and Wheeler to value the public realm more than the private.
men will be largely intellectual, whereas for women it will involve “breed[ing] for the good of society”. Thus, on her reading of Thompson and Wheeler, men will, through mutual co-operation, develop an enlightened self-interest, or benevolence, which is largely intellectual and also arguably beneficial for the possessor. However, women’s inevitable role (as she sees it), reproducing for the community, cannot be viewed in the same light for obvious reasons (1276).

These claims are easily refutable because they are simply not supported by the text. Nowhere does Appeal state women should be confined to the private sphere or to the role of reproducer. To the contrary, Thompson and Wheeler argue for complete equality in politics, and more extensive and inclusive democracy, as well as compensation for reproductive labor. Villanueva Gardner supports her argument by pointing to their claim that some talents are divided along the lines of sex, with men, in general, being more physically strong and women having the capacity to reproduce. Both are considered useful, and Thompson and Wheeler argue in favor of rewarding the pain and labor of reproduction that is specific to women. This leads Villanueva Gardner to ask, since (on her account) they do not specify what compensation, exactly, ought to be granted for such reproductive labor: “[i]s it possible that Wheeler and Thompson think that being more socially valuable than men would be compensation enough for women? Thinking within their utilitarian framework this may well be the case: benevolent women gain pleasure from working for the good of others” (1238).

Thompson and Wheeler were not that naïve. They explicitly cite wealth as that which is to be used to compensate women for their reproductive contributions. Thompson explains in his opening letter to Wheeler their view that under competition equality between men and women is
impossible because women have fewer opportunities than men to accumulate wealth, for two reasons: “…permanent inferiority of strength, and occasional loss of time in gestation and rearing infants” (x). Given that no effort is made to compensate women for these ‘impediments,’ were women to rise in equality with men in all other areas such as knowledge, rights, morals, talent and virtue, “…in point of independence arising from wealth they must, under the present principle of social arrangements, remain inferior” (xi). Men should be willing to compensate women for their particular burdens, instead of making them worse (xi-xii). They claim later that this lack of compensation for women’s burden is evidence of men’s lack ‘of a more enlarged self-interest’ (120). What they mean is that it is unfair that women who are not “working,” in the public sphere (because they are in advanced pregnancy or tending to their infants), do not receive economic compensation for their obviously useful activities. They should still ‘get paid’ for this work. This is part of their criticism of capitalism; under mutual co-operation everyone is equally rewarded for their contributions (or given what they need depending on the situation), including reproducing women. That being said, nowhere in Appeal do Thompson and Wheeler argue that women should be legally coerced into bearing children for the community. Their recognition of reproductive work as important and deserving of equal compensation with traditionally masculine forms of work is one of the more radical ways Thompson and Wheeler work to empower women in Appeal. Far from leading Thompson and Wheeler toward a conservative view of women’s role, their indirect utilitarianism, with its

\[\text{\footnotesize\cite{107}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize I examine Thompson’s view of the role of public opinion in coercing/convincing women to fulfill this role in section 6.3 below. It is important to note that at this point Villanueva Gardner is basing her inference on a reading of Appeal only.}\]

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primacy on individual freedom, provided them with more effective arguments for protecting women from the claims of the community against their bodies, than a virtue ethics standpoint such as Wollstonecraft’s, which begins with a sexual division of duties.\footnote{See Chapter 2 for more on Wollstonecraft, as well as section 6.3 below for an analysis of reproductive freedom in Thompson’s co-operative community.}

Villanueva Gardner also argues that Thompson and Wheeler fail to empower women because they maintain a gendered division of childcare labor (1240). While this question is not central to their analysis, it is unfair to assume they leave this task to women, especially considering one of the more radical passages in the book concerns the superintendence of children, a task they argue can be performed by either men or women. As I have quoted elsewhere, Thompson and Wheeler argue that women ought not be forced to remain in the domestic sphere, being “alternately the slaves or tyrants” of children. In a system of mutual cooperation,

[a] superintendent only would be wanting, man or woman as may be most convenient, intelligent in the theory and practice of physical and mental culture, or if necessary both, surrounded with favourable circumstances merely, and thus giving an impulse to the development of minds of hundreds indiscriminately of both sexes... (179).

Thompson revisits this issue in a later article for the \textit{Co-operative magazine and Monthly Herald}, where he argues that an equal number of men and women ought to educate children who are too young to work (“Proposal” 44). Once more in his final work he re-iterates this view, that teachers can be male or female and either sex can instruct the old and the young (\textit{Practical Directions} 96). Villanueva Gardner makes no note of this radical proposition.
Overall, Villanueva Gardner overlooks the important role of democracy and individualism in their vision, which, taken together, would empower women and prevent their coercion into performing the reproductive labor she seems to suggest they would be coerced into doing without compensation. For Thompson and Wheeler women should have an equal voice in determining how a community is run, who can do what, and how labor is rewarded. Thompson and Wheeler’s main aim in writing *Appeal* was to argue as persuasively as possible the necessity of women’s equal political rights. Justifying the claim that all adult members within a community should have the opportunity to participate politically was of central importance. Villanueva Gardner’s analysis fails to account for this most fundamental aspect of their book and its role in empowering women.

Villanueva Gardner’s interpretation downplays the book’s main argument: that there is no valid reason for excluding women from political participation, and every reason to include them as equal human beings with an equal entitlement to govern and protect their own interests as individuals. Far from being rooted in abstract reasoning that cannot consider women’s differences or ‘issues specific to women’ (1191), the book provides concrete examples explaining why women and men are not the same and outlining why, concretely, they have different interests as women, but also as individuals. Importantly, Thompson and Wheeler recognize differences between women, demonstrating that within the group category ‘women’ are individuals with interests that differ. They outline how the patriarchal context affects married women, adult daughters living with their fathers, and women without husbands or fathers (which further includes adult young women living away from their original families,
women who never marry, and widows) in different ways. They demonstrate how these women have interests that are various, both from each other and also, importantly, from men.

Wheeler was a staunch individualist; she argues that women’s individual differences mean that women should not have the power to legislate on behalf of women. She writes

> [w]omen should in the legislative assembly, whether of state or community, represent, not legislate for her sex …, which from her ignorance of the infinite shades of difference in female as well as male character, would be legislating according to her own peculiar feelings, and would prove as baleful to woman’s happiness as male legislation has ever shown itself to be… (“To the Editor” 279).

For Wheeler, women should not agitate to become independent legislators, for women. Instead, both men and women must equally contribute to the formation of social arrangements, “…they will then both become wiser, more virtuous and steadier friends” (“To the Editor” 279). This kind of analysis is only possible by considering the concrete realities of women’s lives, including their differences from men but also their individual differences from one another. In *Appeal* this attention to the concrete interests of individuals is apparent and a cornerstone in their argument for women’s equal political rights. They explain, for instance, that in order to promote the happiness of another, one would have to permanently be in possession of the knowledge of the ‘wishes and feelings of that other’. To know these, constant consultation with them with is required (95). Thus, individuals are best suited to understand and legislate on behalf of their own interests. Thompson and Wheeler were concerned with creating a new context of freedom and equality such that benevolent characters can be developed and the happiness of each individual promoted. Their utilitarianism was centered on contextual analysis, not mere abstract
theorizing.

For more evidence that Thompson’s utilitarianism was not abstract, one only has to look at the London Co-operative Society’s *Articles*. These articles recognize the concrete, contextually specific situation of women living in an environment of male dominance that must be eradicated in the co-operative community. The protections offered to women in this document demonstrate a prescient understanding of the importance of recognizing women’s difference in order to promote women’s equality and happiness. The principles not only recognize women’s difference in terms of reproductive capacity, but they also recognize that women entering the new community are also entering with what we might now consider less cultural capital, less cultural power, less historical privilege. Thus, the principles aim to eliminate the risk that women and men will revert to traditional gender roles-based hierarchies by banning the entry of women who do not voluntarily agree to enter, who do not agree with the principles of equality, or who are coming with the intention to serve their husbands more than they serve themselves or the rest of the community. In *Practical Directions*, Thompson’s last book, he re-iterates his concern with women’s consent to the community, arguing that it must be voluntary, and that a woman must not accept membership ‘as an appendage to a husband to suit his convenience’. It is better, Thompson remarks, that the husband’s membership be rejected to prevent the injustice of forcing a woman to join a community against her voluntary will, in addition to avoiding the injustice it would also cause to the community as a whole (253).

Utilitarianism only offers Thompson and Wheeler arguments in support of actions that will lead to greater happiness, and does not, in Villanueva Gardner’s view, provide a basis for
women’s justice for reasons such as the rightness of justice, or “because they are women.” Part of Villanueva Gardner’s concern here is the alleged abstractness of utilitarian arguments that universalize the male experience. Justice, under a utilitarian framework, is secondary to happiness and therefore gender justice can only be grounded in abstract arguments in favor of increasing overall happiness (1178). This, however, raises the question: why would happiness be considered a more abstract consideration than justice? Both justice and happiness can be either abstract or concrete depending on how the theorist decides to use the concepts. For instance, Charles Mills and Carole Pateman take issue with Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* for its abstraction from the non-ideal, but they do not argue that abstractness is inherent in the concept of ‘justice’ itself (Mills, 94-96; Pateman, *The Settler Contract* 77-78). Indeed, Thompson and Wheeler understand individuals as having interests that are both produced by and embedded within in the particular context of patriarchy and capitalism.

Setting aside the issue of abstractness, the other dimension of Villanueva Gardner’s concern is that grounding feminism in utilitarianism seems to downplay the importance of justice. The fundamental problem with patriarchy is that it is oppressive, not just that it fails to maximize happiness. Villanueva Gardner’s critique thus follows the common lines of criticism of Benthamite utilitarianism, which as I have argued, cannot be equated to Thompson and Wheeler’s indirect form. Villanueva Gardner overlooks the ways Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is fundamentally different from Bentham’s. As discussed in Chapter 3, Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is ‘indirect’ and focused on institutional power relations and their effect on the happiness of individuals. In their view, happiness is impossible without a context
of equality, including equal access to the means of self-government, equal control over the means of production, and extensive democracy.

Villanueva Gardner’s new lens, that asks us, when determining whether a text deserves inclusion in the history of feminist thought, to consider her question: “Does it empower women?” is fundamentally different from traditional forms of philosophical inquiry which searches for knowledge ‘solely for its own sake’. Instead, feminist philosophers are chiefly concerned with how well the philosophy in question deals with the political question of how to end women’s oppression (61). This ‘new’ perspective is, arguably, one that feminist political theorists and philosophers have been using for quite some time. Villaneuva Gardner’s useful contribution is illuminating what makes it distinct from other, more traditional forms of philosophical inquiry, such as the history of political thought and analytic philosophy, with the purpose of constructing a feminist philosophical cannon. That stated, Villanueva Gardner’s interpretation of Appeal leads her to argue that because of their ‘masculinist’ utilitarianism Thompson and Wheeler have failed to empower women, an argument that I have aimed to challenge here.

So far in this chapter I aimed to show that Thompson and Wheeler’s utilitarianism is not to blame for the shortcomings (whether actual or imagined) in their feminist writings. I do not however argue that Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism is flawless, particularly when examined from a contemporary standpoint. This chapter concludes by describing aspects of their writing that we might now consider unacceptable.
6.3 Reproduction and Coercion in Thompson’s Co-operative

While ultimately empowering for women, Thompson’s later work illustrates the difficulty of balancing women’s individual freedom over their bodies and the needs of the community. While some might argue Thompson’s unsatisfactory handling of women’s reproductive freedom is due to utilitarian concerns, I argue that it has more to do with a (perhaps naïve) belief that economic justice will resolve all issues related to power imbalances. Despite his inconsistencies on this issue, I conclude that ultimately women will be empowered to control their reproductive activities through the non-dominating, democratic structure of the community.

Recognizing that the community might find itself in need of a steady supply of reproductive labor, or that the community might find itself overpopulated, Thompson confronts the problem of how to have women modify their reproductive activities to suit the needs of the community. For this task he relies on the power of public opinion to influence women’s choices, to entice women to refrain from or engage in reproductive labor depending on the community’s needs. I argue that Thompson overlooks the potential for public opinion to violate women’s individual freedom within the co-operative, and suggest that this may be due to his optimism that eliminating the private ownership of the means of production and the implementation of a classless co-operative society will resolve all social ills, including for instance, sexism and racism. This problematic aspect of Thompson’s views on how to control reproductive labor is inconsistent with his insistence on the importance of self-government to individual happiness.\textsuperscript{109} The democratic grounding of the vision, and the explicit protection of women’s self-government, alongside other provisions such as living arrangements, equal

\textsuperscript{109} See Chapter 3.
education, and marriage reforms, both put in place through agreed-to co-operative principles, would ultimately empower women to negotiate the terms of conducting reproductive labor. Thus, while Thompson’s recommendation is that women be subject to the pressure of public opinion to reproduce or not, Thompson’s community has the potential to enable women freedom to contest such extra-legal pressure.

In Thompson’s view, co-operatives must maximize women’s happiness to the same degree men’s happiness is maximized. Although clearly committed to women’s freedom, equality, and happiness, Thompson struggles on this front when contemplating reproductive freedom and the needs of the community. He understood that a community would be affected by its rate of reproduction; at times a community might need more or less reproductive labor. This leads Thompson to make various statements regarding the appropriate method of controlling women’s reproductive labor. At times he advocates women’s absolute control over their own reproductive activities, and at other times he argues that the community should exert control over healthy women’s reproductive activities through the force of public opinion and public regulations.

Thompson’s concern with reproductive issues was clearly influenced by Malthus’ influential writings on overpopulation and methods of population control. While Thompson agreed with Malthus that overpopulation was a problem, he was fervently opposed to Malthus’ understanding of the cause of overpopulation, and Malthus’ prescriptions. Thompson writes in Inquiry,

…insult not the suffering mass, the great majority of mankind, with the glaring falsehood, that by means of limiting population or
not-eating potatoes, their own happiness is in their own hands, while the causes are left in full operation which render it morally and physically impossible for them to live without potatoes and improvident breeding (425).

He argues that the theory of population growth is being used to excuse the evil consequences of capitalism. The Malthusian theory that an increase in material well being will lead to greater reproduction, Thompson argues, is patently false. Human beings are not interested in breeding beyond their ability to provide a comfortable existence, unless they are already living in a state of poverty and ignorance. Instead, as “…comforts increase, accompanied as they are with an increase of knowledge, the tendency to improvident breeding, uniformly decreases with their increase” (426). Thompson uses the example of his home country, Ireland, to demonstrate his opposition to Malthusian population theory. Among the ‘destitute’ in Ireland, “…no prudential habits exist with respect to the increase of numbers…” The reason, he explains is because, “[t]hey that have little can lose little; and of the few pleasures in their power that of breeding is not to be lost” (541).

The motives behind Malthusian arguments, according to Thompson, are not benevolent concerns for the consequences of overpopulation. These arguments against controlling reproduction have economic, political, or religious motives and actually serve to maintain a state of overpopulation in order to:

… afford cheap volunteer recruits for human butchery, or cheap machines to work with and make profit upon, or myriads of what

110 Wheeler also shares Thompson’s disdain for Malthusian population theory, specifically for its disregard of the gendered effects of poverty on women. She writes “…where the moral restraint of Malthus, while it inflicts little privation upon man, condemns the female to an utter blighting of the soul, aggravated perhaps by dependency of want!” (“To the Editor” 277).
theologians call, souls born into poverty and wretchedness and
thence necessarily into vice and crime, and thence, as they (so
trained to think) tell us, into eternal vengeance of the most
intelligent, and most beneficent of beings…

The more appropriate focus, argues Thompson, is the continuous happiness of those living
(“Lease of an Estate… I”).

Instead of using poverty to control population, Thompson argues that granting women
the choice based on her own happiness and well being would be far more effective.
Thompson’s belief that women should be granted the power to control the birth rate is evident
from his first book to his last. In Inquiry, he argues that this solution makes the most sense
because the pain of reproduction (which he considers the most natural means of preventing
overpopulation) is already in women’s hands. He writes,

[t]here is no check or inconvenience from want felt by the married
from inequalities as to numbers of children, all being equally
educated and maintained at the common board; the peculiar
inconvenience is simply that of the pain, trouble, and care, chiefly
on the woman’s side, of nourishing and attending children till two
years old (546-547).

Thus, the consequences of allowing women to choose based on their own interests in the
trajectory of their lives, is a better-regulated birth rate and a lower risk of overpopulation.
Because men are not subject to the same pains, they also are not subject to the same checks on
their sexual behaviour. It is therefore ironic, he argues, that men are entrusted to regulate
reproduction (Practical Directions 241). To the objection that greater economic security for
children will make women more likely to reproduce indiscriminately in a co-operative
community Thompson argues that women will, in addition to the pain of childbearing, also
consider the effects of pregnancy on her own personal liberty (Practical Directions 242). This solution meets the requirements of Thompson’s utilitarian theory in two ways: it protects women’s individual freedom and it helps to solve the social problem of overpopulation.

In addition to granting women reproductive choice, Thompson suggests other means could be implemented to regulate reproduction. In his first book he proposes raising the age at which a person can be married, if the community desires a lower birth rate (Inquiry 549). He also suggests that, likewise, marriages could be permitted earlier, if it were determined that the happiness of the community would benefit by an increase in numbers. It is only in this case, he argues, that early marriages should be permitted (Inquiry 561). Most married persons living in a co-operative, he argues, will learn how to experience sexual pleasure with their partner, without reproduction. Accidents or a lack of foresight in this matter are not harmful, however, because children are valued by the entire community: they consume few resources and will eventually contribute their labor for the benefit of all, and the mother’s security while a member of the community is not threatened (Inquiry 547). In Inquiry the use of marriage to control reproduction in one way or the other indicates that Thompson had yet to reach his ultimate view, which was a rejection of the institution altogether (unless desired by individuals in a context that enables autonomous choice, in a co-operative community).

111 Thus, in my view, one of the problems with Thompson’s earlier writing was his assumption that sex was more frequent and more legitimate when undertaken within marriage.

112 In contrast to the view cited above, his last book Practical Directions suggests that the institution of marriage itself is a product of prejudice and a source of social unhappiness, and thus ought to be drastically reformed. Not only because it is a source of unhappiness, but also because marriage contributes to, rather than aiding, the problem of overpopulation. It is marriage, and in particular, early marriage that is the culprit when it comes to overpopulation.
These proposals, undoubtedly empowering for women (although notably not justified because they are the best way to ensure women’s well-being), are unfortunately accompanied by passages that might indicate Thompson was more ambivalent about granting individual women complete control over their reproductive lives. Thus, in his last book where he provides the most detailed outline of his co-operative community, he gives us two types of prescriptions for population control. The one noted in the paragraph above that protects women’s right to choose, and another that advocates a role for public opinions and public regulation in controlling women’s reproductive activities. Towards the end of Practical Directions, Thompson includes a section entitled “Apprehended Evils from Increase of Numbers”. In this section he argues that in order to maintain a stable human population, “…every woman should produce, on an average, three children allowing for the actual casualties of infancy and youth”. With an increase in scientific knowledge regarding the preservation of health and life, this number may decrease to, at the very least, two children per woman (232).

In Practical Directions Thompson proposes two methods for controlling the population of a community that would satisfy the requirement of protecting women’s right to self-determination. The first is to simply give women the power to determine whether or not they will reproduce. The second is to invite new members to join the community (245). These two options seem unproblematic from the standpoint of women’s self-government. Yet, he also

Since expecting abstinence outside of marriage is ‘ridiculous,’ ‘childish,’ and ‘undesirable,’ “…nature and organization have left us no choice but, between our present marriage system and overwhelming numbers; and a relaxation and equalization of that system, with increased numbers at command” (240). In this book he rejects using late or early marriage as a means to control the birth rate and instead argues in favor of placing this control in women’s hands, as well as in the hands of public opinion and public regulation (241).
writes that if a community finds itself in need of an increase in numbers because, for instance, the older generation passes more quickly than a newer one arrives, the pain of maintaining a healthy population must be endured to prevent lack of care for the elderly (246). Here we find a disconnect between granting women absolute authority over how many children they bear and the needs of the community. Why would women have to endure this pain if recruitment from outside was an option? And, why would the needs of the elderly (or maybe also the interests of the rest of the community who must care for them) be more heavily weighted than an individual woman’s interest in the activity of her own body? In any case, Thompson thinks healthy women should be persuaded to reproduce (or not) for the community through the rational and kind-intentioned force of public opinion.

Thompson suggests that, in a co-operative community, public opinion would be a benign means for controlling reproduction. He explains that it would be a, "...kindly and ever operating restraint of the opinion of friends, in case of undesirableness of increase of numbers, along with the knowledge and individual prudence of the members themselves, and the physical circumstances of the human organization..., would be abundantly sufficient to prevent any real evils arising from such intercourse... (Practical Directions 246).

The natural result of such regulation through public opinion, he argues, will be that the healthiest women will do most of the reproductive work, “...the conduct of such women being necessarily altogether controlled by the public opinion and public regulations of the community, which they, with the rest of the adult members, would have themselves formed” (Practical Directions 248).

113 Thompson and Wheeler thought that power, under mutual co-operation, would still operate, but it would be a different sort of power, the power of reason to influence ‘rational beings’ (14).
Notably absent is any indication that public opinion would operate similarly on healthy men who might engage in too much reproductive pleasure.\textsuperscript{114} The idea that healthy women should be ‘altogether controlled by the public opinion and public regulations of the community’ concerning their reproductive lives, stands in stark contrast to his recommendation that women, as individuals, should enjoy reproductive choice. Why did Thompson think public opinion, as a means to coerce/persuade women to reproduce or not, was unproblematic? This question is particularly vexing given his understanding of public opinion's power to oppress in \textit{Appeal}.

The use of public opinion to influence the actions of women, in particular, was identified in \textit{Appeal} as an example of one of the ways they are oppressed. Women, in this book, were understood as oppressed by prevailing public opinion that coerced them into feminized roles and stunted their freedom of opinion and action. In \textit{Appeal}, the harms of sexist public opinion against women are understood as caused by male control of wealth and security. Thompson and Wheeler argue that wealth and power warp public opinion away from public interest activities, and economics is at the root of public opinion’s ability to oppress women. Men control most of the wealth in society, and thereby hold the security and well-being of women in their power. This power to oppress women has resulted in ethical double standards such as inhibiting women’s sexual gratification while encouraging men’s (61). Thus, Thompson is not unaware of the ability of public opinion to oppress women. He simply does not believe that public opinion

\textsuperscript{114} One is left to presume that women would be more subject to this power than men, presumably because they, and not their male sexual partners, would bear the mark of indiscretion or lack of effort, depending on the needs of the community at the time and the corresponding direction of public opinion on the issue.
can be harmful to women within a co-operative community where women and men have equal rights, an equal amount of resources and economic security.

There seems to be, therefore, an undercurrent of naïve and hasty optimism in Thompson’s thought, leading him to believe that oppressive public opinion can only exist in a context of unjust material inequality, such as capitalism. For Thompson, the power of harmful public opinions is a non-issue in a democratic co-operative because those harms are not in the interest of the majority, and hence to his mind they cannot exist. The opinion of the majority will be gentle and equitable: limited to disapproval and reasonable argument (Practical Directions 251). This is better than the current situation where public opinion can have negative material effects such as poverty and disinheritance (Practical Directions 251).

Under competition the motive to exertion is wealth and distinction from possessing wealth. Under co-operation these motives and their necessarily negative consequences would be eliminated and replaced by a desire for public esteem earned through serving the interests of the community, rather than possessing a greater quantity of wealth (Practical Directions 42). Thompson anticipates and rejects the idea that the power of public opinion in a co-operative will go too far, with widespread public persecutions of minor vices, revealed for the pleasure of causing misery by revealing an individual’s secrets. Thompson argues that “[t]his abuse of the influence of public opinion, will not take place, simply because it never can be the interest of the majority that it should take place. Property belonging to all in common, and opinion free, what is to be gained by slander or molesting other persons’ enjoyments?” (Inquiry 498-499). Thus for Thompson it seems all instances of oppressive public opinion or influence, of vice or
propensity to harm others for personal gain, are fundamentally connected to one’s economic context. For instance, he argues that changing social circumstances in favor of co-operative organization will eradicate vices such as lying and stealing, without fundamentally altering human nature. These changes will occur because the motives to lie and steal will be removed. Moreover, since “[t]he passions of envy, jealousy, hatred, pride, vanity, &c., and the crimes against person or property … are almost always connected with property,” they will, for the most part, be eradicated by new social arrangements that eliminate private (not personal) property (Inquiry 416). Thompson also suggests that violence against women, including abduction and rape, would also decrease substantially due to equality between men and women. He believes that these crimes are rare, and are largely due to material inequality between men and women (Inquiry 417). He writes, “[u]nder such circumstances, where all were equal to all, and equally worthy of all, where would be the motives leading to abduction, rape, or any sexual violence?” (Inquiry 418). Thompson does not provide for us what the motive for these crimes are, or how those motives are particularly economic in nature, but simply asserts that the motives will cease to exist within a more equal context. Thompson’s faith that the elimination of class and economic inequality will eradicate social vices such as slander and sexual violence is perhaps a bit naïve, and certainly one of the main 20th century feminist criticisms of Marxism.

In Thompson’s co-operative community, the sanctions of public opinion would be mere disapproval and reasonable argument. He contrasts this to the power of public opinion in ‘general society’115, which can lead to disininheritance and poverty. While the power of public opinion will be more powerful because communities are smaller and there is little anonymity, at

115 By general society Thompson means society outside of co-operative communities.
the same time, the sanctions of public opinion are generally less severe than in general society 
(Inquiry 506). The power of public opinion in a co-operative community would be limited in 
that nobody has the power to remove the physical comfort of any individual. “Public opinion, 
deprived of the use of force and the means of annoyance, would be compelled to use its 
appropriate instruments, reason and persuasion” (Practical Directions 252).

Thus, on one hand, Thompson emphasizes the limited and gentle nature of public opinion 
in co-operation, which bodes well for those concerned with women’s reproductive freedom. On 
the other hand, Thompson also explains that the power of public opinion within a co-operative 
community will be almost unimaginably immense. In fact, if a co-operative member is not 
affected by negative public opinion and continues to exhibit behaviour considered inappropriate 
by the majority of co-operators, the community will either look upon the person “…as an 
unfortunate idiot, whose partial sanity would be harmless…or if …likely to be productive of 
mischief, the society would exercise…its power of self-preservation, by refusing the benefits of 
co-operation, by excluding from its number the member ceasing to co-operate” (Inquiry 395). 
The power of public opinion, then, will ultimately include not merely disapproval, but also 
expulsion, meaning that in extreme cases public opinion will yield economic sanctions – one of 
his key criticisms of the power of public opinion under capitalism. One would hope that the 
case of an individual woman who did not want to bear children would not face this kind of 
sanction on her behaviour, and that expulsions would only operate in rare, extreme cases such as 
a violent temperament that could not be contained.

Thompson’s proposal indicates that because women are able to participate in the making
of the regulations that would apply to reproductive activity, the pressure they feel from public opinion, in this regard, would be legitimate, in addition to being ‘gentle’ and ‘kindly’. An underlying optimism regarding the power of economic change seems to be at play in his understanding of the kind and gentle nature of public opinion within co-operation. One might anticipate this reasoning to be less than reassuring to healthy women of reproductive age who would most certainly not count themselves as in a majority position, considering more than 50% of the adult population would not be in the same category as healthy women of reproductive age.

Despite this aberration in his thought, other protections would help to ensure women’s reproductive choice. The democratic nature of the communities grants all individuals the power to influence public opinion from an equal footing. Because women would receive an equal and rigorous education, they would be capable of advancing sound arguments in favor of their reproductive freedoms. One would hope, therefore, that these provisions would be interpreted by co-operators as protecting individual women from undue pressure to reproduce against their own will.

Thompson’s inconsistent defense of women’s freedom from the pressure of public opinion might seem to stem from his utilitarianism, where the interests of the individual can be sacrificed for the greater good. I think this view would be mistaken given Thompson and Wheeler’s emphasis on protecting individual self-government and security. Instead, I do not think Thompson realizes that he risks violating his individualist utilitarian ethic when he proposes that reproduction be controlled by the public opinion of the community rather than by individual women. His faith that by creating egalitarian communities power would cease to be
oppressive is, in my view, the cause of this inconsistency.

6.4 White Women as Slaves

Throughout Appeal Thompson and Wheeler depict British women as being in a state of slavery. Given their definition of slavery, on the surface this may not seem problematic. They define a slave as,

…a person whose actions and earnings, instead of being, under his own control, liable only to equal laws, to public opinion, and to his own calculations, under these of his own interest, are under the arbitrary control of any other human being, by whatever name called. This is the essence of slavery, and what distinguishes it from freedom” (66-67).

By this definition perhaps it would be accurate to define the position of middle-class women at that time as enslaved. However, Thompson and Wheeler frequently compare female slaves in the West Indies to British women, often also suggesting that the situation is worse for British women. As Vron Ware points out, by making this comparison, Thompson and Wheeler take the slavery argument too far (103). Thompson and Wheeler suggest that British women at least as oppressed as female slaves in the West Indies (Thompson and Wheeler, 16). Clearly Thompson and Wheeler underestimate the suffering of non-white women in slavery in the Americas in order to bolster their case for the freedom of white women in Europe. They used slavery as a rhetorical device. Most utilitarians were against slavery, but many, like James Mill, saw no issues with women’s legal status in Britain. The comparison was thus helpful in pointing out the hypocrisy of utilitarian thinkers who did not recognize that many of their arguments concerning
the happiness and freedom of slaves apply to women in their own societies.

These kinds of arguments and comparisons, however, risk devolving into white feminist racism, which unfortunately tinged parts of the suffrage movement in America by inviting arguments that to grant Black men the vote meant granting greater respect to Black men than to White women. The rights of white women had, at times, been argued for through the rhetoric of racism, and while Thompson and Wheeler are not guilty of this in particular, the uninformed comparisons between the lives of non-white slaves and middle-class white British women were nonetheless inexcusable. The appropriation of abolitionist arguments to further the cause of the middle-class white woman implicitly diminishes the injustice of the racialized system of slavery.

6.5 Gender and Class

Obviously Thompson and Wheeler’s feminist political thought, while insightful for its time, cannot provide us with a perfect vision of gender equality completely amenable to contemporary sensibilities. When detailing differences between women, they identify ‘three great classes, or divisions’: women without husbands or fathers, unmarried adult women living with their fathers, and wives (21). These ‘classes’ only outline differences between women concerning their relationships with men. They do not include those differences between women that might indicate that women can be oppressors as well. This is something that Wollstonecraft recognized as problematic, that middle and upper class women would often mistreat women of the lower classes (Vindication 190). Class and racial differences between women are ignored in
Another indicator of their middle-class bias is their depiction of women as weaker than men. Although they present this as a general claim only, they fail to recognize the strength many working class women would have needed in order to survive. Presumably many working class women would have been physically stronger than many men in the middle or upper classes. While they admit that women’s lack of strength relative to men is the result of social conditioning and that some women are stronger than some men (the difference is not absolute), Thompson nonetheless uses this difference to exclude women from joining a co-operative community in the very early stages.

In 1830 Thompson published letters in the *Weekly Free Press and Co-operative Journal* outlining the conditions of accepting his land for lease to a set up a co-operative community. Many of the conditions are identical to the London Co-operative Society’s *Articles*. In his third letter he advises that women ought not be admitted to the community at first. This is because ‘much strength and muscular exertion’ is needed to build the community’s initial infrastructure, and therefore women and children ought not be admitted, “…until the machinery and materials for manufacturing industry are procured and in their proper positions, and the lighter labors of agriculture present themselves…” (“Lease…III”). This explicit exclusion is unfortunate given that the arguments in *Appeal* would not support it. In *Appeal* they argued if strength is used as an excuse to exclude that a strength test ought to be administered (120). Although this was not a serious proposition, it demonstrates that they understood that differences in strength do not necessarily correspond neatly to the male/female distinction and therefore strength should not be
used to exclude an entire class of adults (women). Wheeler’s independent writings provide some evidence that her views on the construction of gender differences were more radical than Thompson’s. In a public speech delivered in London in 1830, Wheeler argues that, “…man’s own tyranny has created the distinction [between the sexes] which he ungenerously sets up as a just cause for its exercise.” Citing Monsieur de Chateaubriand, she argues that the difference in strength, is “nothing but a civilized disease.” She also points out that unequal laws exacerbate this inequality by enabling men to abuse their strength, short of murder (“Rights of Women” 15). Since Appeal was co-written with Wheeler, and Wheeler’s independent writings present the view that gendered differences in strength are largely constructed, one might speculate that Wheeler held more radical views of the formation of gender differences, as well as whether these differences can be used to exclude either sex from any activities they wish to perform. For the purpose of Appeal’s argument, this is largely inconsequential, but it makes a clear difference when Thompson uses strength to exclude women from a most important time in the building of a community – the very beginning.

6.6 Conclusion

In analyzing two contemporary interpretations of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism and its relationship to utilitarianism, I aimed to show that Thompson and Wheeler’s indirect

116 The second difference often cited is women’s supposed inability to reason morally. For Wheeler, it is educational difference and socialization for different activities, that are responsible for “…the apparent difference in the phrenological development of men and women”. “Man we find as much the creature of circumstances as woman; and, with some rare exceptions, there is little difference between man and man, but that which education or the want of it, effects” (“Rights of Women” 33). On this point Thompson and Wheeler are in agreement.
utilitarianism was not a conservative influence on their feminist thought. To the contrary, as an individualist framework, the only purported value of which is the happiness of individuals, it enables a consistent critique of social, economic, and political institutions that operated against women’s interests. Ultimately, Thompson and Wheeler’s vision for communities of mutual cooperation would empower women by eliminating their economic dependence, granting them equal opportunities, and creating a context where all useful labor that contributes to happiness, even if it does not produce a surplus, can be recognized and compensated. This does not mean, however, that there are no shortcomings in their work. I presented several aspects of their feminism that we might nonetheless find unsettling from a contemporary standpoint. None of these shortcomings, in my view, can be attributed to their utilitarianism, but rather stem from a naïve belief in the ability of economic redistribution and radical democracy to solve all unjust power imbalances, and from a slightly unreflective white, upper/middle-class standpoint.
Lauded by contemporary scholars for their radical insights into the problem of gender inequality, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill enjoy firm positions within the canon of feminist political thought. Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal*, in contrast, has garnered much less attention from scholars in this (and other) fields. Read in light of *Appeal*, I have suggested that the originality and progressive bent of Mill’s feminist insights in *Subjection* have been exaggerated. Unlike Thompson and Wheeler’s earlier *Appeal*, Mill’s *Subjection* reproduces many of the limitations found in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. Arguably the first comprehensive socialist-feminist work to be published, one might wonder why the dissertation has situated *Appeal* in relation to liberal, rather than socialist or Marxist works. Part of the reason is because Thompson and Wheeler were utilitarian thinkers, thus placing them in the liberal tradition. Comparing *Appeal* with both *Vindication* and *Subjection* also makes sense because these are easily the two most prominent texts of 19th century feminist political thought. Additionally, all three are book-length comprehensive works on the subject of women’s position in society, all three contain both criticisms and analyses of gendered institutions, identities, and power relations, and all three provide proposals for social and political change to address the issues they’ve identified and to promote justice for women. Furthermore, clear linkages of influence can be seen in the succession of texts, and all of the authors were influenced by the major themes in political thought at that time such as power, democracy, reason, and education.

From the backdrop of critically examining Wollstonecraft’s feminism, Thompson and
Wheeler’s contribution to feminist thinking can be more easily discerned. Thus, the first chapter began by establishing Wollstonecraft’s contributions to feminism, but also the limits of her approach. While Thompson and Wheeler drew from Wollstonecraft’s analysis, they move well beyond her prescriptions for women’s increased access to education and civil rights. Thompson and Wheeler’s Appeal includes comprehensive arguments for full political rights, for extending democracy to the economy and the domestic sphere, and for ensuring all enjoy equal economic security. They stress the importance of an egalitarian context to maximize happiness. Their feminism also includes the radical notion that because women’s traditional and biological labor is integral to the happiness of a community, it should be recognized and compensated.

All three texts, Vindication, Appeal, and Subjection, agree that power relations within the family are unjust. All contain strong indictments of the legal barriers that lead to male dominance in the home and all recognize that it is not solely legal barriers that contribute to gender inequality. While Mill goes further than Wollstonecraft in the extent of the legal reforms he proposes, unlike Thompson and Wheeler he believes that changes outside the family that create formal gender equality in law will change the power dynamics inside. In this way, Mill’s reform proposal, like Wollstonecraft’s, hinders the potential for gender equality by maintaining a gendered public/private divide within a capitalist economic context. In Subjection we find that many of the limitations in Wollstonecraft’s work have resurfaced, despite the publication of, and Mill’s familiarity with, Appeal.

While Wollstonecraft and Mill were in favor of women’s equality with men, neither had offered proposals that would substantially alter the gendered public/private divide. Both books
have rightly been characterized as radical and progressive; however, when compared to *Appeal*, both fall short by not sufficiently recognizing the importance of economic security for women’s freedom and independence. Maintaining a gendered separation between public and private, where male activities in the public sphere receive economic rewards and female activities in the private sphere do not, upholds male dominance despite opening the public sphere to women in a formal sense. Thompson and Wheeler were likely the first to document this critique of classical liberalism’s maintenance of a gendered public/private split. Unlike *Appeal, Vindication* and *Subjection* do not provide solutions that, in promoting gender equality, recognize women’s biological difference and avoid limiting women’s role to that difference.

Wollstonecraft and Mill do not fully recognize women’s equal humanity in two respects, both of which Thompson and Wheeler appreciated. First, Thompson and Wheeler understand that because women’s reproductive labor contributes to the community’s happiness, it deserves to be equally rewarded with other kinds of labor that accomplish the same goal (furthering the happiness of the community). In this way, they recognize women’s biological difference. Second, they view women as individuals with their own interests who ought to be granted equal freedom to order their own lives according to those interests. They recognize the role of capitalism in mandating that women perform ‘natural’ duties without compensation, and in so doing, their work provides a stronger critique of an unequal context of choice. The bulk of *Appeal* argues that subordinating the interests of women to men, families, or the economy is against the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In this way, they recognize women as individuals with a capacity and right to self-govern.
In the field of the history of feminist thought, *Appeal* has been clearly overshadowed by Mill’s *Subjection*. This is likely because Mill was a liberal theorist, a British politician, and a prolific philosopher; thus it is understandable that his work would receive greater attention than the work of two Irish co-operative socialist feminists. The relative obscurity of *Appeal* is likely the result of a number of other factors as well, including Marx and Engels’ labeling of other socialists as utopian, and the radical nature of Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism itself. Perhaps it is also due, in part, to the general tendency of historians of political and economic thought to overlook feminist contributions.

The emergence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels may have had a role to play in the eclipse of *Appeal*, as the overshadowing of this book would be connected to a general overshadowing of pre-Marxian socialist thought. Marx and Engels dismiss previous socialist thinkers as ‘utopian’ when compared to their own ‘scientific’ theory (Marx and Engels, “Manifesto” 863 and Engels, “Socialism” 869). Marx and Engels use the distinction between 'scientific' and 'utopian' to differentiate themselves from, and elevate their theories above, those socialist theorists who came before them. It is unclear whether or not Marx and Engels meant for Thompson to be dismissed as utopian. Some reasons for dismissing previous socialists would clearly apply to Thompson’s work. For instance, one of the main reasons Engels dismisses previous socialist thinkers is because previous socialists thought social transformation could occur through reason and voluntary action, thus emancipating all people, rather than emancipating the working class through the historical emergence of the class struggle (“Socialism” 869). The socialist thought of Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simonians could not be
but utopian, since, Engels argues, “…the capitalist mode of production, and with it the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, was still very incompletely developed” (“Socialism” 870). He admonishes these socialists for thinking they could solve social problems through the power of reason, propaganda, and experiments. For these reasons, “[t]hese new social systems were foredoomed as utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasies” (“Socialism” 871). Thompson’s socialism seems to fit this description. He provided detailed plans for co-operatives, helped to draft quasi-constitutional documents for use in co-operative communities, and thought people would voluntarily join these communities, motivated by their reason and convinced by successful experiments. Moreover, Thompson was not working within a historical materialist framework that understood history as a history of class struggle. He also did not think unions should waste time struggling directly with capitalists. Instead, he thought unions should take dues from workers in order to support them during periods of economic crisis and eventually to provide resources for the creation of co-operative communities (Labor Rewarded 78-87).

At the same time, when they criticize previous socialist thinkers as merely utopian, Marx and Engels only explicitly list Owen, Fourier, Saint-Simonians, and their followers. This might not seem like a reason to exclude Thompson from dismissal, except for the fact that Marx and Engels quote Thompson in various publications, and when they quote him, it is always favourably. Marx quotes Thompson in two of his major works: Capital Volume I (361) and Capital Volume II (397-399); Engels quotes Thompson at length in the preface of Capital Volume II (96); and Marx mentions Thompson twice, briefly, in The Poverty of Philosophy (69,
Moreover, Marx and Engels argue that one of the main flaws of utopian socialist analysis was its inability to move beyond understanding capitalism is wrong or harmful, towards understanding the mechanisms within capitalism that make it so – namely – surplus value (879-880). As noted previously, Thompson was working with this conception years earlier, and had called it surplus value (Inquiry 166). While we cannot be sure if Marx and Engels meant to include Thompson in their criticism of utopian socialists, by calling socialist thinkers and activists who came before them ‘utopian,’ Marx and Engels shaped how, and perhaps influenced whether or to what extent, we remember them.

The simple popularity of Marx and Engel’s version of socialism and their idea of the class struggle served to marginalize previous socialist analysis even further. Barbara Taylor argues that with the coming of Marxism and scientific socialism sexual equality was sidelined as less important than the ‘world historical’ class conflict. Women were told to suppress their demands for equality, an instruction often accompanied by a vague promise of sexual equality after the workers’ revolution (xv). Thus, the onset of scientific socialism / Marxism worked to de-politicize women’s concerns. Class became the more important ‘public’ and universal concern, while women’s rights were viewed as either ‘private’ or delegitimized as merely bourgeois (xvi). Nyland and Heenan write that Appeal’s greatest achievement was the recognition of the value of domestic and reproductive labor. The ‘tragedy’ of Appeal “…was the coming of Marx. Both would be swamped in Marx’s formidable wake” (259). The rise of Marxism, undoubtedly, is one of the main reasons why Thompson and Wheeler’s ideas, including those on women’s equality, have been largely forgotten or ignored.
Marxism has been widely criticized by feminist theorists for ignoring the concrete realities of women’s lives, although these oversights have often been excused as due to historical circumstances. Marx and Engels’ theories have often been adapted to accommodate the demands of women’s equality, including recognizing the role and value of women’s work. While Marx and Engels recognized that women were oppressed under capitalism, they thought the abolition of the male-headed private household, and therefore women as property, would resolve the issue. Placing greater emphasis on exploitation within the capitalist marketplace through the exploitation of workers by capitalists, they did not look closely at women’s biological and traditional labor and its place within capitalism, or how this work would be organized post-communist revolution. While all four theorists: Marx, Engels, Thompson, and Wheeler, agreed that greater economic equality is crucial for justice, an interesting project might compare the direction of their analysis and proposals for change in light of their differing ethical frameworks: utilitarianism as compared to historical materialism and Hegelian dialectics. In a similar vein, future research might also examine the direction socialist feminism took following the publication of *Appeal*, comparing the book to socialist feminist texts that come later, namely Friedrich Engel’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* and August Babel’s *Women under Socialism.*

Of course, another likely factor for the obscurity of *Appeal* in the history of feminist political thought is the general marginalization of feminist political thought itself. Dooley argues that one of the reasons *Appeal* has been marginalized is because, while Thompson has been acknowledged for his contributions to economic theory, other aspects of his writing, such
as his work in moral philosophy and justice, have been largely ignored. She writes that “[h]is work on sexual inequality has continued to be ignored as if it were an aberration perhaps brought on by an emotional relationship with Wheeler. To the extent that this dismissal is given credence, it amounts to a continued writing out of history, a perpetuation of the questionable use of power that the Appeal identifies” (Equality xvii). Indeed, many books on Owenite socialism that feature the major players in the movement will emphasize Thompson’s important contributions and his major works. Often, however, Appeal is not noted or is barely mentioned. For instance, Gregory Claeys notes the existence of Appeal as comparable to the later Subjection by John Stuart Mill, but he neglects to say that it was in this earlier book that Thompson articulated his complete rejection of capitalism. While Claeys does mention that Appeal defends equal distribution, he argues that it was Thompson’s Labor Rewarded that held a more complete rejection of the competitive economy (Machinery 100). Claeys neglects to note the complex economic thinking arising from Appeal, most notably the latter’s radical inclusion of women’s traditional and biological work into both the evaluation of a society’s economic activity, and as an integral consideration in the democratic organization of labor in a co-operative community.

Dooley argues that another main reason for Appeal’s historic invisibility is because the ideas were so radical. “In showing the extent of unjustified power that is exercised to frustrate the liberties and self-respect of women, Thompson and Wheeler risked their own obscurity.” In part, as well, the book’s contributions may have been underestimated due to prejudicial understandings of what constitutes important intellectual work, and what ought to be considered fit for the canon of utilitarian philosophy (Equality xiv).
In addition to the history of utilitarian philosophy, *Appeal* also unsettles feminism’s own historical narrative of gradual progression from equal rights to liberation politics by challenging the view that feminist thinking and activism has consistently progressed from its ‘conservative liberal’ 19th century beginnings. Reading Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* should lead us to rethink the history of feminist political thought. Socialist feminism is normally presented as a mid-20th century combination of radical and Marxist feminism. Yet, Thompson and Wheeler had developed a coherent socialist feminist position long before, on the basis of utilitarianism. Further research might uncover and compare Wheeler’s work to other lesser-known feminist activists of the period, such as Flora Tristan and Frances Wright. Further work might also find interesting comparisons between the feminism of Thompson and Wheeler, Robert Owen, Saint Simonians, and Charles Fourier. Unlike Thompson and Wheeler, however, none of these theorists had produced a comprehensive exposition on the topic of women’s equality. That being said, further research to compare Thompson and Wheeler’s feminism to theirs would make an interesting addition to the literature.\(^{117}\)

While *Appeal* addresses concerns that are perhaps less relevant for contemporary feminism, such as political rights, Thompson and Wheeler also point to the importance of extending democracy to better include women’s particular interests. Their understanding of the economy and the family as political, and therefore as changeable and potentially democratic, opens possibilities for formulating innovative proposals to achieve gender equality.

\(^{117}\) This is not to say that scholarship in this area does not exist. See, for instance, for instance, Barbara Taylor’s *Eve and the New Jerusalem*. 
Further research might link Thompson and Wheeler’s *Appeal* to contemporary feminism. One of Thompson and Wheeler's key concerns is the way marriage and the family frustrate women's happiness. However much marriage has changed since the early 1800s, similar issues remain that impede gender equality such as 'the double workday', vulnerability to domestic and sexual violence, and dependence on a spouse's income. For obvious reasons, therefore, Thompson and Wheeler’s analysis remains at least relevant to the contemporary problems associated with gender inequality, as liberal democracy has yet to resolve these important issues. Perhaps less obviously, one might connect Thompson and Wheeler’s work to contemporary debates on politics, the self, and autonomy. In particular, future research might examine whether Thompson and Wheeler’s approach toward the self and women’s freedom and equality anticipates contemporary feminism’s work to reconceive autonomy as ‘relational’, and whether Thompson and Wheeler's work might offer some insights in this regard.

Feminist scholars have often voiced criticism of classical liberal and mainstream economic theory for universalizing an understanding of the self as an abstract self-interested individual. This idea of the self as abstracted from historical context, interpersonal dependencies, and relationships in general has had implications for our understandings of the proper sphere of politics. Thompson and Wheeler’s work connects with feminist efforts to reconceive the self and the tension between individual freedom and socioeconomic equality.

Understood as both shaped by context but also as having a capacity to self-determine, Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of the self is richer than the traditional liberal understanding. Carole Pateman describes this traditional liberal view of the self as abstract, self-
interested, 'naturally' free and equal, with each individual possessing certain characteristics, such as a capacity for autonomy and rationality (The Problem 24). It is only because individuals are viewed in this abstract light that they are considered to be 'naturally' equal and free. She argues instead that since we are not born 'fully-fledged persons', nor are we born outside of important social relationships, the capacities deemed 'natural' for individuals to possess are fundamentally social and reflective of the habits and behaviours of people who live under capitalist democracy. The abstract individual must reason and make decisions based on self-interest, because an individual abstracted from social relationships has nothing else to consider. Thus, motives for action are assumed to be solely based on individual gain (The Problem 25). Pateman argues that the idea of the abstract individual is derivative of modern economic and democratic institutions. She writes, "...in fundamentally important areas of their lives, individuals are educated to act in a fashion that is often not compatible with mutual aid and forbearance and voluntary cooperation" (The Problem 32).

Thompson and Wheeler anticipate Pateman’s arguments regarding the influence that social and political institutions have on human behaviour and motives. For Thompson and Wheeler the self remains fundamentally liberal, as having a capacity and desire to self-determine, i.e. to develop and pursue one’s own conception of happiness. However, instead of the abstracted liberal individual, Thompson and Wheeler emphasize the role of social relationships in forming the self, including motives, interests, preferences, and attitudes towards other individuals. Their understanding of human nature places responsibility for the possibility of happiness outside of the individual and toward social, political, and economic institutions.
Thus, despite the fact that they were chiefly concerned with furthering the happiness of each individual, their analysis ends up not being individualistic. They place prime importance on the idea that individuals are fundamentally social beings, dependent upon one another and shaped by their relationships to one another. Their work asks us to consider how socialization, through the institutions, cultural mores, and social systems that govern our lives, affects our attitudes towards other individuals, and helps determine our preferences, and conceptions of happiness. For Thompson and Wheeler, happiness depends on the quality of social relations; the greatest happiness for the greatest number requires good characters in equal social positions, and the protection of individual freedom from subordination and economic insecurity, requirements impossible to achieve under existing institutions. This rich understanding of the self and how it is shaped, combined with an emphasis on the importance of individual freedom, anticipates contemporary feminism’s attempt to reformulate our understanding of ‘autonomy’ in political theory.

Standard accounts of autonomy have evolved from a view of the self as self-creating or 'autarchic' (Benn, 129) to the recognition of social relations as requisite for the development of autonomy as an individual capacity or characteristic (Christman, 2004: 151; Dworkin, 11; Friedman, 36). Some feminist scholars are critical of the concept of autonomy because of its apparent valorization of masculinist values, promoting detached individualism, elevating rationality over emotions, and obfuscating human interdependence (Di Stefano, “Trouble” 387; Coade, Fineman, 31; and Wolgast). Recent feminist scholarship aims, however, to reformulate our understanding of autonomy as ‘relational’ (Barclay, Nedelsky, Mackenzie and Stojlar).
William Thompson and Anna Wheeler’s work might contain some insights towards re-conceiving autonomy in this way. They integrate crucial aspects of autonomy: individual critical reflection and self-determination is of principal importance in their theory of cooperation, which recognizes substantial mutual interdependence within all social spheres including the economy and the family (Thompson Labor Rewarded; Thompson and Wheeler). Their contribution to this reformulation is contained in their account of how selves are constructed by social systems such as the economy and the family, and in their arguments that extensive democracy is needed to ensure individuals can actually exercise autonomy in significant ways.

Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of the self is different from that of contemporary mainstream autonomy theorists in that they view selves as socially constructed in specific ways by social systems; and that in order to ensure autonomy is an ideal that can be widely enjoyed, decisions about the determination of options must be democratically controlled. Thus, one important difference between Thompson and Wheeler and contemporary theorists is the notion that self-government is something that can be distributed. Looking at the level of access an individual has to exercise autonomy points to the need for greater democracy, including democratic ordering of labor, both public and private. Thompson and Wheeler's vision for a more just society includes universal suffrage in a democratic system where individuals are empowered to influence decisions that affect them. Their understanding of democracy eliminates the boundaries that are often drawn between politics, the economy, and social life or civil society. They emphasize how the configuration of representative democracy, the economy, and the family present extensive barriers to autonomy, something that is largely
overlooked in much of the contemporary literature.\footnote{For instance, Thompson and Wheeler ground their theory in the view of complete interdependence, whereas many scholars simply note that dependency is part of the human condition at various intervals within a lifetime (Dworkin, Christman, Fineman, Friedman, Young).}

While concerned with promoting self-government, Thompson and Wheeler would not agree that autonomy begins or ends with the self. Selves are not only socialized into autonomy, but are also constructed by and embedded within social relations. Social relations have an immense impact on the degree to which a person can self-determine; the breadth of opportunities for individuals to exercise autonomy is largely determined through the organization of social and political decision-making institutions. For these reasons, Thompson and Wheeler’s understanding of self-government might contribute to contemporary work on relational autonomy. Thompson and Wheeler understand self-government as something that is distributed to individuals through their social relationships. They believe that an equal distribution of self-government is the best way to maximize happiness. As quoted earlier in the dissertation, they write,

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\text{[l]et wealth and all other means of happiness exist in ever such profusion in a family as in a nation, little is done as to happiness, until these \textit{means} are rightly distributed. If an equal share of these do not fall to every individual according to wants and capabilities of enjoyment, an equal share of all the means of happiness, and more particularly and above all, an equal share of the power of self-government, an ingredient without which neither intelligence, morality, nor happiness, can exist (47, emphasis in original).}
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In contrast to many liberal accounts that begin with the choosing, self-interested self, Thompson and Wheeler begin with a richer understanding of the self as both having a capacity to self-
govern, but as also having a character that is shaped by social position and social context. This, combined with the idea that self-government is distributed through an individual’s social context, could provide fodder for future research that links Thompson and Wheeler’s work to contemporary feminist theory.
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