

'And, when someone says, I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist, he is not deducing existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognises it as known directly by a simple intuition of the mind.' (DESCARTES) Discuss.

In the *Objections and Replies*, Descartes discusses whether the Cogito, 'I am thinking, therefore I exist', should be understood as a syllogism. It looks plausible to interpret the Cogito syllogistically:

- 1) (Minor premise) I am thinking.
- 2) (Major premise) Whatever thinks, exists.
- (Conclusion) I exist.

The major premise would be *implicit* in inferring existence from thought. Descartes rejects this analysis of the Cogito, because it relies on "previous knowledge of the major premiss" (Descartes 1641); and the aim of the hyperbolic doubt is precisely to *not* take such previous knowledge as given. Instead, existence, rather than syllogistically deduced from thought, is known directly "by a simple intuition of the mind." (Descartes 1641). What does Descartes mean by this?

In this essay, I will compare the interpretation of Bernard Williams to that of Peter Markie, and argue why Williams' interpretation is to be preferred. I will firstly elaborate on why Descartes rejects the syllogistic analysis of the Cogito. I will secondly elaborate on the meaning of 'intuition' and explain Markie's interpretation of the Cogito. Lastly, I will explain why Williams' interpretation is preferable to Markie's, because it is compatible with Descartes' internalism.

The Cogito as a syllogism

The syllogism is a general form an argument can take. It can be represented as follows:

- (1) (Major premise) All A's are B's.
- (2) (Minor premise) C is A.
- (Conclusion) C is B.

The major premise can also be represented as 'Whatever is A, is B', as is done above. Now, we have noted that the major premise is the troublemaker. As Williams points out, according to the traditional logic of the syllogism, 'All A's are B's' refers to A's *that actually exist*. Thus, whether we analyse the Cogito's major premise as 'All thinking things exist' or as 'Whatever thinks, exists', in either case we are making an *existential claim* about thinking things. This means that we are talking about *existing* thinking things, and claiming that the property of existence belongs to each of them. Such a claim would be question-begging in the purest sense. The role of the Cogito is to be the first step – the Archimedean point – guiding the way out of the pit of hyperbolic doubt. Inside that pit, Descartes is presupposing the existence of *no* object. Indeed, proving the existence of *an* object (his own mind) is precisely the task at hand.

But if we cannot appeal to the major premise, then how can the proposition 'I exist' be established? Jaakko Hintikka argues that we should not view Descartes as *inferring* 'I exist' from 'I am thinking' at all, thereby eliminating the need for any alternative premise (1). Instead, the proposition 'I exist' is of "performatory character" (Hintikka 1962): by asserting, thinking, supposing, 'I exist', one *demonstrates* one's existence; the proposition is self-verifiable. But as M. D. Wilson indicates, this fails to elucidate the central point: "the connection between thinking something or entertaining a thought, and becoming convinced

of one's existence." (Wilson 1982). *Why* does asserting, thinking, supposing, 'I exist', demonstrate one's existence? Simply because it is impossible to do so without also existing. Yet, this is a *separate premise*.

Hence we come to Williams' interpretation of the Cogito. It relies on the important distinction between this separate premise (let us call it, the 'impossibility premise') and the major premise. While the major premise, 'All thinking things exist', makes an existential claim, the impossibility premise, 'It is impossible to think without also existing', makes a bare *necessity* claim. As Descartes writes, "(...) when one says that it is impossible ... that one who thinks cannot fail to be or to exist while he thinks ... [truths such as] these are merely (eternal) truths, and not things that are outside the mind (...)" (Descartes 1644). The impossibility premise is unproblematic for Descartes' purpose of escaping the pit of hyperbolic doubt; it is an eternal truth which does not presuppose the existence of any object 'outside the mind'. If we follow Williams, then the Cogito is an *inference*, which has the impossibility premise in place of the major premise – thus rendering it non-syllogistic.

Intuitions and Markie's account

But how is one's existence 'known directly by a simple intuition of the mind'? We know that Descartes is in search of *certainty* in his existence. As Markie explains, Descartes identifies two sources of certainty: intuition and deduction. A proposition that is intuitionally certain is *immediately self-evident*, which, to be apprehended as certain, thus requires no movement of thought through a series of inferences. A certain belief acquired by deduction is one gained from inferences from self-evident – so intuitionally grasped – propositions. Certainties derived by means of several intuited steps starting from a self-evident proposition are known by deduction. On the other hand, propositions that are *immediately inferred* from 'first principles', i.e., from self-evident propositions, can be said to be derived *either* by deduction *or* by intuition, depending on our perspective.

The Cogito is of this latter form. It starts with an immediately self-evident proposition, 'I am thinking', and from that immediately infers the conclusion, 'I exist'. Consequently, we now understand how Descartes believed only a 'simple intuition of the mind' was needed to establish one's existence. Markie believed this to be a straightforward interpretation of the Cogito. However, he lists four problems for it, of which the following two are directly relevant to this essay:

- (I) *Syllogism*: Descartes argues that to get from thought to existence, one must have prior knowledge that it is impossible to think without also existing. Yet, he also denies that the Cogito is a syllogism.
- (II) *Uncertainty*: after having deduced his existence from his thought, and thereby reached a certain belief, Descartes writes in the Third Meditation: "Do I not [now] know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting" (Descartes 1641). Yet, clear and distinct perceptions are doubtful, according to Descartes, if one is an atheist without 'true knowledge' of God, who is not a deceiver. Markie argues that Descartes would not be able to appeal to God this early in the Meditations because he has not proven God's existence yet.

Markie is inspired by these problems to construct an alternative interpretation of the Cogito. He argues that (I) requires the presupposition of a general truth, which is itself not certain,

but “very reasonable” (Markie 1992). Likewise, following (II), clear and distinct perceptions are also nothing more than ‘very reasonable’. In sum, what this entails is that Descartes can claim to be certain about his thought and his existence, but that this claim *itself* is not certain, but instead a “reasonable belief about his epistemic state” (Markie 1992). I will now argue why this alternative account is both unnecessary and unsatisfactory.

Williams and internalism

It is unnecessary because the problems (I) and (II) are not insurmountable without resorting to replacing certainty with reasonableness. I have already explained above in what way we can solve problem (I). Markie might not yet be convinced, because he cannot help but think that the impossibility premise is itself the expression of a general truth, a truth about objects *in general*. However, although the truth is ‘eternal’ and in some sense ‘general’, it is also *particular*. As Descartes writes, one, in fact, learns this truth “from experiencing in [one’s] own case that it is impossible that [one] should think without existing.” (Descartes 1641). Thus, the truth is particular in that it makes no reference to any general objects besides one’s own mind.

To respond to problem (II), we must first look more closely at how the interpretation of Williams (or at least, what I have taken, and shall take, to be his interpretation), differs from Markie’s interpretation. According to Williams’ interpretation, Descartes *is* certain that he is certain about his thought and his existence. That is also in accordance with Descartes’ “Project of Pure Enquiry” (Williams 1978), which is a search for knowledge from a primarily introspective, *internalist* standpoint. For internalists, to have knowledge, we must not only know, but also know that we know. Hence, Descartes must not only be certain, but also be certain that he is certain. But indeed, once we properly understand the notions of *current* and *recollected* clear and distinct perceptions, we shall see that the Cogito can satisfy this internalist requirement.

First, we define an ‘unshakeable’ belief as a belief that “cannot be dislodged by argument, or cannot be dislodged” (Loeb 1992), and is therefore, in a psychological sense, certain. Now, a recollected clear and distinct perception is a past clear and distinct perception which one recalls. Beliefs *based on* clear and distinct perceptions are themselves either current or recollected clear and distinct perceptions.

Descartes writes at the beginning of the Third Meditation that the *truth rule*, that “whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true” (Descartes 1641), is valid because God exists and is not a deceiver. Thus, he would not allow one to be deceived in such cases. However, one may suppose (that does not mean ‘believe’) that the sceptical hypothesis, that God *is* a deceiver, is true. If, and *only* if, the sceptical supposition can be discounted, can we be certain that the truth rule is valid, and thus be certain that if we clearly and distinctly perceive something, it is certainly true.

Now Descartes discounts the sceptical supposition by giving two *separate* arguments for the existence of God, who is not a deceiver. The problematic aspect is that they both rely on the validity of taking a ‘clear and distinct idea’ as proof that it is true, i.e., on the validity of the *truth rule*. But Descartes discounts this worry by arguing that *current* clear and distinct perceptions simply *are* ‘unshakeable’. So long as we rely on those to establish the existence of a non-deceiving God, we should be able to establish the validity of the truth rule, and thus be certain that our thought and existence are certain.

Indeed, this is how problem (II) should be addressed. Descartes argues that his certainty in his thought and his existence, which he clearly and distinctly perceives, is *itself* certain because the truth rule, that 'whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives', is *valid*. Williams' interpretation, which follows the point about existence being *immediately inferred*, through the aid of the 'eternal truth', from thought ensures that existence is certain, and that this follows from a 'simple intuition of the mind', i.e., that this inference itself can be *clearly and distinctly* perceived.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have discussed Descartes' rejection of the syllogistic analysis of the Cogito. Subsequently, I have compared two interpretations of the Cogito, and argued in favour of Williams' interpretation, that helpfully accounts for why Descartes thought existence is deduced from thought by a 'simple intuition of the mind'.

Words: 1805

Why does Mill take the pervasiveness and staying power of patriarchy to be irrelevant to its legitimacy? Is he right to do so?

In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill argues against the 'patriarchy', which can be understood as simply the immense power imbalance between men and women. A big part of the argument revolves around putting this inequality in its right historical context, by seeing how it relates to societal practices that were once pervasive, but have later turned out to be *unjust*.

In this essay, I will look at the two most plausible arguments in favour of the claim that the pervasiveness and staying power of a *societal practice* are relevant to its legitimacy. In section 1, I will give the empiricist argument, and argue why Mill rejects it. Subsequently, I will give the unavoidability argument, and explain why Mill rejects that one, too (section 2). Lastly, I will argue why hindsight provides empirical evidence that Mill was right about both rejections (section 3).

The empiricist argument

The empiricist argument is specifically discussed by Mill. He writes: "The generality of a practice is in some cases a strong presumption that it is, or at all events once was, conducive to laudable ends." (Mill 1869). In 'some' cases, we are driven to institute a social practice because we have tried out different practices and concluded that the practice in question is the best. This has to do with Mill's notion of 'experiments in living'. As a convinced utilitarian empiricist, Mill believes we can only find out about the goodness of a practice by trying it out and looking at its consequences. Now the fact that patriarchy is pervasive means that it is *widespread*. That could mean that *many* different people's experiments in living all showed it to be the case that patriarchy is the best. Likewise, if patriarchy has staying power, that could mean that, although we have been experimenting for a *long* time, patriarchy consistently comes out on top as simply the best system for governing the general relations between men and women.

Let us understand 'legitimacy' as moral legitimacy: and something is morally legitimate if and only if it is morally *justified*. Thus, we get the following empiricist argument:

- i) Patriarchy is widespread and has staying power.
- ii) If a societal practice is widespread and has staying power, then this is good evidence that it has successfully come on top in multiple and continuous experiments in living.
- iii) If there is good evidence that a societal practice is favoured by experiments in living, then this is reasonable evidence that the practice is the best (or at least, better than its immediate alternatives.)
- iv) If there is reasonable evidence that a societal practice is better than its immediate alternatives, then there is reasonable evidence that it is morally justified.
 - C1) The pervasiveness and staying power of patriarchy is reasonable evidence that it is morally justified.

- C2) The pervasiveness and staying power of patriarchy is relevant to its legitimacy.

This argument is valid. Premise i) is obvious enough. Mill would certainly want to maintain premise iii), and premise iv), albeit not totally obvious, seems quite plausible. Indeed, it is premise ii) which Mill would reject. If a societal practice is pervasive and lasting, then this is good evidence that it favoured by multiple and continuous experiments in living *only* if there is evidence that those experiments in living *actually occurred*. Or, less restrictive, only if there is no positive evidence that those experiments in living have *not* occurred in the case of the societal practice in question. But, as Mill argues, patriarchy would certainly not satisfy this adapted premise.

The following passage gives a precise view of why Mill argues this: “If the authority of men over women, when first established, had been the result of conscientious comparison between different modes of constituting the government of society; if, after trying various other modes of social organisation — *the government of women over men, equality between the two, and such mixed and divided modes government as might be invented* — it had been decided (...) [that patriarchy was] the arrangement most conducive to the happiness and well-being of both; its general adoption might then be fairly thought to be some evidence that, *at the time when it was adopted*, it was the best” (Mill 1869, italics added). Indeed, it is clear that no such ‘conscientious comparison’ ever occurred. As Mill argues, the emergence of the patriarchy was merely brought about by the fact that “every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man.” (Mill 1869).

Mill’s point about different modes of government can be extended. Not only do we know that such ‘conscientious comparisons’ were never made at the time when the patriarchy *emerged*, we also know that they *have not been tried* ever since. In Mill’s day, none of the three modes he mentioned had ever been tried (in pretty much any culture). So, rather than giving different modes of government a chance, but only for too short a period, it was the case that none of the different modes had even been given a chance *once*. In the case of the patriarchy, its pervasiveness and staying power were certainly not the consequence of multiple and continuous experiments in living.

But perhaps, someone may say, the reason that no other experiments have been done was because they were all doomed to be harmful. Perhaps, we just knew the patriarchy would be ‘the best’ from the beginning; surely, if this were not true, it would not have lasted so long, and been so widespread? First, Mill emphasises that general adoption can only ensure that the practice was recognised as ‘the best’ *at the time when it was adopted*. This can change. Moreover, a societal practice may be pervasive for aeons, even if it never was, and should have never been recognised as, ‘the best’. For instance, slavery was a widespread practice in the West (or *by* the West) up until it got abolished millennia after its emergence. The same goes for despotism (a practice still prevalent in the world to this day). Thus, if the inequality of the sexes indeed turns out to be unjust, then it would fit into this list quite nicely.

The unavoidability argument

But perhaps we want to avoid any claims about the goodness of the patriarchy. Instead, we may think that the pervasiveness and staying power of patriarchy is testament to its being *natural* (and therefore, *unavoidable*). We can make the following argument about its legitimacy:

- (i) The pervasiveness and staying power of the patriarchy is evidence that the patriarchy is natural.
- (ii) If a societal practice is natural, then it is unavoidable.
- (iii) If a societal practice is unavoidable, then it is morally justified.
 - (C1) The pervasiveness and staying power of the patriarchy is evidence that it is morally justified.
 - (C2) The pervasiveness and staying power of the patriarchy is relevant to its legitimacy.

This argument is valid. To reject it, as Mill does, we must reject either of the three premises. I take it that premise (iii) is true. If a societal practice is *genuinely* unavoidable, then it is morally justified; it would make no sense to contend that some such practice is not what *ought* to happen, because nothing else *could* happen. If someone found *eating* ‘morally unjustified’, because it inevitably involves the non-consensual destruction or exploitation of either animals or plants, we would think this absurd. It does not conform with how we can use the concept of moral justification.

On the other hand, people often mistake what only *seems* to be unavoidable for what is genuinely unavoidable, and that is also where the mistake of this argument lies. Let us assume that calling a practice ‘natural’, whatever that may turn out to mean, at any rate means that the practice is *unavoidable*. As such, eating and peeing are natural – likewise, they are unavoidable (for *human beings*, that is, of course). Following this interpretation, premise (ii) is definitionally true. It is premise (i) which Mill rejects: the patriarchy’s pervasiveness and staying power is *not* evidence for its being natural, i.e., unavoidable.

Mill’s rejection of this premise (i) relies on the same comparison of patriarchy to other historical practices, that was appealed to in the previous section. As Mill points out, even the great thinker Aristotle, believed slavery to be a ‘natural’ condition of certain lesser humans. Likewise, slave owners in the American South had similar views on the ‘natural’ condition of black people as slaves. Of course, it turned out that there is nothing about slavery for black people, or about owning slaves in general. The same, Mill argued, would happen to the patriarchy. Indeed, in the case of the patriarchy, it is less surprising that it has lasted so long. Even if the patriarchy is unjust, it was certain to outlast all other forms of unjust authority, because “If ever any system of privilege and enforced subjection had its yoke tightly riveted on the necks of those who are kept down by it, this has.” (Mill 1869). Now the question is, was Mill right about the rejection of these arguments?

In hindsight

We do not need to analyse the philosophical credentials of Mill’s rejections. Indeed, what he rejects are arguments that justify the patriarchy. A mere *historical* look at whether his prophecies turned out to be true, will be enough to establish that Mill was right in rejecting these arguments. For the empiricist argument, the centuries after Mill have finally opened up society to other modes of government. We have seen that the mode of equality has now replaced the mode of patriarchy. The fact that society has now, for the first time, tried out two different modes, and continues to opt for the mode of equality, proves that the empiricist argument was wrong to suppose that the pervasiveness of the patriarchy was testament to its being the best ranked out of all the experiments in living.

The unavoidability argument can be similarly seen to be false. Now, I do not pretend that the patriarchy has been fully extinguished. But, as is also implicit in the above paragraph, *aspects of it have*. Women are no longer barred from assuming important social positions and leadership roles. The fact that experience shows women to be just as able as men at fulfilling these roles, shows that arguments that would regard women as ‘naturally submissive’ and ‘unsuitable for leadership’ to be unfounded.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued why Mill believes that the pervasiveness and lasting power of patriarchy is irrelevant to its legitimacy. I have provided two arguments for thinking that it is relevant, and explained how Mill rejects both. Finally, I have argued why the centuries after Mill have empirically proven that Mill was right in rejecting these arguments.

Words: 1802

'Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house.' (MILL) How does Mill defend this claim? To what use does he put it in the argument of *The Subjection of Women*?

Mill's *The Subjection of Women* was a tract *by* liberals *for* liberals. That is, the claims and conclusions that Mill establishes in the book are to a large extent direct applications of the liberal viewpoints he defends elsewhere, such as in *On Liberty*. Likewise, Mill, who wrote the book in order to convince people and bring about actual change, believed this could best be done by convincing the progressive liberals. That group, which had been ever-growing since the start of the Enlightenment period, would be most provoked by the comparison of marriage to slavery. It is within this context that Mill's slavery-comparison and its wider argumentative role in *The Subjection of Women* must be understood.

In this essay, I will firstly provide Mill's defence of the claim in this essay's question (Section 1). Secondly, I will explain to what use Mill puts this claim in the wider argument. First, I will

argue how it does not work to interpret the slavery-comparison as part of an argument for why the current (that is, Victorian) inequality of the sexes is unjust (Section 2). Second, I will argue why the slavery-comparison is of *rhetorical* use, but that this does not invalidate it (Section 3).

Mill's defence

The quote in this essay's title emphasises that the comparison between marriage and slavery is done on a *legal* basis. 'Marriage is the only actual bondage *known to our law*' and 'There remain no *legal* slaves, except the mistress of every house.' Mill is far from arguing that the condition of Victorian married women is thus only similar to that of slaves on an abstract level; indeed, there are many different ways in which the actual condition of Victorian wives was identical to, and in some respects *worse* than, that of slaves. However, Mill is also "far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves" (Mill 1869). In what way can the two conditions be compared? The following similarities between Victorian married women and slaves are all discussed by Mill:

- a) Both are destined, for Victorian women at the point of marriage, and for slaves at the point of enslavement or 'purchase', for *lifelong obedience* to their husbands and masters respectively.
- b) Both could not own property (in fact, slaves were themselves regarded as 'property'). Because of this, any woman could only receive her (rightful) inheritance, without immediately having to pass it over to her husband, by working through some complicated and expensive legal loopholes. Mill also pointed out that under Roman law, slaves had access to a 'peculium', a small amount of property to some extent legally guaranteed as to their exclusive use.
- c) Married women had no 'time off work' nor a separate living space, whereas some slaves, as becomes clear from the story of Uncle Tom, did have some rest and some privacy. Although a wife's primary task was the bearing and rearing of children, the children belonged lawfully to the husband.
- d) Marriage, in Mill's day, was still characterised by the 'two souls merging into one' doctrine. But a caveat of this doctrine was that marital rape did not have *any legal status*. Thus, whereas, as Mill notes, some slaves could refuse sex with their masters and be legally protected in their refusal, married women had no such protection.
- e) Wives had no right to a legal separation, even in cases of ill-treatment. On the other hand, many slave masters were required to sell slaves in cases of 'ill-usage'.

We can see that Victorian wives were in many respects in the same position as slaves. In cases b)-e) they were in a certain sense even *worse off* than slaves.

Yet, one may still raise the following objection. Perhaps married women *were* legally in the same condition as slaves. But that does not suffice to make marriage 'the only actual *bondage* known to our law'. To be called 'bondage', the role would have to be *involuntary*. And whereas slaves are enslaved against their will, women *choose* to marry. Saying that marriage is bondage is like saying that BDSM is rape – in fact, the consensual nature of the act prevents it from being recognised as such.

But marriage certainly was not a choice, a mere option among options, in Mill's day. As Mill writes, "Marriage [is] the destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to" (Mill 1869). Furthermore, even if women managed to defy this expectation

(which is much harder than it sounds), they would see that no other life choices were available to them. They were excluded from “the greater number of lucrative occupations, and from almost all high social functions” (Mill 1869). In fact, hardly any professional job was available to women, because almost all professional associations barred women from getting one. Hence, to obtain a livelihood for themselves, women had to marry. Marriage was bondage because women, through expectations and a lack of alternatives, were *forced* to marry, and once they did, they would find themselves without legal identity, without legal protection, and without a way out.

The slavery comparison as an argument

What is the argument of *The Subjection of Women*? Mill specifies the complete argument of this book on the first page. We can separate it into three different claims:

- (1) “That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and
- (2) now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and
- (3) that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.” (Mill 1869)

If the slavery comparison is to fulfil any argumentative purpose, it will be for helping to establish claim (1). Mill argues for claim (2) by elaborating on women’s uncultivated and unreaped skills and on how women, in their current artificial and uncultured state, are hindering human improvement by obstructing their husband’s self-development. Moreover, Mill argues for claim (3) by showing how perfect equality is the only way of ensuring the development of the sympathetic associations necessary for true human connection. In short, neither Mill’s arguments for claim (2) nor for claim (3) look to be aided by a comparison between marriage and slavery. If we are to make the slavery comparison into an argument for claim (1), how would this look? This is my best shot:

- 1) The legal subordination of women to men morally closely resembles (on occasion, even surpasses) the subordination of slaves to slave masters, in a host of significant ways (such as lacking: property rights, separation rights, a legal identity etc.).
- 2) Slavery is, and is known to be, unjust.
- 3) If two things morally closely resemble one another, and one of them is unjust, then the other thing must also be unjust.
 - C1) The legal subordination of women to men is unjust.
 - C2) The legal subordination of women to men is wrong in itself.

(Here I am talking of women and men and not of wives and husbands; I take it that the end of the previous section serves to justify this). Premise 1) has been defended in the previous section. Premise 2) is obvious enough, and was *certainly* accepted by Mill’s liberal target audience. Premise 3) seems rather odd, however. Indeed, it expresses an inference people make on the basis of moral resemblance. It is an example of reasoning by analogy, but an unjustified one. If two objects morally closely resemble each other, this can only give you *good evidence* that they share some further moral resemblance (i.e., ‘being unjust’). One cannot deduce that the subordination of women to men *must* also be unjust, by this reasoning. Adjusting premise 3) will alter the conclusion to ‘There is good evidence that the subordination of women to men is unjust.’ But Mill wants to establish a stronger claim than this. And indeed he does, by, for instance, arguing that their subordination prevents women

from pursuing their own ideal of the human good, or that it leads women to develop 'feminine' characteristics which inhibit their moral self-development – both of these things *are* unjust, full stop. If he has these arguments for claim (1), why appeal to the slavery comparison for a further argument, one which turns out to be quite weak upon analysis?

The power of rhetoric

The answer is that the slavery comparison is not *meant* to serve as a further argument for claim (1). Instead, it is of (*important*) rhetorical value. As mentioned in the introduction, Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women*, a mere 100-page long essay, not as some academic philosophical musing on the inequality of the sexes. Rather, it was more meant as a manifesto, a call for action that would bring about much-needed change. To do so, Mill had to find the right target audience, which he found in the increasingly important group of progressive liberals. Mill believed that these progressive liberals would eventually become so politically powerful that they could implement the changes that were needed. But not only that, they were the pre-eminent group that would be susceptible to Mill's arguments in the first place.

Which gets us back to the slavery argument delineated above. I maintained that 3) is not a valid premise. But I do not deny that it is an *attractive* premise. Or rather, that it expresses an inference that human beings, including even the most well-educated and rigorous of thinkers, *tend* to make. If it is true that people tend to make this inference, then it is true that the slavery argument has rhetorical value, even if it does not stand up to scrutiny. Yet its rhetorical value is not equivalent for anyone. More conservative thinkers in the time of Mill would not assent to premise 2) *with the same force* as progressive liberals would. The conservative position could perhaps be characterised as: 'Yeah sure, slavery is unjust, I guess.'

On the other hand, for progressive liberals, opposition to slavery was an essential part of their entire worldview. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that it was part of their *self-conception*, in the sense that progressive liberals, with their focus on the liberty of the individual, were significantly characterised by their opposition to slavery. The abolition of slavery was chiefly a victory of progressive liberal ideals. Thus, we can see how the slavery argument was rhetorically useful. Progress liberals, like is normal for people, would adopt the inference in premise 3). Likewise, they would certainly assent to premise 2). Hence, if Mill's defence of 1) would be recognised as valid, which, given its breadth rigour, was very likely, then those progressive liberals, given that the argument is valid, *would have to* accept the conclusion. That would certainly be a success for Mill's project.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to show how Mill defends the claim that 'marriage is the only actual bondage known to our [Victorian] law.' Subsequently, I argued what the use of this claim was within the context of the general argument of *The Subjection of Women*. I have argued that it serves to convince people, the progressive liberals especially, about the injustice of the inequality of the sexes. I have argued that, given that the claim can only be represented as a rather 'weak', or otherwise invalid, argument, and that Mill already provides stronger arguments for the reality of this mentioned injustice, the slavery comparison is primarily of rhetorical use. Indeed, it was, as I have argued, very well suited to convince the right people, in order to bring about the right change, the occurrence of which was an essential part of Mill's purpose for writing *The Subjection of Women*.

Words: 1958