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The Family, Political Theory, and Ideology: A Comparative Study of John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Engels

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THE FAMILY, POLITICAL THEORY, AND IDEOLOGY: A Comparative Study

of John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Engels

by

DAVID MURRAY

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
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ABSTRACT

The Family, Political Theory and Ideology: A Comparative Study of John Stuart

Mill and Friedrich Engels

by

David Murray

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[This project is concerned with the development of the Christian family in Europe and how its sociological and historical characteristics informed the writings of John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Engels. The term “Christian family” refers to the dominant form of the family seen in Western Europe, namely the atomistic nuclear family. The sociological and ideological foundations of the family are explored to provide context for the writings of John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Engels that utilize the concept of the family for their political projects. Both wrote critically about the state of the family in their lifetimes, particularly in regard to the mistreatment of women. I argue that their respective critiques of the family are informed by their own domestic lives, and that the family is a prominent part of their ideological projects: Mill's Liberalism and Engels' Marxism. Their appeals to science provided legitimacy to their social criticism while also integrating their ideas concerning the family into their larger bodies of work. Their ideas concerning the family are consistent with, and inform, their respective ideological positions.]

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The socio-political order of Europe was fundamentally re-imagined during the nineteenth century. The destabilizing effect of the French Revolution allowed reformers and revolutionaries, guided by a professed commitment to reason and objectivity, to challenge established institutions and orthodox notions of everyday life. Two of the most influential political theorists of this period were John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), each of whom developed new approaches to address the political problems they and other intellectuals saw in modern society. While both thinkers have been the focus of much scholarship, insufficient attention has been paid to how their views on the family informed the development of their respective political projects. Each man's own familial experiences provided material his critique of the family. Challenging the structure of the nineteenth century Christian family, and implicitly rebuking their own personal histories, Mill and Engels used their ideas on the family to form and strengthen their ideological positions.

The family, in particular, has served as a focal point for theoretical speculation about the nature and structure of society. Mill and Engels' writings are part of a larger tradition of political theorists using the idea of the family to draw conclusions about, and make prescriptions for, their ideal social order. Historian of the family Tine Van Ossalaer notes that the family and the larger society have a mutually constitutive relationship. The theoretical framework of 'public' and 'private' have served to obscure this complex relationship by positing a stark divide between the two institutions.¹ Consideration of both spheres is necessary for intellectual history focused on a contextual analysis.

This paper sets out to provide a historical and sociological context for the ideas Mill and

Engels espoused regarding the family. Scholarship from the social sciences has traced the development of the modern nuclear family. Before the advent of the independent state, the family was the central institution around which society was structured. Decision making was the purview of the head of the family – depending on the society this was a man or a woman – who was charged with protecting the interests of the family. Membership was based on systems of consanguinity and marriage, with strict rules governing each. As the population grew and was consolidated in budding urban settlements, kinship came to be seen as an inefficient way of organizing politically considering the increased likelihood that community members originated outside of the kin group.

In addition to structural changes seen in the history of the Western family, there were also ideological influences on the archetypes of mother and father. The Catholic Church waged a long campaign of Christianization that spanned from antiquity to the late middle ages. The Church became arguably the most important social institution in Europe and exercised outsized influence over the idealized form of the family. The waning influence of familial connections in political organization coupled with the ideological influence of Catholic and Protestant institutions contributed to the shrinking of the family into the nuclear family common to modern Western society.

The concept of “family” has long been used by political theorists to support their ideas related to government or society. The family was a potent political symbol, invoked by male and female writers alike. Mill and Engels wrote to an audience familiar with such rhetoric. Both men had ideologies that were incompatible with the Christian family as it existed in their day, first and foremost due to the subordinate position women were put in. They not only criticized the

family for political purposes drew attention to the political implications of the seemingly private, domestic roles within the family. This essay will look at the texts of Mill and Engels in context, taking into account the history of the Christian family in Europe as well as the tradition of critical examination of the family structure. The most prominent sources will be Mill's "The Subjection of Women" and Engels' *The Origin of the Family, the State and Private Property* which will be placed in a context that includes historical sociological factors such as gender roles – masculinity and femininity – and trends relating to the institution of marriage.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The development of the modern family has fascinated social scientists, historians of the family and political theorists for centuries. Not only do studies of the family reveal interesting and important details regarding everyday life in a given historical period, they also inform the history of the state and civil society. State and society have long been understood to be organized with the household as the basic constitutive unit. The head of house, the father, has been thought to exercise authority domestically just as the monarch does on a national scale. Sociological investigations could not ignore such an important feature of the social fabric. Carle Zimmerman is a revered sociologist, and his book *Family and Civilization* is an important contribution to the history of the family. It continues to provide great insight into the relationship between the power of the state and the evolution of the family.

Zimmerman argues that the powers and responsibilities associated with the 'state' in a modern context were once held by patriarchs and members of their "trustee family". This designation comes from the fact that family members were understood to be representatives of the clan or kin-group rather than autonomous individuals. Zimmerman notes, "In the absence of strong central governments, 'familism' as a key to the internal strength of social groups must have played a greater role in the social order than in other periods."^{2 3} Each member was responsible for the economic security and physical protection of their fellow members, and the male members would meet out justice on behalf of their dependents. Ultimately the role of the family, outside of domestic matters, was slowly subsumed by civil institutions such as courts and magistracies. Zimmerman writes that by the nineteenth century, the family had evolved into an "atomistic form", a far-cry from the large "trustee form" of the various European barbarian

tribes. Zimmerman uses this term to describe a household that is limited to the married couple and their children and that had been around since the seventeenth century.⁴ The transition from predominantly kin-based social structures to civil society made up of “atomistic” nuclear families and governed by an administrative state roughly coincides with the “Christianization of Europe,” which scholars date from the seventh to the fifteenth-centuries.

Christian doctrine concerned with the marriage and sexual morality “facilitated the transition” of European families from disparate forms towards uniform, “commensurable household units.” The household is an important category in the modern techniques used to gathering social and demographic data. The methodologies employed take for granted the relative uniformity among household. In Antiquity and into the middle ages one familial household was not necessarily like the other. The differences between the upper and lower classes, for instance, was dramatic, with elites holding large plantations and vast amounts of material wealth in the form of slaves. Some of these slaves had household of their own, which were included among the other properties that formed the landowners' holdings.⁵ Historians and sociologists like David Herlihy have emphasized the role of the Catholic Church had in the homogenization of European families, which was informed by the larger project of Christianization.

The Catholic Church, in its efforts to secure cultural hegemony over Europe, was in conflict with the trustee family and worked to curb its power. It also sought to be the source of the hegemonic ideology in the West. In order to accomplish this, Church officials and affiliated did not content themselves with dictating matters of theology only. Greek sociologist Panos Bardis, an expert in comparative studies of the family across cultures, traces the relationship

between early Christianity and the family. Gender roles, sexual morality and the dynamics within marriage were prominent topics in the writings of early Catholic intellectuals. The story of Jesus emphasized family values like the patriarchy of God and the brotherhood of man. Jesus himself was a family man who supported his kin both materially and spiritually.⁶

The sexual mores and gender hierarchy associated with Christian doctrine were first propagated by the intellectuals of the early Catholic Church – the Church Fathers. During this period morality became synonymous with celibacy and the denial of carnal desires. Promiscuity associated with the secular cultures of Rome and Greece was condemned. Sex was not viewed as a natural activity but as a corrupting force that needed to be feared. Marriage is one of the seven sacraments in Roman Catholicism and is a topic that Catholic intellectuals have written on extensively.

The Church's fixation on matrimony is due to the outsized role that marriage plays in society. Marriage defines what the community deems to be the proper relationship between men and women. Marriage created a dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate intercourse and reproduction. In the eyes of the Church marriage was believed to be inferior to virginity and celibacy. Women, as the objects of male desire, were identified with the devil. According to Bardis, "Christianity advocated [women's] spiritual equality to men," although this equality did not extend to the "temporal sphere."⁷ In contrast to Roman society, where aristocratic women were able to achieve some level of parity with men, the fathers of the Church asserted that man was the superior sex and truly "of God."

These early Catholic writers displayed a deep-seated distrust of human sexuality, particularly that of women, and worked to exert its influence over the social habits of Europe.

Historian David Herlihy indicates that these writings are part of a larger effort of social control carried out by the Church:

There could be no variant standards of behavior within the Christian community. Roman law recognized several forms of marriage or concubinage; for Christians, however, marriage was the same for all persons, no matter what their class or condition. Similarly, the Christian insistence on monogamy undermined, though only again slowly, the polygyny practiced by several barbarian peoples (or rather, the elites among them).⁸

The Catholic Church has issued numerous edicts and pronouncements that sought to regulate the forms of the family and domestic relationships in European Christendom. Over time and with the help of newly-converted indigenous tribes, the leadership of the Church was able to spread the gospel, infused with its own ideological interpretations, throughout Europe.

While theological and ecclesiastical issues were the primary focus of Catholic intellectuals, the prominence of the Church as a social institution meant that matters concerning practical morality and conduct of its followers were under its jurisdiction as a socio-political institution. The emphasis on ethics and morality was rooted in the notion that temporal world was merely place of suffering which the faithful could transcend upon death. Living according to the proper protocols was a way of ensuring a successful transition to the afterlife. Given the lasting influence of Catholicism in the world, it is hard to overestimate the pronounced effect Church doctrine has had on modern conceptions of family and domestic relationship, as well as the enshrinement of a patriarchal authority, in the family and society more broadly, as one of the pillars of Western Culture.

All of this is not to say that the Church apparatus wielded absolute power over social and intellectual questions. Heterodox Christian, as well as secular, social doctrines have informed the concept of the family, so that while the ideas of early Catholic intellectuals were very influential,

they have since been tempered by critical voices. Historian of the family Pamela Sheingorn has uncovered interesting details pertaining to contested questions about gender roles within the medieval Christian community. It was not until the eleventh-century that patrilineal genealogy became the norm. Before this point, ancestry was traced in a bi-lineal manner, recognizing both male and female progenitors.⁹ Even still, matriarchal themes in artwork, as well as cults dedicated to female figures like the Virgin Mary and her mother St. Anne were popular up to the thirteenth-century. Sheingorn examines various works of art commissioned by secular and religious patrons that emphasized the central place Christ's female descendants within the artistic and theological concept of the Holy Family.¹⁰ This may have been a deliberate choice made by female religious orders. The Holy Family as it appeared in the works of certain German and Dutch painters implied the matrilineal trinity was "equal to and as sanctified as" the traditional Triumvirate: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹¹

Secular and religious social doctrines have had an antagonistic relationship in Europe as each competed for influence over social issues; both have informed the concept of the family and have been constantly evolving, so while the ideas of early Catholic intellectuals were very influential, they have since been tempered by other, less conservative sources. In the late middle ages, there was an emphasis later on the importance of marriage, compared to celibacy - possibly put forward by married laypersons who were upset about the hypocrisy of monastic orders that failed to remain celibate but still sat in judgement of the laity.¹² This points to tension between the Church's administrative and political apparatus and the lay-population. There was a divergence in the lives led by monks and clergy and the average European, with some seeing the Church as disconnected from the experiences of their congregants. Additionally, the Catholic

Church dealt with a series of internal schisms, the most impactful occurring in the mid-sixteenth century with the Reformation. During this period when reactionary ideas held sway within the Church hierarchy, the movement known as the Counter-Reformation, the Church reiterated its fundamentalist positions in the face of opposition from the clergy itself. The Church continued to assert the superiority of virginity and chastity in marriage up the sixteenth century. At the Council of Trent, church officials condemned the practice of clandestine marriages and unlawful marriages, enforcing the sexual mores that undergird the nuclear family.

Protestant reformers had a very different attitude when it came to marriage and the family. Many Protestant sects allowed their clergy to marry. Heinrich von Kettenbach, a priest who converted to Lutheran Reformed Church, declared in 1521, “I believe that God has so established marriage that a pious married person, even one who has married three times, is more esteemed by God than a monk or nun who has been chaste for thirty years.”¹³ Reform-minded monks, priests and nuns were emphasizing the importance of universal marriage, rejecting the traditional monastic life as well as the Church's idealization of celibacy and virginity. The ideas promoted by the reformers emphasized the importance of the home in Christian life, which meant that spiritual precepts once followed closely only in the monastery were now being preached as qualities Protestant domestic life. Historian Steven Ozment notes that the reformers continued to exercise patriarchal authority at home and in the realm of politics.¹⁴

Martin Luther, arguably the primary instigator of the Reformation when he nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, wrote extensively on social questions. He believed that the union between man and woman was pleasing to God. Luther felt that marriage was a defense against prostitution and immorality. This is contrasted

with the Catholic view of marriage being for those who were not strong or faithful enough to live a life of celibacy and virginity. He also advocated access to divorce proceedings for certain issues within a matrimonial partnership. Luther went so far as to take on the case of a congregante who was abused by her husband. In the process, Luther was able to wrest control over divorce proceedings from the state and bring them under the jurisdiction of his own ministry.¹⁵ Just as the Catholic Church had done in the middle-ages, new Protestant sects ingratiated themselves with their respective states, and grew to become institutional powers in their own right. This new challenge to Catholic orthodoxy had a profound effect on social questions that laid at the heart of European society, altering the socio-political landscape of states that adopted Reformed sects as their sanctioned religious order.

The Reformation's emphasis on the home meant that spiritual precepts once followed closely in the monastery were now being brought into the Reformed home. This included an emphasis on patriarchal authority.¹⁶ The nuclear family model was also promoted by Church reformers, which emphasized living according the scriptures as well as raising any children to join the congregation upon their maturity. This focus on domestic piety idealized the atomistic family: a strong and faithful patriarch supported by his pious and demure wife, who together provide a godly home for their children, the next generation of the church. However, the rise of the nuclear family is largely attributed to the Catholic Church by scholars like David Herlihy, who highlight its emphasis on monogamous and sanctified unions. It re-affirmed the sacramental status following the break between the Reformers and the Church.

The nuclear family model became the idealized form in Britain by the seventeenth-century, coinciding with a decline in patriarchal authority. However, feminist historians like

Hilda Smith have argued that this domestic system only served to further subordinate women. In the sixteenth century men had more options available to them in terms of suitable partners for marriage. With the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, men from industrious and/or ambitious families could marry up or down in terms of social standing. Marrying up would bestow aristocratic legitimacy on descendants, while marrying down could secure a large dowry, and with it, financial security. Despite an increase in access to education for men of common backgrounds, on the whole women continued to be passed over for these educational opportunities. Those women whose social standing afforded them modest opportunities to attend dame schools or local parish grammar schools were treated very differently than their male counterparts. The skills learned in these classes were either for the purpose of preparing women for their lives as wives or practical skills such as weaving textiles or crafting other goods. Often their training was simply a new way in which women could be exploited, as the products of their labor could be sold off by their instructors for personal gain.¹⁷ Additionally, women of the seventeenth-century perceived that they were losing some of the social responsibilities that they had traditionally held. Women of the upper classes had often been charged with the managing of family estates, while in the seventeenth-century women were increasingly encouraged to become “social ornaments and gadabouts,” which was criticized by proto-feminist thinkers of that period and beyond.¹⁸

The most radical changes to occur within the family were enacted during the French Revolution. By 1793-4, the assembly had passed laws legalizing divorce, allowed women to inherit property, limited patriarchal authority over children, secured rights for illegitimate children, among others.¹⁹ Marriage, in addition to other familial relationships were politicized

and brought under the jurisdiction of civil authorities. These reforms granted women a certain amount of liberty in deciding the course of their own life and gave them the ability to make their own future free from their husband. The right to divorce gave women the ability to enter into or leave a contractual relationship, whereas before women were subject to will and authority of their husband. These legislative measures created more egalitarian inheritance laws, eschewing the terms of Salic tradition which made primogeniture the law of the land. These legislative changes provided women a more dominant stature in the family and opened legal means for women to assert their civil rights and entitlements.²⁰

Through the exploration of the legislative changes surrounding the family, Historian Suzanne Desan opens up a new avenue of scholarly inquiry into the gender dynamics during the revolutionary period. While the reforms of divorce laws gave women equal footing with their husbands in conjugal relationships, the reforms of inheritance laws gave sisters equal footing with their siblings. Desan argues that the movement to demand inheritance reform was the nucleus of female activism in the Revolutionary period. These women were politicizing an issue that had been taken for granted. Desan argues that they developed a clear class and gender consciousness and became aware of that they were bound to a number of social relationships: to property, family, as well as the state.²¹

These new laws aimed at the family created new opportunities for women and caused a fair amount of controversy. Every political attack on the traditional family structure created new challenges to the civil rights granted to women. However, women fought to keep their new civil rights and, in fact, had been fighting to voice their dissatisfaction with the political system long before the Revolution began to address the legal reforms of the family structure. While many of

the changes made to the family during this period were undone by Napoleon upon his ascension as the head of the French Empire, the questions raised by radical women informed the movements seen later in the nineteenth-century women's movements and suffragette causes. However, the authority Catholic Church or Protestant authorities over social institutions was usurped by the secular state and brought under some measure of democratic control. While religious beliefs would continue to inform social relationships – including those within the family – it could no longer directly interfere in political matters. While this situation was unique to France in the eighteenth century, it served as an ideal to liberal and left wing political and social movements in the nineteenth century across Europe. A new, secular ideology of the family supplemented the religious foundation of domestic affairs.

CHAPTER 3: THE FAMILY IN THE TIME OF MILL AND ENGELS

Despite liberal progress in society and human relations the patriarchal family remained just that: patriarchal. Although this statement is rather tautological, it is an extremely important point to emphasize. The near-absolute mastery of husband over wife defines the household in which children are raised. The learned behavior of the majority of children (discounting the small number of cases of domestic equality that must have existed, considering the two men featured in this paper) was in opposition to the values nineteenth century liberals like Mill possessed. Considering the influence of Enlightenment thought on many nineteenth century thinkers, mankind was believed to have transcended such base, regressive qualities that clung to a mythic biblical past as justification for male superiority. However, as Mill noted, "All the selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference which exist among mankind, have their and root in, and derive their principle nourishment from, the present constitution of the relation between men and women."²² While England may have been a democratic republic, the ideals of egalitarianism and self-determination did not extend to the family.

British family life and its domestic ideology in the nineteenth century was profoundly influenced by the rise of the middle classes in Europe. These atomistic families no longer relied on the extended networks of kinship that characterized the earlier, more clannish forms. The widespread effects of industrialization and urbanization provided the means for more and more men to access the market economy, allowing these smaller families to achieve financial stability on their own. Production and trade flourished throughout this time period, which gave rise to the "middling types": heads of households that had become secure enough in their respective business ventures to live off the profits without subsidizing their income with additional

domestic labor performed by their wives and children.

Historian of the family and masculinity in Britain John Tosh notes that the Victorian middle-class family was the culmination of a long transition from an economic unit to a “sentimental and emotional” one.²³ For the first time, family and domestic life became a site of domestic affection and comradeship rather than economically productive units. This ideology conceived of an idealized domestic life that was superior to historical forms.²⁴ The bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century sought refuge from the public world of business within the home, where the family could spend quality time together. Within this companionate nuclear family connected by affective rather than economic relationships patriarchal authority was reduced from levels seen in the early modern and medieval periods.²⁵ This development led to a marked divide between work and family, a characteristic that continues to be seen in contemporary society.

The middle-classes of Europe wasted no time in developing their own idealized version of the domestic life. In order to understand the structural features of the family it is necessary to examine the myths and ideology that families constructed for themselves, as well as how the family was viewed in the popular consciousness. The "social division of the sexes" was of particular interest to intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Attitudes towards gender roles permeated society through encyclopedias, as well as advice literature marketed to women. The *Meyer's Encyclopedia* in Germany published an article in 1848 on *geschlechtseigentümlichkeiten* - “the disposition of the sexes” - a term that was used to describe the psychological characteristics that were thought to coincide with the observable differences between the sexes. For example, women were perceived to be sexual creatures, while men were thought to be cultural creatures; men favored the individual while women tended towards the universal. These

characteristics were ‘discovered’ in the last three decades of the eighteenth century and were supported ‘scientifically’ with evidence from medical treatises and social scientific works of the nineteenth century: in anthropology, psychology and psychiatry.²⁶ Women were increasingly associated with the home while men were thought to straddle both worlds: men were linked to the external world and formed a constitutive part of the state, while also serving as master in the domestic realm. This authority, however, was not invincible.

Historian Martin Francis stresses that nuance is required when talking about the idealized forms of masculinity in nineteenth-century Britain. Men were constantly straddling the line between their public and private performance of masculine stereotypes: militaristic hyper-masculinity and emphasis on male bonding. The critical view of an absolute divide between public and private has increasingly informed gender studies thanks to the pioneering work done by feminist scholars in the latter half of the twentieth-century. What has also changed is the perceived relationship between masculinity and femininity, which are now understood to be mutually constitutive.²⁷ The conception of the feminine in the nineteenth century was fixated on the domestic figure of the mother. Motherhood was increasingly seen as the highest form of femininity a woman could attain, and reflected women’s perceived moral character. Historian of the family Tine Van Ossalaer notes:

This angelic personification of piety and purity dwelled – so the narrative goes – within the boundaries of her home and turned it into a safe haven for her male family members, away from their hectic day-to-day obligations. The cult of ‘domesticity’ and that of ‘true’ womanhood were therefore inextricably linked.²⁸

Rather than being a natural feature of society, the dichotomy of public and private was an intellectual project that emphasized the differences between the natures and characters of men and women. While this ideology surrounding gender distinctions was espoused by early modern

political theorists, it was legitimated during the modern period with writings from physicians and social theorists. Success of the domestic ideology has been attributed to the rise of capitalism and industrialization and the "intensified gender ideology" that came about because of those phenomena.²⁹ However, this division between society and the home was also a function of the Protestant conception of the domestic sphere as well. The home was a place of piety and living according to Christian precepts. As society was progressing and evolving due to industrialization and urbanization, the home became a place of respite from socio-economic activity.

The modern Christian family was built on the exclusion of women from the public sphere, and the position of women within the home was to be supportive of the patriarch. The communal family, and communal society as a whole, had no conception of private property or absolute ownership. Each member contributed in their own way to making sure the family, and by extension the tribe, was economically stable. The bourgeois family, a pejorative term for the nuclear family used by those on the political left, celebrated the primacy of the individual at the expense of the community. By the nineteenth century, socio-economic stratification had made the bourgeoisie a target of attacks by political radicals that associated the burgeoning power of the middle-class with reactionary and regressive views of society. Liberals, socialists and, later, communists – the left wing of the political spectrum – and their associated intellectuals competed in journals and newspapers in order to sway public opinion.

1. JOHN STUART MILL

James Mill and his wife Harriet (née Burrow) welcomed their son John Stuart to the family in 1806. James was a renowned intellectual and part of the Scottish Enlightenment school

of thought. A friend and collaborator of Jeremy Bentham, he contributed to the fields of philosophy, psychology and history. His marriage to Harriet was, by all accounts, less than ideal: the two were ill-suited for one another in terms of temperament, and the lack of intellectual curiosity on the part of Harriet was a leading cause of their domestic tension. This comes through in John Stuart Mill's posthumously published memoirs. Mill's mother Harriet is largely absent from the text. Considering the book is a memoir regarding Mill's intellectual development, the dearth of her appearances is telling. Mill's father casted a large shadow over Mill's reminiscences, serving as both a role model and overbearing schoolteacher. His mother is rendered invisible by the enormity of his father's influence, which matches with descriptions of James and Harriet's married life. In the words of one Mill biographer, Mill's mother seems to have conformed to the eighteenth-century template of the "genteel and useless" woman.³⁰ Considering the lack of educational opportunities afforded women during the late eighteenth-century, this is unsurprising. It may be why Mill so very much valued his relationship with his own Harriet, who by most accounts was every bit Mill's equal, both intellectually and in terms of their relationship.

Religion was not a prominent feature of the Mill household. James Mill was a lapsed Presbyterian and eschewed the spiritual in favor of the temporal when it came to his son's education. Mill personally instructed his son's tutoring, teaching the classics of Greek philosophy and Roman history. John Stuart's intellectual development benefitted from the Mill's middle-class status, as his time could be spent pursuing knowledge as opposed to economically productive labor in the home. The younger Mill utilized his comprehensive education by turning his sharp wit and keen intelligence towards social criticism. This began with some journalistic

endeavors as a young man and grew into a vast and varied oeuvre.

The friendship and subsequent marriage of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor has captivated scholars for decades. Their relationship was highly unorthodox in terms of the social conventions of the mid-nineteenth century. She was married when they first met, and they carried on an intense intellectual correspondence for twenty years before they were able to marry following the death of Taylor's husband, John. Besides the scandalous fact that Harriet Taylor was married when their relationship began, what appeals to modern scholars was the intellectual parity that existed between the two. Mill wrote glowingly of Taylor in his *Autobiography*:

To be admitted into any degree of mental intercourse with a being of these qualities, could not but have a most beneficial influence on my development.... The benefit I received was far greater than any which I could hope to give.... What I owe, even intellectually, to her, is in detail, almost infinite; of its general character a few words will give some, though a very imperfect, idea.³¹

The respect and admiration between these two intellectual partners made their relationship so successful. Mill went so far as to use his own marriage as an example of the ideal form. In terms of the influence Taylor had on Mill and vice versa is hard to overstate.

The difficulty for scholars has been identifying the extent to which Taylor's voice comes through in Mill's writing. Collections of her works in recent years have done a good job identifying the unique contributions she made to Mill's oeuvre. What comes through is Taylor's radical and insightful stance on gender issues.³² The best-known work produced by Taylor, with editorial work provided by Mill, was "The Enfranchisement of Women," which features similar conclusions that appear in Mill's later essay "The Subjection of Women." Taylor formulated a social, economic and 'materialist' analysis of the plight of women in Britain and the wider Western world. The pecuniary disadvantage of women was a central issue for Harriet Taylor.

Marriage required women to give up all financial interests and rely on the good will of their husbands. Extra-nuptial agreements could be made to secure some financial independence for women; however, the costs of such contracts limited their availability to the wider public.

Harriet's solution was for all women, wives and mothers included, to be allowed to enter the labor market:

Numbers of women are wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them, no other occupation for their feelings or their activities To say that women must be excluded from active life because maternity disqualifies them for it, is in fact to say, that every other career should have been forbidden them in order that maternity may be their only resource.³³

The principle that undergirded her ideas for reform was the individual's right to choose. Her analysis of social issues, however, was much more grounded in material realities than Mill's.

Drawing on her own experiences as a married woman, Taylor addressed the norms surrounding gender relations that she believed kept women in a subordinate position to men.

Informed by Mill's work, Taylor also employed utilitarian and liberal arguments to challenge the domination of women by men in terms of social power. She believed that individual happiness was a result of self-determination and held that "so long as competition is the general law of human life, it is tyranny to shut out one half of the competitors" by virtue of their sex.³⁴ Education was the means by which society kept women relegated to the domestic sphere. Indicative of the reciprocal intellectual relationship the two had, Mill and Taylor wrote each other essays outlining their respective thoughts on marriage, and women's meager educational opportunities around 1831 or 1832:

Women are educated for one single object, to gain their living by marrying... To be married is the object of their existence and that object being gained they do really cease to exist as to anything worth calling life or any useful purpose. One observed very few marriages where there is any real sympathy or enjoyment or companionship between the parties. The woman knows what her power is and gains by it what she has been taught to consider 'proper' to her state.³⁵

Harriet's radical positions went beyond even Mill's progressive position on women's rights. This passage is preceded by other observations, including the fact that she believed if everyone was educated, and the institution of marriage remained unchanged, then no one would marry anymore. Obviously, Taylor believed that education should be promoted as the most effective way to get rid of marriage as an institution. Barring that, divorce should be available to any one for any reason, with caveats like the parties must wait at least two years after initiating the divorce before it could be finalized. This would ensure that divorce was the right decision.³⁶

What is apparent from the writings of Mill and Taylor is that on concepts like marriage and political equality for the sexes Taylor was the more radical. If Mill's reminiscences about their intellectual relationship are taken at face value. Mill was not only criticized for the radical nature of his ideas relating to women in society, he was mocked by his peers for even including Taylor in his intellectual process. A striking example is Mill's relationship with the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle, along with his wife and brother, derided the views on marriage held by Taylor and her social circle. He believed that Mill was "far above all that" - clearly, he didn't know his friend's mind on the subject!³⁷). Following one bout of Mill's chronic illnesses in 1836, Carlyle wrote to his (brother or wife), "Is it not strange, this pining away into dessication [sic] and nonentity, of our poor Mill, if it be so, as his friends all say, that this charmer is the cause of it? I have not seen any riddle of human life which I could so ill form a

theory of.”³⁸

Animosity between Mill and his peers was a recurring motif. Mill and Taylor’s friendship with the Carlyle’s withered after word got back to Mill and Taylor around 1846 that the Carlyle’s had been indiscreet in their gossiping.³⁹ Mill’s correspondence with his intellectual idol Auguste Comte was adversely impacted by his progressive views on the family, as well as his relationship with Taylor. After reading the collected letters between the two men, Taylor was disappointed with Mill’s inability to directly challenge the older scientist – tellingly, her response to Comte’s regressive views was indifference, since they conformed to the mainstream positions advocated by men during this period. The casual misogyny espoused by Mill’s male intellectual peers was one of the many reasons that Mill and Taylor isolated themselves socially from Mill’s former scene and befriended more progressive and radical writers that shared their egalitarian views.

2. FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Friedrich Engels was born a few decades after Mill, and about a thousand miles east in Barmen, a city in Westphalia region that was part of the Kingdom of Prussia. Situated in the Wupper River Valley, Barmen was the site of some of Prussia’s earliest industrial projects, and the Engels family were members of the new class of industrialists. The Engels controlled a company involved in textile production and acted as paternal providers to the community of workers they employed. His family were representative of the bourgeois life-style that Engels would work all of his life towards upsetting: he regarded it as insular, reactionary, in a word philistinish. Former Labour MP and intellectual historian Tristram Hunt has helped to revive the

legacy of Engels and bring it out from under the shadow of his friend and collaborator, Karl Marx. For too long, Engels' intellectual contributions, such as his writings on the working class of England as well as the family, have been subsumed by the prestige of his intellectual partner, seeming to be no more than appendage to the oft-cited Marx. Engels was true scholar in his own right, and

Steeped in the conservative strain of Lutheranism called Pietism, Engels' intellectual curiosity was hampered by his family's reactionary outlook. It was not until Engels was on his own at university that he formulated his own worldview. Writing on Engels' religious principles

Hunt notes:

In that sense the latent rationality of Christianity comes to permeate the everyday experience of the modern world – its values are now variously incarnated in the family, civil society, and the state. What Engels particularly embraces in all of this was an idea of modern pantheism (or, rather, pandeism), a merging of divinity with progressing humanity, a happy dialectical synthesis that freed him from the fixed oppositions of the pietist ethos of devout longing and estrangement.⁴⁰

Engels' upbringing among the "philistines" of the Barmen industrial class provided the resistance that sparked his desire to explore thinkers and ideas that were considered by conservative society to be radical. David Friedrich Strauss' book *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* demonstrated how rational analysis could illuminate, and challenge, the foundational ideologies of European society. The nineteenth century was a time of rapid change and intellectuals were questioning the legitimacy of socio-political institutions previously taken for granted.

Like Mill, Engels was part of the first generations to experience a recognizably modern childhood devoid of compulsory productive labor in the home. Domestic labor was a significant feature of home life in the early modern period, when the income of the household depended on

the sale of products produced by the family, usually the wife and children. The Engels, like other bourgeois clans, made the home a place where the family spent quality time with one another. This signified the development of a sharp divide between the outside world and the domestic sphere.⁴¹

Mary Burns (1821-1863) was an Irish mill worker and working-class advocate living in Manchester. When Engels arrived to learn the family textile trade, Mary acted as a guide to the industrial slums. These experiences formed the basis for Engels' expose *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. There is much ambiguity surrounding Mary in Engels' scholarship, which historian Terrell Carver attributes to the male-centric and hagiographic tendencies in the field of intellectual biography. Mary is viewed as either a "kept" woman living with, and exploited by, the bourgeois son of a mill owner; or as a symbol of Engels' defection from the bourgeoisie and bourgeoning working-class consciousness. Following Mary's death, which by all accounts shook Engels, her sister Lydia Burns (1827-1878) worked as his housekeeper, and it is presumed by scholars that the two had a sexual relationship as well.⁴²

Given the revolutionary nature of Engels ideas, it is interesting that gender was rarely referred to explicitly in his writings and correspondence. His relationships with the sisters Mary and Lydia Burns point to his progressive views on marriage. Mary and Engels both agreed that marriage was a repressive institution for women and lived together as domestic partners. Engels ultimately married Lydia on her deathbed, in accordance with her dying wishes. The sisters were from working class backgrounds, and Engels kept his family in the dark when it came to his personal life, which may speak to his unwillingness to advocate his true beliefs in the face of potential loss of his social standing and access to the family's social and financial resources.

Regardless of the problematic way that mostly male historians have treated Engels' romantic relationship, as well as the legacy of the women themselves, it is important to think through the implications any serious relationship when looking at an intellectual in context. Many studies sanitize stories to the detriment of the audience.

While it is difficult to fully appreciate the complexities of a couple's experiences, it is not controversial to assume that partners inform each other's thinking. A functional relationship has dialectical characteristics, with each party bringing their own ideas and experiences into it and, potentially, their different viewpoints can produce a synthesis. It is naïve and lazy to assume that one's intellectual and personal lives are completely compartmentalized. Given the politics of the two men featured in this paper, as well as the backgrounds and characters of the women in their lives, these considerations need to be central to any intellectual biography, or intellectual histories that draw on biographic elements of the subject. While Engels' relationships are less documented – it is widely believed that Mary Burns was illiterate, and Lydia and Lenchen do not appear in any substantial way in Engels' correspondence – their non-traditional natures and the working-class sensibilities of his significant others speak to Engels' revolutionary views on the bourgeois family.

CHAPTER 4: THE FAMILY IN POLITICAL THEORY

The use of the term "ideology" here is value-neutral. This project is not concerned with judging the merits of either man's system of thought. Instead, the focus is the way in which their observations and criticisms of the Western Christian family relate to their respective ideological projects. The working definition of ideology used is as follows: a theory of social life meant to inspire and guide political actions in a coherent, consistent and rational manner. The term has been used in a pejorative manner since the mid-nineteenth-century – interestingly enough by Marx and Engels – as a way of delegitimizing the subject's contributions as a political. (Interestingly, this insult originated with Marx and Engels as an attack against their detractors and intellectual competition). Considering Mill and Engels respective contributions to the field of political theory, this is not an accusation that can be levelled against them in good faith. However, this does not mean that either can escape from the more general label of ideologist. Both created a body of work united by their respective, and consistent, principles and modes of analysis. In the process, both politicized the family by showing that the roles of public and private are not distinct but are in fact mutually constitutive.

Political scientist Graeme Duncan notes that ideologies are simplified models of the real world used to aid social and political analysis.⁴³ Mill and Engels constructed theoretical systems of analysis that highlighted the patterns in seemingly disconnected socio-political phenomena. The human mind thrives on pattern recognition, on constructing frameworks for identifying and differentiating relevant data from the unfiltered mass. Ideologist approach problems with a working hypothesis that is informed by their principles and worldview. These hypotheses assume the existence of a *raison d'être* for an ideal form of society and government. Akin to a

theologian, ideologists are seeking truth, in the classical sense: laws that govern the development of society, as well as the infinite permutations of human behavior and relationships that form the basis of social life. This approach leaves the ideologist vulnerable to legitimate criticisms, because confirmation bias can easily interfere with any rational analysis. While there are obvious limits to such analyses, they can also provide new and dynamic ways of looking at and understanding the world.

In his essay "The Subjection of Women," Mill proposed that the regressive and tyrannical characteristics of past societies persisted when it came to the treatment of women. The days when women were slaves in all but name, forced to accept the authority of their fathers and husbands, were not merely the subject of history books but a contemporary reality. Mill conceived of history as marking the progressive improvement of society. Conquest was, historically, a legitimate means through which a state could settle political conflicts. During these earlier periods there was little that curbed the power of the state from interfering and coercing the individual. The nineteenth-century on the other hand was the epitome of human civilization! The right of strength and conquest were supposed to have been replaced by the natural rights of man and citizen.⁴⁴ Building on the work of earlier liberal theorists, Mill believed that there existed a contractual obligation between the state and its constituents: the populace gave up certain liberties to the state, which then took on the obligation to protect the civil and political liberties, as well as the personal safety, of the body politic. The treatment of women, however, continued to be dictated by arbitrary gender hierarchies that upheld a patriarchal system of authority.

The natural development of women's individual characters was subjected to the class

interests of men who benefitted from obedience and humility shown by their daughters and wives. Independence, critical thought and self-determination were denied to all but the most singular of women: those who had the means to educate themselves and have some agency in their own lives. The accounts of strong women having positions of influence and power under the *ancien régime* were the exception to the rule.⁴⁵ These women exposed the fraudulent nature of the claim that women categorically lacked the qualities necessary for leadership and success.

Unlike his peers, liberal and conservative alike, Mill did not feel that women should be excluded from the opportunities to better their lot in life, such as a well-rounded education. Most male intellectuals of this period felt that women were not suited for rigorous intellectual activity, an idea that Mill challenged on principle. Mill believed that these assertions were bad-faith justifications meant to keep women from competing with, and potentially surpassing, men in the labor market:

It is not sufficient to maintain that women on the average are less gifted than men on the average, with certain of the higher mental faculties, or that a smaller number of women than men are fit for occupations and functions of the highest intellectual character. It is necessary to maintain that no women at all are fit for them, and that the most eminent women are inferior in mental faculties to the most mediocre of the men on whom those functions at present devolve.⁴⁶

Men infused misogyny into the hegemonic ideologies within Western European society. Women in and of themselves – at the metaphysical level – were believed to be incapable of running society, let alone being equal partners with men or entering the labor market, and this notion was sold to the masses as science rather than the basest propaganda. Meritocracy was an ideal that Mill aspired to implement, and he sought to apply this principle to both representative government and market economies. Mill's liberal peers, the same men who denounced the

tyranny of autocrats and big government, kept half of the population in chains based on the dubious ideas regarding "the character of the sexes." The institutions of socialization, including the family, perpetuated this oppression.

Around 1832 Mill and Harriet Taylor wrote each other essays meant to illuminate one another on their respective ideas regarding the institution of marriage:

[This topic's] difficulties, for difficulties it has, are such as obstruct the avenues of all great questions which are to be decided for mankind at large, and therefore not just for nature's resembling each other, but for natures or at least characters tending to all the points of the moral compass. All popular morality is, as I once said to you, a compromise among conflicting natures; each renouncing a certain portion of what its own desires call for, in order to avoid the evils of perpetual warfare with all the rest.⁴⁷

This passage is revealing in multiple ways, but the one of interest to the topic at hand is this: it shows the extent to which Mill held Taylor to be his collaborator and full intellectual partner in his career as a public intellectual. Taylor was consulted on all of Mill's projects during the period in which they knew each other and came to serve as editor and contributor to some of Mill's seminal works.

This passage also demonstrates the way that Mill reckoned with social questions. He sought compromise between conflicting points of view, while attempting to preserve the dignity, and hopefully happiness, of all parties concerned. Mill was troubled by the fact that, tragically, women have been traditionally been the ones that were forced to sacrifice their own potential prosperity for the sake of male superiority. Considering Harriet's intellectual acumen, gender has no bearing when it comes to judging human potential. Yet her experience with marriage forced her to choose between loyalty and obedience to her husband or the pursuit of job that could fulfill her intellectual aspirations. It is no wonder that Mill had such strong opinions on the

institution of marriage, particularly because a direct consequence was the ill-treatment of women.

Mill decried moral and economic authority granted to men over women. Husbands had a monopoly on domestic finances, which gave them an effective means to coerce their wives. The upshot was that women relinquished the modest liberty they enjoyed within society for the chance at financial security, which was subject to their husband's whims and character completely. Mill's solution was the recognition of women's equality under the law so that domestic power could be favorably distributed between the two parties by mutual accord. Like the contract theorists of the Enlightenment, Mill held that marriage was akin to a private contract between two consenting parties, *à la* a business partnership. He was hesitant to advocate any legislation that would directly impact individual marriages and, in effect, forcibly rest power from husbands to create more equitable partnerships. In liberal fashion Mill advocated for a reduction in unnecessary government interference into the private lives of citizens. He favored a voluntarist approach, which would allow the parties within a marriage to mediate their own disagreements. Given the inferior position of women in terms of civil and political rights, however, this could only be possible once the state reiterated that women and men were equally protected under the law. This would create a basis upon which future marriages could be founded on more egalitarian agreements.

Mill believed that everyone should have the opportunity to live and to pursue their own happiness, even if one's path in life was not in line with the expectations of society. The limit he puts on individual liberty is that one's actions should not infringe on another's liberty. Mill believed that if left unchecked, society would seek to punish and ostracize those that did not

conform to the hegemonic ideology and its praxis:

That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or entreating him but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise.⁴⁸

While the authority of the state had been curbed by democratic reforms, public opinion, one of the mechanisms through which these reforms were achieved, posed a new threat to individual liberty. Mill emphasized that one form of tyranny should not be replaced by another. It is an easy thing to note the countless ways that women have been made to suffer at the hands of men and conclude that women should therefore have absolute authority over their husbands. However, this suggestion was antithetical to the non-aggression principle that Mill had formulated.

The individual was sovereign in Mill's ideology. Whether it be in public or in the home, the individual deserved the opportunity to develop their own characters without undue influence from exterior forces. This would ultimately prove impossible if the socialization of new generations continued to be raised in a society and in households that venerated the *paterfamilias*. The arrogance of authoritarian regimes, according to Mill, was exemplified by the man who saw himself as the master of his home and family with the support of the state. The socialization of men and women that occurred within the family during childhood only served to undermine any progress that society had made towards enacting a meritocratic system. Such a system would create an environment that encouraged social mobility and allow the individual to pursue goals that best suited their own characters. Mill envisioned that such a society would allow those best suited to a particular position or field to succeed. The contemporary gendered

hierarchy based on the binary understanding of “the character of the sexes” only served to reward humanity’s worst impulses.⁴⁹

Considering Mill’s unorthodox relationship with Harriet Taylor and the negative reaction this relationship engendered among his friends and peers, it is understandable that Mill would develop a worldview that would allow others to pursue their own prosperity without the social fallout he himself experienced. This was a nuanced position because Mill understood that the nature of any community is to protect its own existence and ensure that its ideals and values are shared by its members. He felt, however, that social pressure should never cross the line into coercion. In Mill mind, that of a progressive-minded reformer, the subjection of women was albatross around the neck of enlightened British society; the result of hundreds of years of social development moving closer to achieving humanity’s full potential.

In his essay “On Liberty,” Mill drew attention to the restrictions that had been historically placed on the individual by the rules, laws and action of the state and society. According to his worldview, regulation and freedom were in constant tension with one another. The individual was only free to operate within the range of acceptable conduct dictate, implicitly or explicitly, by the dominant socio-political institutions: public opinion, the justice system, etc. The actions of the state and society had to be limited to ensure the individual liberty to develop their character. Violence and repressions were deemed to be outside the bounds of a liberal society. The family in its then-current form did not adequately socialize the citizens of a liberal democratic state.

If reason *a priori*, combined with experience during the formative years of one's life go into the development of an individual's character, then the family would therefore be tasked with

making sure this development could take place in the most efficient way possible. This was not just a departure from traditional views of the family, where the figures of authority were to be revered, but it was also a departure from Enlightenment thought, particularly of the metaphysicians and the natural philosophers. The introduction of the scientific method shifted the emphasis from metaphysics to empiricism: from pure abstract thought to tangible and testable data. Engels, recognizing the deficiencies in the metaphysician's craft sought to distance his brand of scientific socialism from the earlier utopian strains.

Following the death of his friend and writing partner, Engels became the master theoretician for the Marxist school of thought. His book *The History of the Family, the State and Private Property* was an attempt to reconcile a history of the family with the Marxist mode of thought: historical materialism, or the materialist conception of history. Engels' historiography and analysis of the family in Europe appeared at the height of popularity of sociological inquiries into the origins of the modern nuclear family. Essays and treatises examining of the role of the family in society had been popular since the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ Having criticized similar projects from contemporary academics like Johann Bachofen and other German sociologists for their unwillingness to forego judgment of earlier forms of sexual morality, Engel's lent his support to the work of American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan lived with the Iroquois Nation in upstate New York and spent close to thirty years studying the familial systems of various indigenous groups in America. Fascinated with their system of kinship, Morgan sought to uncover the secrets of the primitive family in order to better understand the formation of the modern, nuclear form. This type of scholarship has been looked down upon by contemporary sociologists. However, the merits and deficiencies of the

methodologies employed in such studies are less important to this project than the conclusions drawn; conclusions which Engel's would synthesize into his theory of historical materialism and the economic models laid out in Marx's *Das Kapital*.

Engels presented a history of the family that correlated with the development of the institutions of the state and private property. Private property, in the Marxist system of thought, was one of the pillars of the capitalist system. By awarding returns to investors and shareholders rather than the laborers and community, the state and its legal systems upheld the rule of 'the haves' over 'the have nots.' The family, and structural changes to its form, were also central to this narrative. In Engels' opinion, the rule of men over women in domestic life was the first step towards securing a patriarchal system of authority and ownership. The first class divisions in history were made along gendered lines and were "confirmed and perpetuated by the overthrow of mother right, the introduction of father right."⁵¹ Women, in their role as mothers, had exercised great influence over the household and, by extension the tribe. Systems of consanguinity were structured in a matrilineal fashion. Since group marriage was a common feature of these early families, paternity was nigh-impossible to determine. Women were secure in knowing their connection to their children, so familial connections were therefore based on common maternal ancestors. Engels describes a process whereby maternal authority was usurped completely by husbands and fathers.

With mother right abolished, men were free to consolidating their power over family and tribe. This control would establish the foundations of private property and a patriarchal state. The division of labor allowed early human societies to move beyond a subsistence economy by creating more efficient modes of production. This led to the creation of surplus products that

could then be commodified and traded for profit. However, due to changes in the family – the division of labor between man and wife – this surplus was under the purview of the male heads of tribe and household, who had determined that women's labor should be contained to the domestic sphere. Engels noted that "the same cause which had ensured the woman her previous supremacy in the house – that her activity was confined to domestic labour [sic] – this same cause now ensured the man's supremacy in the house."⁵²

As communal property became private, communal production gave way to family-based control of agriculture. In Engels' analysis, this transition corresponds with the decline of group marriage in favor of monogamous relationships, or pairing marriage. This social evolution ultimately benefited the same parties: men, in their role as patriarchs. The patrilineal system of consanguinity, along with primogeniture, became the dominant family structure, which is best exemplified by the feudal system with the ruling class maintaining control through hereditary succession.⁵³ Patriarchal authority and private property were protected and reinforced through the mode of production as well as the ideology that held that society was divided into public and private spheres. In Engels' determination, the path towards equality between the sexes would begin with the dissolution of the ideological division between public and private:

We can already see from this that to emancipate women and make the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out of productive labour [sic] and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in the production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.⁵⁴

Engels believed that the ongoing evolution of industry would finally present women with the means to emancipate themselves. Capitalism, and its need for cheap labor, would provide women the opportunity to transcend the artificial barrier between public and private. This was a

revolutionary idea.

Even radical liberals like Mill were skeptical of woman entering the labor market and performing productive labor outside of the home. Women were first and foremost thought of as potential mothers whose responsibilities consisted of the domestic duties: the maintenance of the household and child-rearing. Engels proposed solution for women's subjugation not only challenged the dichotomy of public and private, it challenged the gendered familial roles associated with the Christian family. His criticisms attacked the very foundations of Western European social and cultural tradition.

Disrupting the contemporary family structure meant that any reforms would be imparted to future generations through the process of socialization. If future families extolled the virtues of liberalism or scientific socialism, the likelihood that those social reforms would survive would have increased. Changes made to the ideology of the family would ultimately impact the relationship between the private and public spheres. Reforming the family was a necessary step towards enacting their moral and socio-political visions. In light of this goal, his criticisms extended to monogamy, which he argued was a means of enforcing patriarchal authority:

The increasing complication of these prohibitions made group marriages more and more impossible; they were displaced by the pairing family. In this stage, one man lives with one woman, but the relationship is such that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain the right of the men, even though for economic reasons polygamy is rare, while from the woman the strictest fidelity is generally demanded throughout the time she lives with the man, and adultery on her part is cruelly punished.⁵⁵

In order to facilitate the transition to a male-dominated social system, women's infidelity had to be curtailed. Inheritance based on primogeniture could only work if men were secure in the fact that the children they raised were in fact theirs. Women, as mothers, were certain of the

maternity of their children. The same could not be said of the father, especially in a culture that practiced polyandry. In Engels' view, the moralizing of monogamy upheld a regressive trend in human society. He applied empiricism to his scholarly methodology in service of establishing a ideology upon which a new society could be built.

Engels and his materialist philosophy does away with any reference to essential natures or even the more empirical concept of character. Men and women are both subjected to the social order derived from the dominant modes of production. Women are tasked with the domestic labors that are involved with keeping a household and tending to a family. Men were expected to be the breadwinners, with the majority toiling in productive labor, the value of which is extracted by the capitalist class. In both cases, Engels envisioned a complete reordering of society, the destruction of the family and the gendered division of labor.

CHAPTER 4: FEMININITY, IDEOLOGY, AND SCIENCE

Both men used the rhetoric of science and reason to reinforce their ideologies, and by extension their writings on social questions. Mill sought to formalize a science that dealt with human character. He was fascinated by the complexities of human existence and was determined to explore, in accordance with the principles of the scientific method, the natural laws that governed the human experience. He posed the following questions, “Are the actions of human beings, like all other natural events, subject to invariable laws? Does that constancy of causation, which is the foundation of every scientific theory or successive phenomena, really obtain among them?”⁵⁶ Through birth and circumstance – or nature and nurture – every individual develops the principles and habits that define their behavior and character. Mill’s ruminations on the modern family went hand in hand with his proposed scientific discipline: ethology.

The proposed science was similar in scope to the contemporary fields of psychology and psychiatry. Psychology was a favored area of study of Mill’s father James and was a relatively new discipline in the nineteenth-century. Ethology would be a synthesis between the “sciences of Ethics and Politics,”⁵⁷ a discipline concerned with the “physical nature of man as an organized being.”⁵⁸ Following the example of his friend and correspondent Auguste Comte, Mill postulated that the study of human life could be reconciled with the analytical framework of the scientific method, just as Comte had done with the other social sciences. Like other social theorists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, Mill felt that prior studies of social phenomena needed to be formalized rather than “abandoned to the uncertainties of vague and popular discussion.”⁵⁹ Throughout, Mill emphasized the prominent role reason, informed by

experience, played in any scientific endeavor. In the face of centuries of metaphysical and idealist notions of essential natures of the sexes, Mill opted for a more empirical approach when it comes to understanding the characters of women.⁶⁰ His recognition of the historical process of gendered social engineering connects to his prescriptions for women's emancipation such as education. The denial of educational opportunities for women allowed a male-dominated society to dictate the terms by which young women were socialized. The ideal temperament of women in Western European society was submissive in order to better support their male partners. Mill notes that men have forged the character of women in an unnatural manner. Rather than allow women the freedom to develop their own place within society, men have worked hard to ensure that women do not overstep their designated positions. His ideas on this topic are informed by his views on women in conjunction with his "ethological" theories.⁶¹

The implications of Mill's beliefs for the fields of science, founded on a faith in rationality, were enormous. Taking Mill's analysis to its logical conclusion, women would no longer be excluded from intellectual and economic pursuits based on the arbitrary category of gender. Proficiency, or a character suitable to one's field, would be the determining factor. Mill wanted a meritocratic society that valued an individual's character over a social orthodoxy based on the supremacy of men over women. He noted, "Our character is formed by us as well as for us; but the wish which induces us to attempt to form it is formed for us; and how? Not, in general, by our organization, nor wholly by our education, but by our experience; experience of the painful consequences of the character we previously had; or by some strong feeling of admiration, accidentally aroused."⁶² The intricacies of human behavior had to be better understood before sweeping social reforms could be undertaken, hence the importance of Mill's

analytical writings on the family. Family life, education, and the other minutiae that makes up one's life are part of the process of character formation. Unlike the necessitarians⁶³ and idealists, Mill believed that the individual was also involved in the shaping of one's own character, allowing for moral growth:

[Character] being, in the ultimate resort, formed for him, is not inconsistent with its being, in part, formed *by* him as one of the intermediate agents. His character is formed by his circumstances (including among these his particular organization); but his own desire to mould [sic] it in a particular way, is one of those circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential. We can not [sic], indeed, directly will to be different from what we are. But neither did those who are supposed to have formed our characters directly will that we should be what we are. Their will had no direct power except over their own actions. They made us what they did make us, by willing, not the end, but the requisite means; and we, when our habits are not too inveterate, can, by similarly willing the requisite means, make ourselves different.⁶⁴

Mill understood how important a role one's environment plays in the shaping of character, building on one's consciousness *a priori*; nature and nurture formed a dialectic relationship with one another, the synthesis being the individual.

His essay "The Subjection of Women" made explicit use of the analysis of character presented in his book *A System of Logic*. This is an important point, because it shows that Mill thought human character was universal, regardless of gender. There was no female-specific 'nature,' merely the near-infinite permutations of character found in *all* humans, every one informed by biology and environmental factors. "The Subjection of Women" also features concepts Mill introduced in his seminal essay "On Liberty," showing the connectedness of Mill's body of work.

Mill's liberalism sought to protect the free development of an individual's character, a term that denotes the infinite variety of personalities and behaviors of the world's population.

Unlike other intellectual in this period, Mill believed women were no different than men when it came to the formation of their characters and did not accept the argument that women's essential natures were somehow limited by their gender. He proposed that a woman's intellectual and economic success should depend on her character and compatibility with a given task or area of study, just as it should be for everyone else in the free market. Mill's approach adds nuance to what was previously a binary distinction between men and women, while dismissing the notion of feminine 'nature.'

Engels also rejected the concept of a defining feminine 'nature' in his attempts at creating a materialist understanding of human history and society. Along with his collaborator Marx, Engels saw himself as a pioneer of a new form of socialism, one that rejected the utopian systems of intellectuals like Robert Owen, Henri Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier. Labelling themselves materialists, Marx and Engels sought to formulate a worldview that could account for the development and perpetuation of the hierarchical, class-based society that existed throughout Western Europe. Engels believed that these earlier intellectuals were overly idealistic – quixotic even – and that they represented the interests of the bourgeois middle classes:

Not one of them appears as a representative of the interests of that proletariat which historical development had, in the meantime, produced. Like the French philosophers, they do not claim to emancipate a particular class, but all humanity. Like them, they wish to bring in the kingdom of reason and eternal justice, but this kingdom, as they see it, is as far from heaven as from earth, from that of the French philosophers.⁶⁵

Despite coming from the very bourgeois background that he is attacking, Engels recognized that each class had different material interests, which impacted any program of reform. His experiences among the working classes in Germany, and later in Britain, convinced him of the important role the proletariat would play in any large-scale social project. In the process, Engels

recognized the importance of the working class's position in the socio-economic order; a position that gave workers the potential to challenge, and hopefully overthrow, the existing mode of production. While abstract concepts may have appealed to earlier philosophers and social critics, Engels saw that improving the lives of the vast majority of Europeans meant gaining an intimate understanding of the material realities of European society.

Scientific socialism thus attacked the bourgeois institutions that perpetuated the oppression of the European proletariat. This included the Christian, or bourgeois, family. The family was such an important institution to Engels' ideology; that he incorporated his critiques into his system of thought shows that he thought about the long-term implications of their political ideas. Changing the form of the family, and eventually doing away with it all together, would ensure the continuation of a communist society by removing the institution of socialization that Engels' believed to be one of the pillars of hierarchical society. The political program of the communist movement was laid out in the 1847 pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*, which included a radical critique of the bourgeois family.

The bourgeois family, in the Marxist tradition, was founded on the principle of capital, or private gain. "The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital."⁶⁶ In Marx and Engels' worldview, the nineteenth-century middle class family had been reduced to a unit connected through economic relationships. The various members of the family are viewed by the head in terms of their potential value. Wives and children are exploited by the paterfamilias in order to further his own goals of capital accumulation. Their political movement also sought to aid the liberation of women and secure the equality of all peoples. The Marxist school of thought held that increasing

division of labor and alienation of the working-class will discredit the division of the sexes. Their goal of instigating a revolution that would transform the system of production in nineteenth-century Europe and "bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e., of prostitution both public and private."⁶⁷ Written nearly twenty years later, Engels' history of the family was an attempt to reconcile the available historical and sociological data on the development of the Western family with the materialist theory of history, or "historical materialism."

The primary factor in the materialist conception of history was "the production and reproduction of immediate life"; in other words, how a society provides for things like food, shelter, clothing and other basic human necessities. The modes of production, and by extension the social organization, of any given historical period were determined by the development of labor and technological progress and the family. In Engels' determination, the historical family is an important factor in understanding a given society, since the family was the precursor to the independent organization of the state. The historical family was an essential part of the social and political history of Western Europe; a fact that is reflected in the treatment of the family in the Marxist school of thought. Following Marx's death, Engels took on the responsibility of formalizing historical materialism and setting down a definitive study of the family that conformed to its intellectual scope.

The views of both Mill and Engels challenge the existence of an immutable, essential nature, which had been a feature in the writings of the natural historians and other earlier proponents of science. There is a sinister connection between science and pejorative understanding of femininity. The notion of the "feminine" as a pejorative was promoted by

natural historians and idealists. Women were believed to be precluded from higher rational thought that was so valued by the male proponents of natural science, the early modern to the more formalized sciences that were codified in the nineteenth century. This argument effectively undermined any chance of women securing the recognition of their political rights by treating women as having a monolithic – and male-defined – ‘nature.’ Both Mill and Engels took issue with these ideas and set about challenging them by emphasizing the material conditions that led to women being designated as lesser than men.

Mill and Engels were both self-professed scientists and applied the methodology of the scientific method to their investigations into social questions. Not only did their appeals to science add legitimacy to their writings on the family specifically, it served to incorporate their views on women and the family into their ideological systems. Each essay or book written by Mill or Engels is consistent with the rest of their respective bodies of work. Mill's "ethology," as well as the ideas in "On Liberty," informed his *oeuvre*, just as historical materialism did in terms of Engels' social and political writings.



The family is such a potent symbol in any society. Having an analysis of the family and its relationship to society is necessary if one wishes to develop an all-encompassing world view. Mill and Engels, in their respective approaches, developed unified ways of looking at the world based on their respective principles and ideals. The roles of the family – mothers and fathers, as well as the understanding of masculinity and femininity – all played a part in the formation of

their intellectual projects. Their experiences in life – beginning in their childhoods with exposure to the domestic relationships within their own families – exposed them to some variation of the hegemonic gender roles and intra-familial dynamics that would inform their later writings.

They were socialized within the atomistic Western Family and came away with a critical outlook on that institution. Their parents represented an earlier generation, one in which women were to be demure, obedient and chaste and men were to be socially oriented and focused on the private interests of the business world. Recognizing the stark division between the gender along social, political and ideological lines, both men advocated for the emancipation of women from the domestic and social subjugation that was the *status quo*. They also lived in a manner inconsistent with their parents' social mores. Mill and Harriet Taylor bucked? Lived in defiance of? Social conventions because of the strength of their ability to connect on a romantic, as well as intellectual connection. Engels rejected the bourgeois institution of marriage and lived happily in common law with two partners throughout his adult life. Their respective writings formed comprehensive systems of thought that proposed an alternative *logos* for European society. Liberalism and Marxism posed direct challenges to the authority of the Christian and earlier secular social institutions and provided a template for reforming the socio-political relationships between the state and society.

NOTES

¹ Tine Van Osselaer and Patrick Pasture, *Christian Homes*, ed. Jan Art et al., vol. 14 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 7, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/stable/j.ctt1jkts28>.

² Carle C. Zimmerman, Allan C. Carlson, and Bryce Christensen, *Family and Civilization*, ed. James Kurth, 2nd ed. edition (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2008), 11.

³ Adela Garzón Pérez, "Familism," in *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family*, ed. James J. Ponzetti, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), 546–49
Familism describes the kin-based social ties that prefigured the sense of cultural and national identity developed in the modern period. This domestic dynamic valued the good of the family as a whole over that of the members.

⁴ Zimmerman, Carlson, and Christensen, *Family and Civilization*, 50.

⁵ Herlihy, David. "The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, and Sentiment." (192-213

⁶ Panos D. Bardis, "Early Christianity and the Family," *Sociological Bulletin* 13, no. 2 (1964): 2.

⁷ Bardis, 6.

⁸ Mary McLaughlin et al., *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children*, ed. Carol Neel, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching ; 40 (Toronto, Toronto ; Buffalo, NY, Toronto ; Buffalo: Published by University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 2004), 198.

⁹ McLaughlin et al., 274.

¹⁰ McLaughlin et al., 275.

¹¹ McLaughlin et al., 279.

¹² Ibid, 285

¹³ McLaughlin et al., *Medieval Families*, 290.

¹⁴ Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 262.

¹⁵ Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther, 1521-1532: Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), Loc. 1563-1603

¹⁶ Roland Herbert Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 256.

¹⁷ Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 24.

¹⁸ Smith, 11.

¹⁹ Suzanne Desan, "The Family and the French Revolution," in *A Companion to the French Revolution*, ed. Peter McPhee (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 470

²⁰ Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 7

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- ²¹ Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 143
- ²² John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, “The Subjection of Women,” in *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 485.
- ²³ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 13.
- ²⁴ Tosh, 53
- ²⁵ Lawrence Stone, “The Rise of the Nuclear Family in Early Modern England,” in *The Family in History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 14, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/stable/j.ctv512sz0.4>.
- ²⁶ Richard J Evans and W. Robert Lee, *The German Family : Essays on the Social History of the Family in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 53–54.
- ²⁷ Martin, Francis, “The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (Sep., 2002), 637-638
- ²⁸ Van Osselaer and Pasture, 7.
- ²⁹ Van Osselaer and Pasture, 8–9.
- ³⁰ Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-4
- ³¹ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*,
- ³² Seiz and Pujol, Harriet Taylor Mill, *American Economic Review* , 435
- ³³ Ibid, 479
- ³⁴ Janet A. Seiz and Michèle A. Pujol, “Harriet Taylor Mill,” *The American Economic Review* 90, no. 2 (2000): 476–79.
- ³⁵ Friedrich A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage* (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1969), 78.
- ³⁶ Hayek, 77.
- ³⁷ Hayek, 82.
- ³⁸ Hayek, 85.
- ³⁹ Hayek, 88.
- ⁴⁰ Tristram Hunt, *Marx’s General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels*, 1st ed.. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 43.
- ⁴¹ Hunt, *Marx’s General*, 14-20
- ⁴² Terrell Carver, “‘Mere Auxiliaries to the Movement’: How Intellectual Biography Obscures Marx’s and Engels’s Gendered Political Partnerships,” *Hypatia* 33, no. 4 (2018): 598, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12439>.
- ⁴³ Graeme Duncan, “Understanding Ideology,” *Political Studies* 35, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 650, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1987.tb00211.x>.

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- ⁴⁴ John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, “The Subjection of Women.”
- ⁴⁵ John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, 458.
- ⁴⁶ John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, 456.
- ⁴⁷ Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage*, 58.
- ⁴⁸ John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” in *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ed. Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.
- ⁴⁹ John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, “The Subjection of Women,” 486.
- ⁵⁰ Evans and Lee, *The German Family*, 58
- ⁵¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 199.
- ⁵² Engels, 199.
- ⁵³ Engels, 202.
- ⁵⁴ Engels, 199.
- ⁵⁵ Engels, 76–77.
- ⁵⁶ John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation, Vol. 2*, 10th ed.. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1879), 1016.
- ⁵⁷ Mill, 1016.
- ⁵⁸ Mill, 1014.
- ⁵⁹ Mill, 1014.
- ⁶⁰ It is important to remember that Mill’s use of the word “character” is singular; he is referring to a concept more akin to temperament or individual psychology than a metaphysical, essential nature.
- ⁶¹ John Stuart Mill, Mark Philp, and Frederick Rosen, “The Subjection of Women,” 428.
- ⁶² Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation, Vol. 2*, 1023.
- ⁶³ This refers to the school of thought that holds that an individual’s character is immutable. There is also an element of predestination, since an individual’s character determines one’s actions in life. The criticism levelled against the necessitarians is that they do away with free will.
- ⁶⁴ Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation, Vol. 2*, 1022.
- ⁶⁵ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (India: Leopard Books, 2010), 33.
- ⁶⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx, 1818-1883*, E-Book, Delphi Classics 7 (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2016), 8694.
- ⁶⁷ Marx and Engels, 8708–14.

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