MEMORY, INVENTION, DELIVERY: TRANSMITTING AND TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE IN LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

PANEL: Facing Facts: Technology is Here to Stay - and a Good Thing Too! (Friday, April 17, 2009.)


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OUTLINE: J.S. Mill's two classic works appeared separately during his lifetime but are closely tied together intellectually in many ways. They appeared together in a single volume posthumously (in 1874) but did not reappear together until the women’s movement rediscovered Mill in the 1910s and then the 1970s, after which time it became common to see them together in anthologies. The mammoth University of Toronto Press Collected Works of Mill in 33 volumes kept them apart in separate volumes but online they have been reunited in a “virtual volume” in the Online Library of Liberty in the hope that a new generation of tech-savvy readers will see the connections between them.


John Stuart Mill (1806-73) was one of the most important classical liberals of the 19th century and one of the most important political philosophers of all time. *On Liberty* is one of the foundation texts of 19th century classical liberalism and was published in 1859 shortly after his lover and then wife, Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), died and after he had retired from the East India Company. *The Subjection of Women*, a very controversial book at the time it appeared but which was to become one of the foundation texts of the feminist movement, was written in 1861 (with significant collaboration from Harriet Taylor) but was not published until 1869 when Mill had safely retired to the south of France and only some 4 years before his death.

In his *Autobiography* (1873) Mill described *On Liberty* as "a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth"\(^1\) which he defined in the opening paragraph of *On Liberty* as follows:

> The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised 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

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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 persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of the conduct of anyone for which he is amenable to society is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.\(^2\)

The key ideas in *On Liberty* can be summarised as follows\(^3\):

1. the idea of "social tyranny" - in addition to "tyranny of the magistrate" Mill warned of the "tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling". ("Introductory," p. 63).
2. the idea of a private "sphere of action" within which one is completely free to think and act. ("Introductory, p. 71).
3. the right of free expression - the majority has no right to silence even one dissenting voice. ("Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", p. 76).
4. the utility of free speech - intellectual progress through conflict between "dead" vs "living" beliefs. ("Thought and Discussion," pp. 101-3).
5. diversity in "different experiments of living" makes progress possible. ("Of Individuality," p. 120).
6. the development of "eccentricity" is socially useful. ("Of Individuality," pp. 132-3).
7. only "acts injurious to others" should be punished. The individual should be free to engage in "moral vices". ("Of the Limits to Authority of Society," pp. 145 and "Applications," p. 163).
8. a theory of "social rights" is a "monstrous" principle harmful to liberty. ("Of the Limits," p. 158).
9. the danger of adding to the power of the government - the creation of a class of "Hangers-On" who use government for their own benefit. ("Applications," pp. 181-2).


In all areas of political, social, and economic activity, even in the lives of women, Mill sought to demonstrate the necessity of the principle of individual liberty, namely that the liberty of the individual should be absolute except in the case where that liberty did harm to another. Unless harm could be shown to result, all individuals (including women) had to be left alone by society, state, or the church.

Soon after publishing On Liberty (1859) Mill began work on his often neglected and reviled work, The Subjection of Women (written in 1861, published in 1869). The delay in its publication can be explained by pressure from his colleagues and contemporaries who regarded his views on women to be “odd” and that his agitation of behalf of women (such as his concern for issues of women’s health, the marriage laws, the contagious diseases acts, contraception, and his support for women’s suffrage bills in parliament) to be beyond the pale for “proper” Victorian gentlemen, even liberal-minded ones.

Two points need to be kept in mind when considering this book: Mill very much had in mind the recent death of his long time lover and then wife Harriet Taylor (they could only marry in 1851 after her first husband had died in 1849) and the application of his general principle of individual liberty to the specific situation of women. This should be clear from the following key ideas in the book:

1. the legal subordination of women is wrong in itself and is one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, p 1
2. inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest, pp. 10-11
3. women form a subject-class which is in the interest of most males to maintain, pp. 18-21

4. the education of women has been designed to enslave their minds, p. 27
5. the subjection of women is a relic of the past and violates individual freedom, pp. 29-31
6. the idea of the nature of women is an artificial construct distorted by forced repression and unnatural stimulation, p. 38-9
7. the true nature of women will be determined by women themselves by their own experience and faculties, p. 48
8. the comparison of the subjection of women to tariff protection in economics - Mill does not want legislation to favour women but the repeal of all bounties and protective duties in favour of men, to enable the free play of competition between them, pp. 48-9
9. marriage should be a partnership or contract based upon voluntary mutual consent, including the division of household duties and functions, pp. 72-75. However, still believes the most suitable division of labour is man working outside the home and woman working within the home, pp. 87-88
10. the equality of married persons before the law promotes justice, happiness and morality, pp. 78-9
11. the power of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, pp. 89-90
12. women should have the right to vote, pp. 95-6
13. the Actonian idea that "power corrupts" - the privileged position of men has a corrupting influence on them, pp. 148-51
14. utilitarian arguments in favour of liberating women - the opening of all occupations to women will double the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity, pp. 153-4

It should be clear from these brief summaries of Mill’s ideas in *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women* that the idea of individual liberty is in fact the “single truth” which guided all of Mill’s thinking about political theory. He explored this “truth” in the general and abstract case in *On Liberty*, and then he explored the specific case of the liberty (or lack thereof) for a particular group or class of individuals, namely women, in the work which followed closely after it, i.e. *The Subjection of Women*. 

It is a sound pedagogical practice to “pair” texts because it allows the educator to do a number of important things:

1. to show similarities or connections between contemporary texts (synchronic analysis)
2. to show a text’s origin or the development of ideas over time (diachronic analysis)
3. to contrast opposing points of view in a debate (eristic analysis).

Some interesting examples of pairings of texts are the following: an example of (3) (contrasting opposing views) is the publication of Richard Price’s sermon on “A Discourse on the Love of Our Country” in November 1789, in which he praised both the American and the French Revolutions, which prompted Edmund Burke to write his critique of the French Revolution *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790. Burke’s critique was quickly replied to by supporters of the Revolution such as Catharine Macaulay (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft (1790), Thomas Paine (1791), William Godwin (1793), Vicesimus Knox (1795).\(^5\)

A good example of (2) (showing a text’s historical origin and development over time - in this case texts separated by 78 years) is to combine Mary Wollstonecraft’s pioneering work *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) penned during the euphoric early days of the French Revolution and the later work (reviled in its day even by male liberals) namely John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) which was published after the passage of the Second Reform Act of 1867 which opened up voting rights to the British urban working class. This interesting

pairing of texts was published for the first time in London and New York in 1929 (later republished in 1955 and 1970) and was an important volume in the 20th century women’s suffrage and feminist movement.\footnote{The Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft and The Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1929; New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1929). Republished 1955 and then in 1970 with new introduction by Pamela Frankau for London: Dent, 1970.}

An example of (1) (showing similarities or connections between texts - this time texts by different authors close in time) is the pairing of Harriet Taylor Mill’s \textit{Enfranchisement of Women} (1851) and Mill’s \textit{The Subjection of Women} (1869) in order to show the impact Taylor had on the intellectual development of the much better known and respected male philosopher. It was first paired during the modern feminist movement by Alice Rossi in 1970\footnote{Essays on Sex Equality by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, edited and with an introductory essay by Alice S. Rossi (University of Chicago Press, 1970).} and again in 1983\footnote{The Subjection of Women, John Stuart Mill. \textit{Enfranchisement of Women}, Harriet Taylor Mill. New Introduction by Kate Soper (London: Virago Press, 1983).} by the wonderful British feminist publishing house “Virago”.\footnote{I can’t help but state the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “virago”: “a domineering, violent, or bad-tempered woman” coming from an archaic use of “a woman of masculine strength or spirit, a female warrior.” What a wonderful name for a feminist publishing house!}

But for the purposes of this paper I would like to focus on another example of (1), this time of two texts by the same author separated by a short period of time and which are closely related conceptually: Mill’s \textit{On Liberty} (1859) and \textit{The Subjection of Women} (1869). The publication of \textit{The Subjection of Women} as a stand alone title was rare during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due its controversial topic and the disdain most readers had for its subject matter. It was the least successful and profitable of Mill’s published works and it was soon dropped from the publisher’s catalog as somewhat of an embarrassment. The publishing
history of this title\textsuperscript{10} shows that it appeared in London, New York, and Philadelphia in the year it was published (1869)\textsuperscript{11}, New York again in 1870\textsuperscript{12}, and then there was no new edition until Longmans republished it in London and New York in 1906 (with a reprint in 1909)\textsuperscript{13}, and a new New York edition in 1911\textsuperscript{14}. After this initial flurry, there seems to be little interest by publishers until the 1970s when the development of the modern feminist movement created a new audience for the title.\textsuperscript{15}

I think this pairing of texts, the obscure and unappreciated \textit{Subjection of Women} with the classic and much admired \textit{On Liberty}, is an blatant though justifiable attempt by feminists and others to revive interest in this title by showing its close intellectual and biographical links with Mill’s more accepted works. They probably thought, along with Mill himself, that the idea of individual liberty was the core of his political theory and that the liberty of women was just one aspect of the broader notion of individual liberty. So it would appear to be quite natural then for Mill’s two works on liberty, the general defense of liberty and a defense of one group’s liberty, to be paired in a joint publication. Both works were first printed

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10} I used the online catalogs of the New York Public Library <http://catnyp.nypl.org/>, the University of Michigan <http://mirlyn.lib.umich.edu:80/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b>, and WorldCat <http://www.worldcat.org/>.
\bibitem{13} J.S. Mill, \textit{The Subjection of Women} (London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1906).
\bibitem{14} J.S. Mill, \textit{The Subjection of Women}, with a foreword by Carrie Chapman Catt (New York: Frederick Stokes Co., 1911).
\end{thebibliography}
together in one volume in 1874, one year after Mill’s death, and were reprinted at least twice during the decade.\textsuperscript{16}

*The Subjection of Women* has also appeared alongside *On Liberty* in other anthologies of Mill’s writings. Perhaps the most important of these for the modern feminist movement was that introduced by the English suffragist and feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1912, which included three texts: Mill’s *On Liberty*, *Representative Government*, and *The Subjection of Women*.\textsuperscript{17} This was a pioneering anthology which re-established the importance of *The Subjection of Women*. Of course, from the 1980s onwards, it is standard practice to include *The Subjection of Women* in any anthology of Mill’s writings as it has become recognised as a canonical text of modern political thought. So it appears that the publishing history of *Subjection* coincides with the ebb and flow of the women’s rights and suffrage movements. There was an initial burst of interest in the 1870s, then a gap until a second flurry of interest appeared in the 1900s and 1910s, and then its acceptance as a canonical text from the 1970s and 1980s onwards in a third wave of interest. Thus, it was not until the modern women’s movement appeared in the 1960s and 1970s that both pieces were commonly published together in one volume nearly 100 years after they first appeared together in 1874.


3. The Fate of Mill’s Writings on Women in the Collected Works and in Virtual Anthologies.

The mammoth scholarly effort under J.M. Robson saw Mill’s *Collected Works* appear in 33 volumes under the University of Toronto Press imprimatur between 1963 and 1991.\(^{18}\) Although the editors believed that Mill’s writings on India merited a separate volume (volume XXX)\(^{19}\), as well as his writings on French History and Historians (volume XX)\(^{20}\), they did not think his (and Harriet Taylor’s) writings on women merited the same treatment. In 2006 Liberty Fund acquired the electronic rights to the 33 volume *Collected Works* and they now appear online at the Online Library of Liberty website free of charge to the public for educational and scholarly purposes. In the print edition scholars could laboriously search through the tables of contents and the index to the entire set in order to find Mill’s writings on women which were scattered throughout the 32 large and expensive volumes. In the online edition scholars can now search much more easily the complete works for key words and phrases in one go.

The WWW allows us a number of options to present Mill’s writings on women to a much broader audience than was ever possible under the old regime of print publishing. For example, one can see online the following books at the OLL website:


1. a facsimile of the original edition of the stand alone version of *Subjection* (or one of the reprint editions of the 1870s)\(^{21}\)
2. the first paired edition of *On Liberty* and *Subjection* first published in 1874 (or one of its reprints of the 1870s) in multiple formats (facsimile PDF, HTML, EBook PDF)\(^{22}\)
3. the authoritative scholarly edition of both *On Liberty\(^{23}\) and *The Subjection of Women*\(^{24}\) from the University of Toronto edition in multiple formats (facsimile PDF, HTML, EBook PDF, Audiobook in mp3)

Other possibilities for learning about the ideas of Mill and Taylor are to listen to a “podcast” of Mill’s *Subjection of Women* in mp3 format on your computer or iPod read out loud by a computer generated voice (“Alex” from a Mac), thus making these ideas accessible to the visually impaired (perhaps for the first time). Or, one can get the free Portable Library of Liberty DVD which contains over 900 titles drawn from the larger collection at the OLL website. This DVD (data with EBook PDF files) contains the 1879 edition of the paired edition of Mill’s *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*, as well as all 32 text volumes (but not the Index to the set which is volume 33) of the University of Toronto Press edition of his *Collected Works*.

But more to the point, it is now possible to quite easily assemble one’s own “virtual volumes” (or anthologies or reading lists) in order to overcome the

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shortsightedness (or worse) of Robson and his colleagues. Mill’s writings on women can be gathered together electronically in a number of interesting ways:

1. purely electronic tables of contents of a “virtual volume” can be created with links to the desired texts, which can either be on the same server or across the world on some unknown server in an unknown country. At the OLL there is such a table of contents where all the writings of Mill (and Taylor) on women, which were scattered across seven volumes of the University of Toronto Press edition, are assembled and viewed on one page.25

2. User Created Reading Lists can be created by any registered editor at the OLL website. The editor registers for free, then browses the OLL website to select entire books or chapters of books which they wish to have on their reading list. Once a list of readings has been assembled they can be annotated, edited, or reordered to suit the needs of the editor. The Reading List can then be hosted online at the OLL free of charge for educational purposes.26 Thus one could create or re-create “virtual” pairings of texts or passages from texts such as Mill’s On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, or Harriet Taylor’s Enfranchisement of Women and Mill’s The Subjection of Women or any combination thereof.

The hope is that a new generation of computer and iPod-savvy readers will be able to make use of this technology (with our pedagogical assistance and guidance of course!) and be stimulated to think about the connections between the ideas of liberty embodied in these two classic works, one on the liberty of human beings in general and the other on the liberty of women in particular.

25 “John Stuart Mill’s and Harriet Taylor’s Writing on Women” <http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=448&Itemid=278>. This is also available as a Reading List <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/177-john_stuart_mill_s_and_harriet_taylor_s_writings_on_women> and as an Appendix to this paper. See also the online Reading List on “Mill on Liberty” at the OLL website <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/250-mill_on_liberty> and “Mill on the Subjection of Women” <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/252-mill_on_the_subjection_of_women>.

26 See some examples at this page <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/list>. One which might be of special interest to ACTC members is the one on a “The Great Books Reading Group” <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/11-the_great_books_reading_group> or “An Introduction to the Political Thought of John Locke” <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/127-an_introduction_to_the_political_thought_of_john_locke>.
Bibliography

Library Catalogs

Online catalogs of the following libraries were used in the research for this paper:

- New York Public Library <http://catnyp.nypl.org/>
- The Library of the University of Michigan <http://mirlyn.lib.umich.edu:80/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b>
- OCLC’s WorldCat <http://www.worldcat.org/>

Printed Books


**Online Books and Essays**

**Books by J.S. Mill**


**Reading Lists and Essays**


Reading List on “John Stuart Mill’s and Harriet Taylor’s Writing on Women” <http://oll.libertyfund.org/readinglists/view/177-john_stuart_mill_s_and_harriet_taylor_s_writings_on_women>.


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