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CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN:

A HUMANIST APPROACH

TO FEMINISM

DISSERTATION

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), writer and lecturer, provided philosophical guidance to the feminist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During a career spanning the years 1890 to 1935 she published eleven books, wrote articles for popular magazines, and lectured throughout the United States and Europe. Between 1909 and 1916 she wrote, edited, and published a monthly magazine entitled The Forerunner. Gilman's efforts dealt primarily with the status of women, but she described herself as a humanist rather than a feminist. She explained that her interest in women arose from a concern that, as one-half of humanity, their restricted role in society retarded human progress. Thus, Gilman's contribution to feminism must be viewed within the context of her humanist philosophy.

Gilman described a humanist as one who valued human life and fostered its development. She argued that growth involved the full use of one's powers in four dimensions: physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social. Curtailment of expression in any of these areas arrested growth and,

in proportionate degree, dehumanized a person. Gilman alleged that woman's subordinate position to man had stunted her progress in every dimension; consequently, the female sex had been dehumanized.

Gilman speculated that because of women's aborted development human traits had become synonymous with male attributes and that, by default, civilization had been a singularly masculine achievement. In her view, society was an organic form of life, dependent for health upon the vitality of all its parts and suffering when any of its members were "diseased." As the deficient members undermining society's progress, women must develop those human traits common to both sexes. This could be done by exercising their faculties in the four dimensions of human life.

Gilman's contribution to feminism lies in her diagnosis of woman's predicament as ideological rather than political and, hence, subject to self-resolution. The uniqueness of Gilman's approach is in the autonomous nature of her solution: Woman, through the full use of her human powers, could achieve the equality that decades of political agitation had failed to accomplish.

Gilman has been a neglected figure in American history. Upon her death in 1935 she received tributes as a feminist

leader of the first rank; but shortly thereafter her name sank into oblivion. In 1927 Charles and Mary Beard recognized Gilman's feminist leadership in their two-volume work, The Rise of American Civilization. Thereafter, historians largely ignored her work until Carl N. Degler's pivotal article, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the Theory and Practice of Feminism," American Quarterly 8(Spring 1956), demonstrated her importance as the "leading intellectual" in early twentieth century American feminism. Since the 1960's scholars have given increasing attention to her work. The rationale for this dissertation lies in the premise that Gilman's humanist approach to feminism made a significant contribution in her own day and offers insight into women's present status.

Primary sources used in this study include Gilman's papers (filed in 342 folders at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College) and her published works. Secondary materials include works concerning Gilman and the general history of feminism.

This study is organized as follows: A survey of feminism in Chapter I provides a frame of reference for Gilman's work. Chapters II-IV are biographical, describing the evolution of her humanist philosophy. Chapter V provides

an introduction to her thought. Chapters VI-IX deal with Gilman's humanist approach to feminism, each elaborating respectively on her guidelines for growth in the physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions of life.

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CHAPTER I

FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

The concept of liberty as a human right has been a motivating force in the American experience. In 1776 the Declaration of Independence justified revolution against tyrannical political authority on the premise "that all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to liberty. The new nation made sporadic attempts to implement this goal; the ensuing decades witnessed not only a democratization of political and economic processes but racial emancipation. Although these extensions of freedom were slow, incomplete, and accompanied by protest, America's commitment to "liberty and justice for all" has remained a cherished ideal.

Paradoxically, the term "liberty" loses its lofty connotation when used in relation to women. In March 1776 Abigail Adams suggested to her husband that he and other members of the Second Continental Congress "remember the ladies" in the "new code of laws" by freeing them from male authority. John Adams replied, "I cannot but laugh . . . . Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine

systems." Undaunted, Abigail noted the irony of men "emancipating all nations," while "retaining an absolute power over wives." She warned that women would "foment a rebellion" rather than be "bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."[1]

Abigail Adams' prophecy became reality within a century. The year 1848 inaugurated an organized woman's movement in America that culminated in 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment granting female suffrage. The first Woman's Rights Convention, held in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, issued a Declaration of Sentiments which paraphrased the Declaration of Independence. It proclaimed woman's freedom from male despotism on the premise "that all men and women are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to liberty. Citing specific unjust laws and customs, the document protested the "disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation" and demanded for women "immediate admission to all the rights

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[1] Charles Francis Adams, ed., _Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution_ (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1875), pp. 149-50, 155, 169.

and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States."[2]

This declaration of woman's inalienable right to liberty met widespread scorn and ridicule. In keeping with John Adams' earlier response, the nation laughed. Whereas "the rights of man" resounded a noble theme in 1776, the long struggle for woman's rights initiated in 1848 proved an ignoble--and largely ignored--epoch in American history.

How does one explain this paradox? Why is "liberty" a pejorative term when related to women? A key to understanding resistance to female autonomy lies in society's traditional belief that women are by nature a subordinate sex. Since subordinance is antithetical to autonomy, the claim of woman's right to liberty contradicts the orthodox concept of her nature. In short, tradition holds that it is not woman's nature to be free.

Thus, in analyzing American feminism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the nature of woman emerges as the central issue. The point in question: Is woman's nature essentially female, hence subordinate; or is her nature human, like man's, and therefore autonomous?

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[2]Alice S. Rossi, ed., _The Feminist Papers_ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 415-18.

This issue bears directly on Charlotte Gilman's contribution to feminism, for she ranks among the few who recognized the futility of changing laws without challenging myths upholding a subordinate womanhood. Because Gilman focused upon woman's nature as a key to the "woman problem," a preliminary survey of traditional views of women and of feminist response to this orthodoxy will give perspective to her philosophy.

Historically, woman has been defined as an adjunct to man, as one who lives in an auxiliary capacity, dependent upon and subordinate to man. Through the centuries there have evolved secular and religious arguments justifying woman's subservient position on the basis of natural law and divine decree. The feminist claim that female subordination was culturally derived and subject to change thus challenged an idea deeply entrenched in western thought.

Aristotle, whose research in natural science influenced European thought for centuries, cited biological evidence that the female state was inferior, "being as it were a deformity, though one that occurs in the ordinary course of nature." He argued that a husband should rule over his wife because, according to the order of nature, the male--a rational, ruling being--was more fit for command than the

female. Moreover, in this relationship between male and female the inequality was permanent. Quoting Sophocles, Aristotle further advised that "silence is woman's crown."[3]

The Judeo-Christian interpretation of male sovereignty as a divinely inspired institution has had profound influence in defining woman's status. According to Hebraic history, God created woman as a helpmeet for man, then ordained her subservience to man as punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge. In the New Testament Paul sanctioned female subordination as a Christian doctrine: "Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church." Reminiscent of Aristotle, Paul emphasized silence as a ramification of submissiveness. He advised his protege, Timothy:

> Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adams was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.[4]

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[3] Aristotle, Generation of Animals, trans. A.L. Peck (London: Heinemann, 1943), p. 461; Ernest Barker, trans., The Politics of Aristotle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 32-33, 35-36.

[4] Eph. 5:22-23; 1 Tim. 1:11-14.

Patristic literature written during the first four centuries A.D. introduced a misogynistic note into Christian thought. The ascetic Church Fathers associated sexuality, and therefore women, with evil. Emphasizing Eve's original sin, they castigated woman as the source of evil, a temptress. Fearing woman's seductiveness and disdaining her supposed mental and moral inferiority, they urged men to keep their wives in subjection. They recommended celibacy, however, as the ideal state. Jerome illustrated the depth of this conviction in observing that the only good thing about marriage was that it produced virgins. Tertullian, one of the more vindictive Fathers, wrote of woman: "*You* are the devil's gateway . . . the first deserter of the divine law . . . . You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert . . . even the Son of God had to die."[5]

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas, philosopher and theologian, synthesized Aristotelian thought with Christian theology. He viewed woman as an inferior being, but one "who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink." Aquinas considered woman "naturally

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[5]Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1966), pp. 14-22.

subject to man, because in man the discernment of reason predominates"; but he also held that woman deserved male protection because of her weakness. This idea was embodied in the chivalric code whereby the strong protected the weak. During the Middle Ages chivalry mitigated the harsh judgment of woman's inferior status. But while chivalry ostensibly honored women, the patronage implicit in its code reinforced the idea of female inferiority. Religious expressions of chivalry resulted in the cult of the Virgin Mary, an elevation of Jesus' mother to suprahuman status--but only as a virgin, a residue of patristic bias.[6]

Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century, in reaction to veneration of the Virgin Mary, returned to an emphasis of Eve's sinfulness. While not as misogynistic as the Church Fathers, they did insist on male sovereignty.

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[6]Friedrich Heer, The Medieval World, 1100-1350 (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1961), p. 265; Anton C. Pegis, ed., Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1945), 1:880-81. Aquinas' statement on the necessity of woman's functions is a candid explanation of why man would maintain a relationship with an inferior being: the value of woman derived from her sexual and domestic services, not from her personhood. Aquinas' candor is instructive in descerning the same value judgment veiled in the gentility of Victorian rhetoric; for by the nineteenth century, sexual appeal and domesticity had become mandatory traits in the definition of femininity--in being a "true woman." If a woman did not excell in one area, she might in another--thus retaining her femininity. But a woman who chose not to conform did so at the expense of her sexual identity.

The Pauline doctrine of female submission and silence became Puritan orthodoxy and permeated thought in colonial America.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century brought hope for extended human liberty. But while the rights of man were extolled, those of woman were overlooked. French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau contributed to a polarization of the sexes in arguing that nature decreed complementary characteristics in men and women. Rousseau described the nature of man as active, strong, and rational and that of woman as passive, weak, and non-intellectual. He maintained that nature had decreed woman to be pleasing to man:

> Thus the whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, to make life agreeable and sweet to them--these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy.

Rousseau warned that if woman neglected these duties for the cultivation of her own intellect, she would be ridiculed for making a man of herself.[7]

Increasingly, arguments for female subjection referred to woman's differentness rather than to her inferiority;

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[7] William H. Payne, Rousseau's Emile (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892), pp. 260-263, 303.

and, ironically, some suggested her superiority. In mid-nineteenth century John Ruskin articulated the tenets of the Victorian era's neo-chivalric dogma. In an essay entitled "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865), Ruskin echoed Rousseau's idea of complementary qualities in the sexes. "Each has what the other has not; each completes the other . . . they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give." Ruskin then delineated separate spheres for the sexes, in accordance with their respective characteristics. The "open world" described man's sphere, for "He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest." In contrast, the home bounded woman's sphere--"a sacred place, a vestal temple" where women reminiscent of Rome's vestal virgins tended modern-day altar fires. Service to man within the domestic sphere lent nobility to woman's character, and Ruskin extended this service ethic even to female education. He advised that, "A man ought to know any language or science he learns thoroughly--while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathize in

her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends." Ruskin disparaged woman's intellect but elevated the level of her moral capacity. He confined her moral superiority to two areas: guidance of her husband's conscience (alleviating the idea of wifely subjection), and philanthropic activity (her only acceptable reason for leaving the domestic sphere).[8]

Ruskin's concept of the separate spheres sanctioned an insidious trade of responsibility that dehumanized both sexes. Man's mental superiority excused woman's intellectual irresponsibility, for she must acquiesce to his judgment; woman's spiritual superiority freed man from moral responsibility, for she acted as his conscience. In effect, men did the thinking, while women lived purely.

The doctrine of the separate spheres, the most ingenious rationalization of woman's subordination, constituted the greatest barrier to sexual equality in the nineteenth century. The tenacity of its acceptance reflected a converging of idea and need, for the industrialization of America had created a division of labor necessitating

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[8]John Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1904), pp. 82-84, 89-91.

separate spheres. With industrialization, men for the first time in history left home in large numbers to earn their living in factories, shops, and offices. Personal domestic service became essential to men's functioning in this larger arena. Norman Mailer stated the problem at its most basic level: if women become equal, who will do the dishes?[9]

John K. Galbraith analyzed in more precise terms industrialized society's vested interest in the idea that "woman's place is in the home." Galbraith deemed woman's domestic role as "personal servant and consumer" critical for the modern industrial economy. He attributed women's acceptance of such an ignominious role to the power of "the convenient social virtue," which he described as follows:

> The convenient social virtue ascribes merit to any pattern of behavior, however uncomfortable or unnatural for the individual involved, that serves the comfort or well-being of the more powerful members of the community. The moral commendation of the community for convenient and therefore virtuous behavior then serves as a substitute for pecuniary compensation. Inconvenient behavior becomes deviant behavior and is subject to the righteous disapproval or sanction of the community.
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> The convenient social virtue is widely important for inducing people to perform unpleasant services.

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[9]Norman Mailer, The Prisoner of Sex (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), p. 226.

> . . . its ultimate success . . . has been in converting women to menial personal service.[10]

The nineteenth century emphasis on separate spheres, idealized by chivalry and justified by industrialism, brought to full cycle the historic arguments accounting for female subjugation. Aristotelian logic and Judeo-Christian thought, synthesized in medieval theology, rationalized woman's subordinance on the basis of her inferior nature, specifically her physical, mental, and moral deficiencies. In later centuries arguments became more sophisticated; an emphasis on woman's moral superiority, along with her intellectual limitations, pointed to the domestic sphere as a place not of subjection but of homage, safety, and willing service. No longer degraded as subhuman, woman became idealized as suprahuman.

Both extremes of categorization dehumanized woman by denying her full range of faculties; but the latter, less obvious in its limitation, proved more insidious--in part because women themselves assumed the validity of their suprahuman status. Aspiring to the Victorian ideal of "true womanhood: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness," woman accepted the myth of her mental inferiority. She

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[10]John K. Galbraith, Economics and the Public Purpose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), pp. 30-31.

bartered her intellectual birthright--the ultimate human distinction--for the honor promised a "Lady." For chivalry's twin tributes of courtesy and protection she left the mainstream of humanity and ascended her pedestal, a euphemism for her separate sphere. John Stuart Mill, English philosopher and politician, discerned the irony of the lady on the pedestal: "They are declared to be better than men; an empty compliment, which must provoke a bitter smile from every woman of spirit."[11]

American feminism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a rallying of "women of spirit" who protested the inequities resulting from their auxiliary role, exalted though it might be in chivalrous terms. Not all feminists, however, rejected the role itself. Feminism, defined as the advocacy of equal rights for men and women, was a pluralistic movement in which various groups sought female equality in one or more of the following areas: education, law, politics, social relationships, and economics. The diverse attitudes, approaches, and goals of those concerned with women's rights are best understood

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[11]Barbara Welter analyzes the concept of "true womanhood" as revealed in nineteenth century literature in "The Cult of True Womanhood,1820-1860," American Quarterly 18(Summer 1966):151-174; John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (1869, reprint ed., Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 76.

in relation to each group's definition of the nature of woman. Three major categories (including opponents of female equality) distinguished those involved: anti-feminists, conservative feminists, and radical feminists.

Anti-feminists upheld the traditional view of female subordination and, therefore, regarded a free woman as an anomaly. They believed that no inequities existed because women had all the rights they needed. Anti-feminist ranks included men and women, and their number was legion. Their efforts of opposition ranged from passive condescension to active resistance.

Feminists encompassed two distinct groups, conservative and radical. While they shared the general goal of augmenting women's rights, they did not all aim at sexual equality. Conservative feminists accepted the orthodox image of woman's auxiliary status; consequently, they sought varying degrees of equality to enhance their contribution as helpmates and to extend the influence of their moral superiority. Because they accepted male dominance as the natural or divine order, they did not challenge social institutions based on a sexual hierarchy, such as marriage and the home. Rather, they emphasized legal and political reforms, particularly that of female suffrage. Conservative feminists included men and women, and they comprised the larger of the two feminist groups.

Radical feminists rejected the validity of inherent female subordination and demanded full autonomy for women. Unlike their conservative counterparts, they defined the nature of woman in human rather than feminine terms and sought to abolish her separate sphere rather than to enlarge it. While radicals worked diligently for legal and political equality, they did not consider the ballot an exclusive priority. They emphasized independence in all areas of life, particularly intellectual and social. Their attempts at domestic reform within the institutions of marriage and divorce, however, proved threatening to the social order; and by the 1880's their effectiveness diminished as that of conservatives increased. Radical feminists included but few women, and fewer men.

Charlotte Gilman represented a foremost spokesman of radical feminism. She defined the nature of woman, as well as the nature of man, as essentially human. She considered masculine and feminine distinctions important but secondary to a common humanity, gender functions being a part of life but not the whole. According to Gilman, human activity extended beyond domestic roles to include economics, education, politics, religion, art, and science. The nature of being human implied having access to all these areas of interaction.

Explicitly, it meant giving full expression to one's physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social powers.

Gilman maintained that recognition of woman's human nature and restoration of her access to all areas of human activity constituted the goal of feminism. An assessment of her humanist approach to feminism must be considered within the context of her predecessors' activities.

The earliest efforts of nineteenth century feminists concerned the expansion of women's educational opportunities, particularly within institutions of higher learning. They faced severe handicaps, for intellect was considered a male faculty. Nineteenth century publications, both popular and professional, reflected a prevailing view that woman's brain was smaller than man's, thus inferior in capacity. Mental activity could result in hysteria, brain fever, or--at worst--race suicide, for intellectual women would so masculinize themselves as to repel prospective suitors. Gilded Age physicians gave scientific sanction to the idea of female intellectual inferiority. Dr. Edward H. Clarke's Sex in Education (1873), argued that brain development was directly antagonistic to womb development; therefore, higher education would destroy the reproductive capacity of American women. Clarke's credentials as a professor at Harvard

Medical School enhanced the validity and the influence of this position. Few Victorians questioned an anti-intellectual view of woman. It coincided with their belief in female subordinance, the ability to reason being an impediment to the duty of submission; and it contributed to the division of labor upon which their newly industrialized society depended.[12]

Feminists were divided in their rationale for female education. Catharine Beecher, who began her career as an educator in the 1820's as head of a female seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, represented the conservative view that women's education should be expanded in order to increase their efficiency as wives and mothers. Arguing that the domestic sphere deserved trained technicians, Beecher attempted to elevate housework to the level of domestic science. The American Woman's Home (1869),

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[12] See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Learning How to Behave, A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books (New York, 1946), for insight into social mores concerning women's intellect; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth Century America," Journal of American History 60(September 1973):333-356; William L. O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 80; Barbara Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism and the American Woman, 1800-1860," Mid-America 48(October 1966):258-270.

co-authored with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, was the most notable of her books on this subject. Beecher regarded teaching as a legitimate extension of woman's domestic role, and during the 1830's and 1840's she crusaded throughout the midwest for the establishment of normal schools to train female teachers. In 1847 she founded the National Board of Popular Education and, in 1854, the American Women's Educational Association. The incongruity of leaving the domestic sphere to campaign for women's hearth-oriented education seemed to pose no problem to Beecher. Faithful to the Pauline doctrine of silence and submission, she sat mutely on lecture platforms while a male companion read her speech.[13]

Radical feminists held the concept of separate spheres to be as intolerable in education as in any other area. They advocated a non-sexist course of study which exposed women to the same liberal arts curriculum as that theretofore reserved for men. Frances Wright, a Scottish heiress who adopted America as her homeland, toured the eastern and midwestern states in the late 1820's lecturing on equal

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[13]Eleanor Flexner, _Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States_ (New York: Atheneum, 1959), pp. 30-31.

rights for workingmen, Negroes, and women. The first woman to speak publicly in the United States for female equality (in contrast to Beecher, she delivered her own speeches), Wright argued that until women had access to equal educational opportunities, America's claim to egalitarianism was but a shibboleth. "Equality! where is it, if not in education? Equal rights! they cannot exist without equality of instruction." Wright warned that women's inferior training would retard the development of human character, for "if they advance not knowledge, they will perpetuate ignorance."[14]

Transcendentalist scholar Margaret Fuller provided the most cogent argument for intellectual equality in Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845), one of the first and most important American books on the status of women. Prescient in her recognition that the liberation of woman implied the liberation of man, Fuller observed that the sexual dichotomy of separate spheres robbed both men and women of their human heritage; it deprived men of emotional expression and women of intellectual activity. She concluded, "There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman"; rather nature intended a "harmony of spheres" within each

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[14]Rossi, Feminist Papers, pp. 109-110.

person. "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But in fact they are perpetually passing into one another." Fuller considered it a "vulgar error that love, a love, to Woman is her whole existence; she is also born for Truth." Woman, therefore, must retrieve her intellectual heritage, the gift of reason, and ignore the epithet given to a woman of intelligence: "She has a masculine mind." Anticipating the argument that female equality would result in a unisex world, Fuller assured that by being more human, a woman "will not be less Woman."[15]

Fuller rejected the conservative approach to female education. "Too much is said of women being better educated that they may become better companions and mothers for men." She acknowledged the value of an intellectually active wife and mother, saying, "A house is no home unless it contain food and fire for the mind as well as for the body." But this value comprised an effect of female education, not a cause. Indeed, she said, "The intellect, no more than the sense of hearing is to be cultivated merely that Woman may be a more valuable companion to Man." Fuller maintained

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[15]Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845; reprint ed., New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1971), pp. 43, 168-177.

that women must fulfill themselves not in relation to men but as individuals.[16]

The philosophy articulated by Fuller informed the practical efforts of two radically-inclined feminist educators, Emma Willard and Mary Lyon. In 1821 Willard established Troy Female Seminary, the first school in the United States to offer women college level courses. Willard objected to educating one sex to please the other; she regarded women not as satellites designed to influence men but as companions destined to accompany them. Thus, the Seminary's curriculum included natural science and higher mathematics, as well as domestic science. Two clergymen visiting Willard's school became incensed at her "unwarranted attempt to teach girls higher mathematics." One warned that since the feminine mind was unable to comprehend higher mathematics, exposing girls to the subject contradicted nature and God's will. The other felt that girls might become so absorbed in solving math problems that they would neglect their domestic duties. Willard's major innovation, the introduction of a course in physiology, proved even more shocking to Victorians who were taught never to mention parts of the body. As an

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[16]Ibid., pp. 35, 95-96.

accommodation to propriety, thick paper was pasted over pictures of the human body in the physiology textbooks.[17]

In 1837 Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke, now considered the oldest women's college in the United States. Lyon felt that intellect had no gender, and the intellectual rigor of her school's curriculum exceeded even that of Willard's. The educational philosophy of Mount Holyoke set the precedent for academic excellence espoused by other women's colleges established in the post-Civil War years: Vassar in 1865, Smith and Wellesley in 1875, the "Harvard Annex" (Radcliffe) in 1879, and Bryan Mawr in 1885.

Due to entrenched stereotypes of femininity, however, academic excellence in women's colleges initially proved an ideal rather than an actuality. M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr from 1894 to 1922, recalled her frustration when, as the school's first academic dean in the 1880's, she protested the policy of hiring women professors with no college training (a practice also followed at Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and Smith). She was told by Bryn Mawr's

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[17]Aileen S. Kraditor, ed., Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), pp. 79-81; Flexner, Century, pp. 25-26; Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, Woman Suffrage and Politics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), pp. 10-11.

president, "that there was an intuitive something in ladies of birth and position, which enabled them to do without college training and to make on the whole better professors for women college students than if they had themselves been to college." To Thomas' suggestion that faculty appointments be given to young men of high promise, the president replied, "Such men will not consent to teach women in a women's college." Woodrow Wilson proved an exception to this prediction but not to its inference. He accepted a professorship in political science at Bryn Mawr in 1885, and throughout his three-year tenure he lamented the dullness of his female students. Wilson considered women "too docile" to respond to his subject; they provided "no intellectual comeback."[18]

Despite hindrances to their academic progress, women made significant gains in education during the nineteenth century. In addition to the founding of women's schools, the coeducational policies of an increasing number of private and state colleges (beginning with Oberlin in 1837) expanded women's educational opportunities. Denied the right to higher education until the 1830's, by 1900 women had access to eighty per cent of the nation's colleges, universities,

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[18]Kraditor, Pedestal, pp. 92-93; John A. Garraty, Woodrow Wilson (New York: Harper and Row, Perennial Library, 1956), p. 15.

and professional schools. But perhaps the greatest gain in women's educational breakthrough came with the experiential proof that female brains could withstand the strain of intellectual demands. According to M. Carey Thomas:

> We did not really know anything about even the ordinary everyday intellectual capacity of women when we began to educate them . . . . We were told that their brains were too light, their foreheads too small, their reasoning powers too defective, their emotions too easily worked upon to make good students. None of these things has proved to be so. Women have proved themselves equal to men, even slightly superior.[19]

In addition to educational reform, early feminists were concerned with legal justice. Marital and civil inequities experienced by women in the first half of the nineteenth century had been imposed by state legislatures influenced by English common law. William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-1769), a standard reference for American lawyers, established the principle of "civil death" for married women (that is, a wife had no legal existence apart from her husband). According to Blackstone:

> A man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner . . . . A woman as soon as she is married, is

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[19]Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City, 1878-1898 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 205; Kraditor, Pedestal, pp. 19-94. Thomas, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell who in 1892 received her Ph.D. summa cum laude at Zurich, noted that before going to college, she had seen only one college woman. She was relieved to find her not an invalid but a tall, handsome woman.

> called covert, that is veiled . . . clouded and overshadowed . . . . To a married woman, her new self is her superior, her companion, her master . . . . By marriage, the husband and wife are one person under the law; . . . the very being or legal existence of the wife is suspended . . . incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything.

Under this concept of femme coverte a married woman forfeited the right to own property, the right to her wages if employed, and the right to guardianship of her children; in addition, she was legally subject to physical chastisement by her husband. Stringent divorce laws allowed a woman little recourse if her husband did not exercise his sovereignty benevolently. All women, married or single, were denied the following civic privileges: the right to vote, to bear witness, to serve on a jury, to sign contracts, and to bring legal suit. Single women suffered an additional inequity: allowed to own property, they were subject to taxation without representation.[20]

In contrast to educational reform achieved through the efforts of individual feminists, the struggle for legal equity required an organizational structure. Redress of

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[20]Flexner, Century, pp. 7-8; Leo Kanowitz, Women and the Law: The Unfinished Revolution (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), pp. 1, 35-38, 93-96.

marital and civic inequities would have to occur within the halls of state--all occupied by men. Collective, organized action offered the only means of exerting enough pressure on male legislators to affect their response to a subordinate class. But women restricted to a domestic province were hardly equipped for such a venture. They had little experience in group association, no practice in public speaking, and no background in political processes. Moreover, the service ethic expected of "feminine" women--that is, the idealization of sacrificial living for and through others--made any attempts for personal advantage appear "unwomanly."

The anti-slavery movement of the 1830's helped resolve this dilemma. It served as an acceptable cause for drawing women from the home, for it related to the service ethic; it educated women in organizational methods and political strategy; and it gave women a collective consciousness of their own subordinate status. When women joined the anti-slavery crusade they immediately encountered discrimination against themselves. Discounted as equals by male abolitionists and barred from membership in their organizations, women formed their own abolitionist societies and began to speak for their own rights as well as the Negroes'.

In 1833 Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister, helped found the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, the first of many such organizations. Ignorant of parliamentary procedure, the women asked a Negro freedman to preside. Competence replaced inexperience as women abolitionists throughout the Northeast learned to chair meetings, prepare agenda, and conduct petition campaigns. In 1837 the first National Female Anti-Slavery Society convention, held in New York, drew eighty-one delegates from twelve states. Proficient now in such public affairs, the delegates replied to abolitionist Theodore Weld's offer of help, "Tell Mr. Weld . . . that when the women got together they found they had <u>minds</u> of their own, and could transact their business <u>without</u> his directions."[21]

During a decade of abolitionist activity women won a major victory for themselves: the right to speak before mixed public audiences. Sarah and Angelina Grimké, daughters of a South Carolina slave-holding family, pioneered in this area. When the Grimké sisters found life in the South to be incompatible with their humanitarian views, they moved to Philadelphia and joined Quaker abolitionists in crusading against the slave system. Their eloquence in relating the

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[21] Flexner, <u>Century</u>, pp. 41-42.

evils of slavery resulted in numerous speaking engagements; but their violation of prevailing feminine propriety by speaking in public elicited criticism from many groups, especially the clergy. A Pastoral Letter from the Council of Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts, issued in 1837, publicly chastised women who spoke in public:

> The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties and that influence are unobtrusive and private, but the source of mighty power . . . . The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection . . . . But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer . . . she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural.[22]

Responding to criticism, Sarah Grimké published a book entitled Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman (1838), in which she refuted the religious dogma proclaiming female subjection to be the will of God. On the lecture platform both Grimké sisters began defending the rights of women as well as that of blacks. Other women abolitionists followed suit, gaining repute as accomplished orators in the process. In the second half of the nineteenth century these women--among whom were Lucretia Mott, Lucy

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[22]Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., eds., History of Woman Suffrage 1848-1920, 6 vols. (1881-1922; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 1:81.

Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth--formed the nucleus of the Woman's Rights Movement, an expression of organized feminist reform active between 1848 and 1920.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton spearheaded the organization of the Woman's Rights Movement in 1848 and, along with Susan B. Anthony, provided its strongest leadership during the next half century. Stanton first became aware of women's "defect of sex," as described by Blackstone, in observing her father's law practice. As Daniel Cady, a New York attorney and judge, advised women clients of their impotent legal status, his young daughter determined to tear from his law books every unfair statute. Prevented from the literal act, Stanton spent her life affecting change within the laws themselves.[23]

Stanton first conceived the idea of a woman's rights organization in 1840 while attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London with her abolitionist husband, Henry Stanton. Although not a delegate herself, Stanton reacted strongly to the Convention's refusal to seat the United States' female delegation, among which was Lucretia Mott.

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[23]Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eighty Years and More (1815-1897): Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: European Publishing Co., 1898), pp. 31-33.

Clergy delegates represented the strongest opposition. They stood, "Bible in hand," insisting that woman's subjection had been divinely decreed with Eve's creation. Despite arguments by Wendell Phillips and Henry Stanton on their behalf, the women delegates were allowed admission as guests only and were seated in an area "fenced off behind a bar and curtain, similar to those in churches to screen the choir from public gaze."[24]

Wendell Phillips, misjudging the significance of the matter, responded graciously to the Convention's overwhelming vote rejecting the women. He said to the delegates, "I have no doubt the women will sit with as much interest behind the bar as though the original proposition had been carried in the affirmative." This reaction of a man who had championed their cause prompted one woman to observe, "it is almost impossible for the most liberal of men to understand what liberty means for women." William Lloyd Garrison, the most prominent figure in the abolitionist movement, demonstrated his support of the women's cause in a remarkable way that earned him a heroic status in their eyes. He declined his seat as a delegate, explaining, "After battling many long years for the liberties of African

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[24]Ibid., p. 81.

slaves, I can take no part in a convention that strikes down the most sacred rights of all women." Garrison sat with the women behind the bar, remaining a silent spectator throughout the ten-day meeting.[25]

Stanton recalled in her autobiography that as the Convention adjourned, "the remark was heard on all sides, 'It is about time some demand was made for new liberties for women.'" She and Lucretia Mott began to formalize such a plan. "As Mrs. Mott and I walked home . . . we resolved to hold a convention as soon as we returned home, and form a society to advocate the rights of women."[26]

Eight years later Stanton and Mott launched their plan with the following notice in the Seneca (New York) County Courier:

> Woman's Rights Convention--A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of woman will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, Seneca Falls, New York, . . . the 19th and 20th of July current [1848].

Over three hundred people--including forty men--from a fifty-mile radius attended the meeting. They listened to a reading of the Declaration of Sentiments (written by

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[25] Stanton et al., History, 1:60-61.

[26] Stanton, Eighty Years, pp. 82-83.

Stanton) and adopted it with some slight amendments. There followed a discussion and adoption of twelve resolutions implementing the Declaration. The Declaration and resolutions demanded:

> all [that] the most radical friends of the movement have since claimed--such as equal rights in the universities, in the trades and professions; the right to vote; to share in all political offices, honors, and emoluments; to complete equality in marriage, to personal freedom, property, wages, children; to make contracts; to sue and be sued; and to testify in courts of justice.[27]

Two key resolutions claimed woman's equality to be divinely ordained. They stated that God intended woman to be man's equal and that, consequently, she should reject "the circumscribed limits which customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures marked out for her . . . and move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her." These resolutions constituted the most radical aspect of the Woman's Rights Movement. They challenged the centuries-old belief in a God-ordained sexual hierarchy and urged women to destroy the concept of their separate sphere by participating in the larger world. With the passage of time, however, this radical aim was sacrificed to attain a more conservative goal, female suffrage.[28]

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[27]Stanton et al., History, 1:67-73.

[28]Ibid., 1:72-73.

Ironically, in 1848 the suffrage resolution (the only resolution not passed unanimously) was considered the most radical. Many convention delegates, including Lucretia Mott, opposed its adoption, fearing that a demand for the vote would defeat other propositions they deemed more feasible and would make the whole movement ridiculous. But Stanton and Negro abolitionist Frederick Douglass argued that the power to elect leaders and make laws was essential to obtaining all other rights. Their advocacy of the suffrage resolution secured its adoption by a slim majority. Douglass played a unique role, for he represented the Convention's sole male support of female suffrage.[29]

Signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration in 1848 included sixty-eight women and thirty-two men (a third of those attending the convention). A composite profile of this group indicates they were young (average age, thirty-five), middle-class, and liberal in theology and political philosophy. Many were associated with abolitionism, temperance, freesoil

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[29]Stanton et al., History, 1:73; Benjamin Quarles, "Frederick Douglass and the Woman's Rights Movement," Journal of Negro History 25(January 1940):36. Henry Stanton, supportive of the Declaration in general, vehemently opposed inclusion of the suffrage resolution, warning that it would turn the Convention into a farce; he carried out his threat to leave town if Elizabeth presented it to the Convention. Alma Lutz, Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1815-1902 (New York: John Day Co., 1940), p. 46.

parties, and whig Republicanism. Two-thirds of the women were married; one-third of them had children at home. Throughout ensuing decades the Woman's Rights Movement involved primarily northern, white, middle-class, married women who had the necessary leisure to participate in affairs outside of home or factory. Men (particularly abolitionists) continued to form a small segment of feminists; in the forefront appeared such spokesmen as Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Gerrit Smith. After a split in the movement following the Civil War, men identified for the most part with the more conservative branch of feminists.[30]

Press and pulpit immediately denounced the Declaration of Sentiments of the Seneca Falls Convention, causing many of the signers to withdraw their names. Frederick Douglass, editorializing in his paper *The North Star* on 28 July 1848, anticipated critical response:

> We are not insensible that the bare mention of this truly important subject of woman's rights . . . is likely to excite against us the fury of bigotry and the folly of prejudice. A discussion of the rights of animals

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[30]Katherine Milton Faust, "The Signers of Seneca Falls," (1970), quoted in Ross Evans Paulson, *Women's Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1973), p. 36. Male supporters of the Declaration were branded "Aunt Nancy men" and "hermaphrodites." Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," p. 35.

> would be regarded with far more complacency by many of what are called the wise and the good of our land, than would be a discussion of the rights of women. It is, in their estimation, to be guilty of evil thoughts to think that woman is entitled to equal rights with man. Many who have at last made the discovery that the negroes have some rights as well as other members of the human family, have yet to be convinced that women are entitled to any.

John Stuart Mill analysed the hostility succinctly: "The majority of the male sex can not yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal."[31]

Despite the barrage of criticism, many women responded to the appeal for human equality sounded at Seneca Falls by holding similar conventions in Ohio, Massachusetts, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New York. From 1850 until the beginning of the Civil War, national woman's rights conventions met every year except 1857 in eastern and midwestern cities. (No meeting occurred in 1857 because feminist leaders were absorbed in family cares at home.)[32]

As the newly organized members of the woman's movement explored avenues to implement change, dress reform claimed their attention as a logical expression of physical freedom. In 1850 Elizabeth Smith Miller, Stanton's cousin, designed

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[31]Stanton et al., History, 1:16, 73-74.

[32]Flexner, Century, p. 81; Lutz, Created Equal, pp. 104-5.

an alternative garb to the tightly laced, multi-layered, long dresses worn by women in the ante-bellum era. Weighing from twelve to fifteen pounds, traditional feminine attire not only impeded freedom of movement but contributed to ill-health by forcing abnormal posture. Miller's outfit consisted of a loosely belted tunic, falling just below the knee, worn over full Turkish trousers gathered at the ankle.[33]

Miller's father, Gerrit Smith (a noted abolitionist and feminist), encouraged women's sartorial reform and gave it philosophical significance. He urged women to see the relationship between a "dress which imprisons and cripples them," and the "oppressive evils which they are striving to throw off." Many women began wearing the "Bloomer" after Amelia Bloomer publicized it in her temperance paper, The Lily. (Bloomer thus inadvertently bequeathed her name to the new costume.)[34]

Stanton wore the Bloomer for two years and considered it "a great blessing." She compared her freedom from heavy, dragging skirts to that of a convict released from a ball

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[33]Flexner, Century, pp. 83-84; Stanton et al., History, 1:469-70.

[34]Kraditor, Pedestal, pp. 125-27.

and chain. Nevertheless, she remained sensitive to mounting criticism of the new fashion. People stared and even jeered at women in Bloomers, while the press suggested their association with "free love," "easy divorce," and "amalgamation." Women's bold action in letting the public know they had legs had proved an intolerable indiscretion. By 1854 Stanton discarded the Bloomer, convinced it had become a detriment to legal reforms. She asked other feminists to do the same--to sacrifice comfort for a larger cause.[35]

These abortive efforts at dress reform were an ironical phenomenon of nineteenth century feminism. In giving up the Bloomer women voluntarily relinquished a freedom vital to their well being and one entirely within their power to achieve. This action--led by Stanton, one of the most radical feminists--revealed the pressure felt by woman's rights advocates to conform with conventional views of propriety in order to gain legal equity.

As feminists turned their attention to legal reforms in the mid-1850's, Susan B. Anthony assumed a position of leadership which she maintained until 1900. Having been

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[35] Stanton, Eighty Years, pp. 200-3; Flexner, Century, p. 84.

active in abolition and temperance societies in earlier decades, she now utilized her organizational experience to secure women's equality in New York's state laws. Her state-wide petition campaign in 1860 resulted in a bill passed by the New York legislature granting women control of their wages and extending their property rights.[36]

Anthony's organizational expertise complemented Stanton's philosophical contributions to feminism. The two women met in 1851, developed a close friendship, and thereafter combined their talents in working for women's rights. Anthony, one of the few unmarried feminists, carried on the bulk of the work in the 1850's while Stanton cared for her family. In 1859 Stanton gave birth to her seventh and last child; she then made ready for a time of greater participation in feminist reforms. She had written Anthony two years earlier: "You and I have the prospect of a good life. We shall not be in our prime before fifty, and after that we shall be good for twenty years at least." The outbreak of war in 1860 interrupted these plans.[37]

The Civil War diverted the work of feminists from their own cause to that of the Negroes'. In 1863 Stanton and

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[36] Flexner, Century, pp. 84-88.

[37] Ibid., pp. 88-89.

Anthony helped organize the National Woman's Loyal League, dedicated to supporting a war for freedom. The League's most significant accomplishment was the collection of over 400,000 signatures for a petition requesting Congress to pass the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. Feminists hoped that women's war-time contributions, particularly through the League and the Sanitary Commission (a forerunner of the Red Cross), would result in their being accorded the right to vote.[38]

Following the war the question of female suffrage became linked with Negro franchisement, to the detriment of the former. Abolitionists and feminists joined forces in organizing the American Equal Rights Association to promote the interests of Negroes and women. It became apparent with the proposed Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, however, that suffrage would be extended to Negroes but not to women. The Fourteenth Amendment recognizing Negro citizenship included in its second section the word "male," implying a masculine qualification of the term "citizen." This represented the first reference to sex in the Constitution, and its specific use raised the question of whether women were citizens of the United States. Following ratification

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[38] Ibid., pp. 109-111.

of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, radical Republicans introduced the Fifteenth Amendment which stated, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." By excluding the word "sex" as a basis for denying political discrimination, the Fifteenth Amendment (ratified in 1870) crushed feminists' hope for immediate suffrage rights.[39]

Male abolitionists urged women not to protest the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, lest their insistence on female suffrage jeopardize the attempt to enfranchise Negroes, a higher priority. Frederick Douglass stressed that this was the "Negro's hour," but that this did not preclude a later "woman's hour" if feminists would agree to

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[39]Ibid., pp. 141-48. Republican Senator George H. Williams, a member of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, introduced into the proposed Fourteenth Amendment the following provision which had been recommended by "sound men" on the Committee: Denial of suffrage to adult male citizens would result in a state's loss of Congressional representation in proportion which the number of such deprived male citizens bears to the state's total number of adult male citizens. Williams later argued that "to extend the right of suffrage to negroes . . . is necessary for their protection; but to extend the right of suffrage to woman is not necessary for their protection." W.R. Brock, _An American Crisis: Congress and Reconstruction, 1865-1867_ (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 141, 294n2.

bide their time. He argued that female suffrage depended upon the preliminary success of Negro franchisement.[40]

Stanton and Anthony felt betrayed by both amendments and bitterly opposed them. They recognized that insertion of the word "male" into the Fourteenth Amendment would necessitate another Constitutional amendment to allow women to vote in national elections and, therefore, they secured petitions against its passage. They argued the feasibility of including the word "sex" in the Fifteenth Amendment and sought to have the franchise statement reworded accordingly, but to no avail. Anthony expressed the views of both women in vowing, "I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman." But other feminists, including Lucy Stone and Antoninette Brown Blackwell, responded to the abolitionists' argument that pressing for woman's suffrage at this time would result in defeat for both women and

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[40]Quarles, "Frederick Douglass," pp. 35, 38-44. Quarles observed that abolitionists made good their promise to seek female suffrage after achieving Negro franchisement in 1870. Douglass continued to assert that "Right is of no sex," and he reestablished a working relationship with Stanton and Anthony following the Reconstruction rift over the "Negro's hour vs. the woman's hour." Quarles further notes that in 1870 Negro election officials in certain South Carolina districts allowed black women to vote; thus, "the Negro became the first practical vindicator of woman's right to the ballot."

Negroes. They agreed to support the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, delaying their own quest for the ballot until Negro rights were assured.[41]

Divisiveness among feminists concerning the Reconstruction amendments climaxed in 1869 with the creation of two rival organizations: the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), headed by Stanton and Anthony; and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Stone and Blackwell. Both organizations supported female suffrage as their first priority, but they differed in their rationale for seeking the ballot and in their approach to obtaining it. The AWSA reflected the viewpoint of conservative feminists. Its members avoided controversial issues which challenged male dominance and concentrated on the single issue of suffrage. They regarded the ballot as an end in itself, not as a means to achieve other more radical reforms. They worked for suffrage on the state level, in contrast to the NWSA which advocated a federal Constitutional amendment.[42]

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[41] Flexner, Century, pp. 143-48.

[42] Robert E. Riegel, "The Split of the Feminist Movement," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 49(December 1962):487-496; Flexner, Century, p. 151-53. The Boston-based AWSA included Henry Ward Beecher (its first president), Julia Ward Howe, Gerrit Smith, and George William Curtis. The New York-centered NWSA included Matilda Gage, Martha Wright, and Theodore Tilton (one of its few male members).

The NWSA represented the radical feminist viewpoint. It embraced a broad spectrum of reforms but concentrated on woman's suffrage as the means of obtaining these changes. Anthony, in particular, believed strongly that the ballot constituted the gateway to all areas of freedom and that nothing should jeopardize its attainment. She felt that social and economic reforms would easily be achieved once women were able to vote their own interests. Stanton's radicalism, however, remained unchecked by any such conviction. Along with her advocacy of suffrage, she continually crusaded against inequities within three areas of male dominance: marriage, divorce, and religion. In comparison with attacks on these fundamental institutions, the campaign for female suffrage as a singular end increasingly assumed a conservative, respectable image.[43]

The NWSA's identification with free-love advocate Victoria Woodhull in the 1870's intensified its radical image. In January 1871 Woodhull so charmed a House Judiciary Committee hearing with a speech on female suffrage that the

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[43]Flexner, Century, pp. 153, 173. In 1878 Senator A.A. Sargent, a friend of Anthony's, introduced a woman suffrage bill, later called the "Anthony Amendment," which Congress passed forty-one years later as the Nineteenth Amendment. It retained its original wording: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

NWSA invited her to give the same address at its convention which was meeting in Washington at the same time. Later, Woodhull tried to exploit the NWSA for her own political aspirations. When Anthony blocked the attempt, Woodhull withdrew from the organization to form her own Equal Rights party. In 1872 she ran as its candidate for the United States presidency on a platform advocating free love. The NWSA's unfortunate identification with Woodhull necessitated its retrenchment in radical reform efforts. In 1890 it united with the AWSA in a significant concession of radicalism to respectability.[44]

The newly merged National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), although presided over first by Stanton (1890-1892) and then by Anthony (1892-1900), represented the more conservative branch of feminism. The broad movement for women's rights, which in 1848 viewed suffrage as only one aspect in a fundamental restructuring of society, had been transformed into an all-inclusive movement, with the ballot its single, final goal. Even the rationale for female suffrage had changed. Initially women claimed this right

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[44] Ibid., pp. 153-55. Woodhull's party nominated Frederick Douglass, without his consent, for its vice-presidential candidate in 1872.

as a matter of justice; but by 1890 the argument had changed to one of expediency. Women argued that their vote would expedite progressive reforms such as prohibition and vice control. They also appealed to racist and nativist strains within the Progressive party by claiming that the vote of white, middle-class, native-born women would offset that of blacks and immigrants of both sexes.[45]

In the twentieth century a new generation of feminists replaced the older leadership. Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw presided over NAWSA's methodical, plodding suffrage campaign between 1900 and 1920. In 1913 Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed a splinter group, called the Congressional Union, which injected new life into the quest for a suffrage amendment by using militant tactics borrowed from British suffragists. In 1916 leaders of the Congressional Union formed a new organization, called the National Woman's Party, which pledged to hold the political party in

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[45]Kraditor, Pedestal, pp. 18-19; William H. Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Role, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 3-22, provides an excellent analysis of feminism's shifting emphasis from radicalism to conservatism between 1848 and 1920; Alan P. Grimes, The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), views woman suffrage as a conservative, white, Anglo-Protestant movement to impose Puritan and progressive concepts of morality upon an increasingly urban, immigrant population.

power responsible for lack of support of the federal amendment. NAWSA, with its two million bipartisan members, disdained the militancy of the Congressional Union and the aggressive political position of its successor, the National Woman's Party; yet, the conservative NAWSA benefited from the resulting upsurge of interest in winning the ballot.[46]

President Woodrow Wilson, initially opposed to female suffrage, became sensitized to it as "the matter was brought to his attention" by the militants' White House pickets, arrests, and hunger strikes. Wilson's response quickened as he approached reelection in the fall of 1916. In September 1916 Wilson addressed the annual NAWSA Convention in Atlantic City; but while praising the suffrage movement, he stopped short of endorsing the proposed constitutional amendment. Carrie Chapman Catt marked as the moment of his conversion the end of his speech when Anna Howard Shaw stood to say: "We have waited so long, Mr. President, for the vote--we had hoped it might come in your administration."[47]

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[46]Flexner, Century, pp. 263-276; David Morgan, Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1972), pp. 186-87, attributes the militants' contribution to their "galvanizing not politicians and parties, but Suffragists."

[47]Flexner, Century, p. 279.

With the advent of World War I, women put increasing pressure on President Wilson to realize the paradox of a nation's fighting abroad for world-wide democracy while denying women democracy at home. On 30 September 1918 Wilson made an unprecedented personal appearance before the Senate to advocate passage of the suffrage amendment then being debated. The man who sought to make the world safe for democracy had become conscious that women comprised a part of that world. Wilson declared to the Senate:

> Through many, many channels I have been made aware of what the plain, struggling, workaday folk are thinking upon whom the chief terror and suffering of this war falls . . . . They think in their logical simplicity, that democracy means that women shall play their part in affairs alongside men and upon an equal footing with them.[48]

The President failed to move his audience. (As one feminist observed, "You can't hustle the Senate.") Not until a new Republican Congress took their seats in 1919 did the Senate pass the amendment and send it to the states for approval. On 26 August 1920 the woman suffrage amendment, introduced into every session of Congress since 1878, won ratification and became part of the United States Constitution.[49]

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[48] Ibid., pp. 308-309.

[49] Ibid., pp. 306, 309, 323.

The "logical simplicity" of the idea that women were endowed with the inalienable right to liberty had finally penetrated centuries-old authoritarian attitudes. But even in the "land of the free" the impact of this idea was gradual, and its realization proved incomplete. According to Carrie Chapman Catt, the achievement of suffrage alone took:

> fifty-two years of pauseless campaign. . . . fifty-six campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get State constitutional conventions to write suffrage into state constitutions; 227 campaigns to get State party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms, and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses . . . . It was a continuous, seemingly endless chain of activity.

Furthermore, twenty-six countries had preceded the United States in making women part of the electorate.[50]

Only recently have women become aware of what early radicals knew from the start: that the ballot was but a beginning, not an end. The Nineteenth Amendment signaled the political emancipation of women, but it left untouched the ancient tenet concerning woman's subordinate nature. To this radical issue Charlotte Gilman addressed her work.

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[50]Catt and Shuler, Woman Suffrage, pp. 107-8.

CHAPTER II

THE SHAPING OF A HUMANIST, 1860-1881

A concern for human liberty marked the central theme of Charlotte Gilman's life. Freedom from authoritarianism and freedom to grow to fullest capacity--these aims initiated a personal pilgrimage during adolescence and evolved into a public mission in adulthood. Subscribing to a teleological view of life in which happiness derived from fulfillment of function, she determined to excel in physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social expression. Her ambition reflected the idealism of youth and later became tempered by the realism of maturity. Yet the imperative of multi-faceted growth endured as both ideal and goal, becoming the keystone of her humanist philosophy. She viewed a humanist as one who valued persons--including one's self--above dogmas or institutions and who, accordingly, fostered avenues of growth in all areas of human life.[1]

Charlotte Gilman remarked in 1925 that she had started work on an autobiography but that she had difficulty

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[1]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "A Simple, Personal Position," 12 April 1901, Folder 16, Charlotte Perkins Gilman Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College (hereafter cited as CPG Collection).

sustaining interest in it. "My real interest is in ideas," she explained. Her life and ideas, however, were so integrated as to be inseparable. Thus, an understanding of her thought, the focus of this study, dictates prior attention to the formative influences in her life.[2]

Charlotte Anna Perkins, born 3 July 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut, spent her childhood in an environment marred by family trauma and poverty. The last of three children born in three years to Frederick Beecher Perkins and his wife Mary, Charlotte indirectly precipitated her parents' separation. In response to the doctor's warning that another pregnancy would be fatal to Mary, Frederick left home, returning only as an occasional visitor. His contact with Charlotte and her older brother Thomas (two of her siblings died in infancy) was so infrequent that she thought of him as a "stranger, distant and little known." For thirteen years

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[2]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), p. xviii (footnote references to Gilman hereafter cited as CPG). Because Charlotte Gilman married twice, an explanation regarding the use of her name within the text is in order. During her first marriage to Charles Walter Stetson (1884-1894) and for six years after their divorce in 1894, she published under the name, Charlotte Perkins Stetson. Following her marriage to George Houghton Gilman in 1900, she published as Charlotte Perkins Gilman. For purposes of clarity, textual references in this chapter shall use her given name, Charlotte; and those in following chapters, Gilman, regardless of the time period involved.

Frederick refused to make the separation official, explaining to friends that his work kept him elsewhere. He resented Mary's filing for divorce in 1873, but it was she who suffered most from this violation of Victorian propriety. As a deserted wife she warranted pity; as a divorced woman she met disgrace.[3]

Frederick provided little financial aid to his family. Mary and the children began a nomadic existence as unpaid debts forced them to move nineteen times in the next eighteen years. They lived for brief periods in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York before settling permanently in Mary's home town, Providence, Rhode Island in 1873.[4]

The frequent moves left Charlotte with a sporadic school record. Her formal education consisted of four years of public and private school between the ages of seven and fifteen; two years at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she received a teaching certificate in drawing in 1880; and correspondence courses with the Society for the Encouragement of Studies at Home. Although her education

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[3]CPG, Living, pp. 5, 9, 11. For an account of nineteenth century attitudes toward divorce, see William L. O'Neill, Divorce in the Progressive Era (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[4]CPG, Living, pp. 8-25. Charlotte lived in Providence from 1873 until her separation from Charles Walter Stetson in 1888.

seems meager by current standards, it assumes greater importance against the backdrop of nineteenth century intellectual opportunities. Only after the Civil War did more than half the nation's children attend any school, and as late as 1870 American students averaged only four years of formal schooling. Girls had access to the few public high schools (in 1870 there were only 160 in the country), but discrimination against women in higher education limited female enrollment in colleges and professional schools. Charlotte's training at the Rhode Island School of Design was a significant achievement for a woman in 1880.[5]

Despite Charlotte's fatherless childhood, Frederick did influence her life in two ways: as a bibliophile and as a Beecher. During the years of separation from his family, Frederick became a renowned librarian. While serving in turn as head of the Boston Public Library and the San Francisco Public Library, he introduced the decimal system of cataloguing; wrote The Best Reading, which became a standard reference; and contributed to various periodicals

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[5]CPG, Living, pp. 8-9, 18, 27-30, 45-46; School reports and certificate, Folder 1a, CPG Collection; John A. Garraty, The American Nation (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 570; Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 2 vols. (New York: Science Press, 1929), 1:544-546.

as editor and writer. Much of Frederick's correspondence with Charlotte concerned recommendations of books for her to read. She reflected in later years that whatever else he did not provide, her father did furnish leads to good reading matter. The remoteness of their relationship, however, remained its outstanding characteristic. She wrote Frederick in 1881, "I think I should have liked you very much--as a casual acquaintance."[6]

Charlotte viewed with pride her kinship to the "world-serving" family of Lyman Beecher, Frederick's grandfather. Lyman Beecher combined evangelistic preaching with humanitarian interests in the tradition of New England progressivism; he directed his reform efforts against dueling, slavery, and drinking. All seven of his sons became preachers, including the noted Henry Ward Beecher. Three of his daughters also participated in public life. Catharine Beecher fostered higher education for women, Isabella Beecher Hooker promoted female suffrage, and Harriet Beecher Stowe propagandized against slavery with _Uncle Tom's Cabin_. Lyman's only child to choose a private life was Mary Beecher Perkins,

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[6]CPG, _Living_, p. 4; "Sketch," p. 4, Folder 243, CPG Collection; CPG to Frederick Beecher Perkins, 10 April 1881, Folder 37, CPG Collection.

Frederick's mother. Charlotte identified strongly with the Beecher heritage of public service and attributed to it her own propensity for social improvement. Throughout her career critics took note of her Beecher gifts of wit, wisdom, and rhetoric.[7]

Charlotte had additional New England roots through her mother. Mary Fitch Westcott Perkins traced her lineage to Stukely Westcott, a deacon who had served with Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island. Mary grew up in a Unitarian home, but she left it with a Calvinist psyche. Dominated by a Puritan urge toward repression, she allowed herself scant expression of feeling. This trait intensified after Frederick's desertion, and she inflicted upon Charlotte severe emotional deprivation. Mary determined to protect her daughter from the pain of rejection she herself had endured. She ceased all expressions of affection, verbal and tactile, reasoning that if Charlotte never knew love, she would not miss the lack of it in later years. Only when the child slept did Mary caress her. When Charlotte

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[7]CPG, Living, p. 3; Lyman Beecher, Autobiography, ed. Charles Beecher, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864-65), 1:150-56, 245-52; ibid., 2:323. Lyman Beecher Stowe, Harriet's son, observed that according to nineteenth century views of women, Mary, "the only purely private Beecher," was "the only lady of the family," Saints Sinners and Beechers (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1934), p. 152.

discovered this, she feigned sleep in order to be "held close and kissed."[8]

Charlotte compensated for this dearth of affection by creating an imaginative dream world. Between the ages of eight and thirteen it was a major source of happiness; but because of the resulting pleasure, she felt it must be wrong. She compromised with her conscience by regulating her fantasies. Nightly she would think only of plausible things; weekly she would think of grander things; monthly, of things grander still; and once a year she would imagine anything she pleased. Mary distrusted her child's life of reverie after a friend warned of its dangers. Extending maternal authority to thought control, she commanded her thirteen-year old daughter to end this imaginative life. Two more restrictions followed: no novels and no close friends. Charlotte obeyed out of a strong sense of duty, but she did so at great cost to her personal happiness.[9]

Mary's attempts to restrict Charlotte's emotional experiences resulted in an increasingly authoritarian relationship. A major confrontation occurred when Charlotte was fifteen, whereby Mary won a battle but lost the war. A

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[8]CPG, Living, pp. 6-11.

[9]Ibid., pp. 20-23, 30.

psychic friend of Mary's had accused Charlotte of thinking negatively about her and had demanded an apology. Highly susceptible to the friend's influence, Mary delivered a harsh ultimatum: Charlotte must apologize or leave home. Innocent of the charge, Charlotte faced a choice of ethical priorities: obedience or honesty. She answered her mother "slowly, meaning to say the first part, and the last part saying itself: 'I am not going to do it,--and I am not going to leave you--and what are you going to do about it?'"[10]

Mary struck Charlotte--a rare response of feeling. But the display of physical power could not reverse the birth of freedom that had taken place. Charlotte described as a major event in her life the realization that neither her mother nor anyone could make her do anything. "One could suffer, one could die if it came to that, but one could not be coerced. I was born." The problem of authority and freedom had been faced existentially, and it would remain a constant theme in her later writing.[11]

Charlotte henceforth considered herself a free agent, no longer subject to compelled obedience. She decided,

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[10]Ibid., p. 34.

[11]Ibid.

however, that while a minor she would recognize parental authority and, with characteristic candor, told Mary that she would obey until she came of age and then she would stop. There ensued six years of:

> self-enforced obedience to management I heartily disapproved of, and which was in some ways lastingly injurious; submission to a tutelage so exacting that even the letters I wrote were read, as well as those I received; an account was always demanded of where I had been, whom I had seen, and what they had said--there was no unhandled life for me.

Later Mary complained that Charlotte never confided in her.[12]

Charlotte attributed her mother's "mis-management" to ignorance rather than to a lack of love. She described Mary as a loving, sacrificial mother determined to rear her children as a credit to the family, "father's family, that is." Mary's maternal devotion, however, proved to be a poor substitute for her lack of human understanding. Charlotte would later treat this problem in arguing for a trained motherhood.[13]

How does a fifteen-year old "free agent" employ newly affirmed freedom? Charlotte's response involved an intensive, six-year period of self-improvement. Sensing the implicit

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[12]Ibid., pp. 36, 69-70.

[13]CPG, Autobiography typescript, copy 2, p. 29, Folder 234, CPG Collection.

relation between freedom and power, and analyzing her character as vascillating and uncontrolled, she set about to develop will power. The first step was to establish limited goals and execute them promptly: "In ten minutes I will take another chair . . . . I will get out of bed at thirteen minutes to seven." These exercises were designed to connect mental action with motor nerves at a fundamental level. Once established, the habit would then facilitate similar action in larger areas.[14]

A second step in developing will power consisted of choosing character traits to incorporate as habit. Charlotte devised a two-fold formula to insure success: (1) Start with something easily attainable and progress by slow stages to the more difficult. (2) Practice when you think of it and stop before you are tired. She allowed herself a year in which to develop one or, at the most, two new virtues. She worked to acquire first a pattern of thoughtfulness, then a more difficult trait, truthfulness.[15]

To become thoughtful of others Charlotte initially concentrated on general concern for people's needs, but she soon felt the need for a more direct approach. She solicited

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[14]CPG, Living, pp. 56-57.

[15]Ibid., p. 33.

the help of a poor, crippled, half-blind girl, explaining to her: "You see, I don't think about other people, and I'm trying to learn. Now I don't care anything about you, yet, but I'd like to. Will you let me come and practice on you?" At first skeptical, the girl finally agreed. Charlotte studied ways to benefit her protege, implemented them over a period of time, and indeed became fond of her. Abrasive and self-serving on the surface, Charlotte's approach in fact revealed her precocious insight that love grows by service. Contrary to Victorian sentimentality, she conceived of love in terms of doing as well as feeling. She later incorporated this idea into her theology.[16]

In cultivating the trait of truthfulness, Charlotte followed a strict standard: she felt that absolute truth meant not only the absence of falsehood but an additional positive aspect--"meticulous accuracy." When still permitted her dream world, a compelling desire had been, "I wish that everything I wish may be right." The concern to be right now changed from fancy to determination as she practiced being so reliable that people would say, "If Charlotte Perkins says so, it's so." Undaunted by the prospect of hurting people's feelings and losing some friends, both of

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[16]Ibid., pp. 57-58.

which she did, Charlotte never wavered in her dedication to truth. "For eight years I did not do anything I thought wrong, and did, at all cost, what I thought right--which is not saying all my decisions were right."[17]

Truthful even to herself, Charlotte admitted the reverse attributes of a noble character: "Self-righteous? Tremendously so." She observed that having acquired many virtues, "inordinate egotism" had become her greatest vice. She also recognized a growing stoicism, due both to external deprivation and to self-denial accompanying her character building. She therefore adjusted her tack and resolved to try hard to enjoy herself.[18]

Charlotte had always associated pleasure with excelling. Thus, to increase her enjoyment of life, she decided "to become the best I could in all lines possible to me." Utilizing her strengthened will power, she now directed her efforts toward physical culture, intellectual development, spiritual understanding, and social awareness. Growth in these four dimensions, begun in late adolescence, remained an encompassing, lifetime activity. Charlotte visualized

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[17]Ibid., pp. 21, 59-60.

[18]Ibid., pp. 44-45, 60.

life as a verb, and she came to interpret living and growing as synonymous terms.[19]

Charlotte viewed the body as one's most basic medium of expression. Her ambition to achieve as perfect a physique as possible led to a five-point program of essentials: exercise, non-restrictive clothing, fresh air, good food, and adequate sleep. During the latter part of her school career a young physical education teacher, Dr. Brooks, had inspired her with a lasting enthusiasm for calisthenics. Under his tutelage she developed so erect a carriage as to lean almost backward.[20]

In 1881 Charlotte renewed acquaintance with Brooks and asked him to add a woman's gymnasium to the one he had opened for men in Providence. She regarded gymnastic training as a high art by which the ancient Greeks had produced the most beautiful bodies yet seen by the world, and she aspired to be as athletically beautiful as the chitoned Greek.

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[19]Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[20]Ibid., pp. 28, 64, 67. After meeting Charlotte in the early 1890's, novelist Mary Austin reported being "struck by her beauty, the fine lines of her head and the clear look of her eyes, the carriage of her shoulders, so erect and precise." Earth Horizon: Autobiography (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932), p. 293. Photographs of Charlotte in her seventies indicate that erect posture remained a life-long habit. Folder 333, CPG Collection.

Although her request to Brooks challenged societal strictures against strenuous activity for women, he responded by opening a women's gymnasium and inviting her to help in its design.[21]

After attending the gymnasium regularly for three years Charlotte's skills included vaulting, rope climbing, and use of the traveling rings. The latter feat involved traversing the length of the room via stirrup-handled rings which extended from the ceiling. Testimony to Charlotte's physical maintenance came during a 1925 visit to the Young Women's Christian Association in Dallas, Texas, when the sixty-five year old athlete demonstrated she could still negotiate the flying rings. Swimming and jogging were her regular sports. An aerobics forerunner, she faithfully ran a mile each day, changing her pace when older from jogging to long distance hiking. Enduring pride in her physical prowess constituted a rare indulgence in vanity.[22]

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[21] *Woman's Journal*, 22 October 1904; CPG, *Living*, p. 66. Female physical culture challenged the idealization of frail, delicate womanhood. One author in 1906 argued: "*What has the average girl to do with a gymnasium?* Sweeping and scrubbing a floor and dusting out a room, is infinitely more beneficial and useful than going to a sanctified room to turn somersaults." Lato (pseud.), in Bernard Rudofsky, *Are Clothes Modern?* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1947), p. 188.

[22] CPG to Miss Strong, 2 April 1925, Folder 233, CPG Collection; CPG, *Living*, p. 67.

Charlotte emphasized naturalness as the basis for physical beauty and rebelled at corseting her body in Victorian fashion. She wore loose fitting clothes which either hung from the shoulder or fell from a side-garter suspender of her own invention. Only once did she wear a corset--as a character in a play; and then she almost fainted. The courage of Charlotte's personal dress reform becomes apparent in light of the moral significance attributed to corsets by her generation. In the late nineteenth century one who refused to wear a corset risked being called a "loose" woman, figuratively as well as literally.[23]

Specific charges against Charlotte in this regard were to surface in 1892 when newspaper reporters speculated that her divorce from Charles Stetson stemmed from his embarrassment over her refusal to wear a corset. Criticism in a 1895 newspaper article was less harsh, describing Charlotte simply as a "peculiar lady" for the eccentricity of not wearing a corset. By the 1920's the vogue of free flowing garments made the corset issue moot. Throughout these vicissitudes in fashion, she persisted in her own dress standard: "Real beauty I cared for intensely, fashion I despised."[24]

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[23]CPG Living, pp. 65, 112; Rodofsky, Clothes, pp. 65-69.

[24]Newsclippings, New York Journal, 25 December 1892, Evening Press (Ogden, Utah), 19 July 1895, Folder 266, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, p. 66.

Intellectual inquiry began in earnest for Charlotte in her seventeenth year. She wrote her father that she wanted to understand history in order to help humanity--and where should she begin? She could have consulted no better source. Frederick sent books and lists of books. He guided her reading in history, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, and biology. He also sent copies of Popular Science Monthlies, a magazine carrying lively debates on evolution and the implications of natural law. Charlotte considered this study the beginning of her real education. For six years she read systematically, analyzing relationships between people and their environment. Included among the books she read were Andrew White, Warfare of Religion and Science (1876); James Freeman Clarke, Ten Great Religions (1871); William Boyd Hawkins, Cave Hunting (1874); Edward Burnett Tylor, Primitive Culture (1871); and James Fergusson, Rude Stone Monuments (1872).[25]

While Charlotte realized that her program of self-education was not commensurate with college training, she evaluated the experience as one of great intellectual value.

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[25]CPG, Note, Folder 26 CPG Collection; Frederick Beecher Perkins to CPG, 15 October 1878, Folder 26, CPG Collection; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 11 May 1897, Folder 41, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, p. 36.

She reflected that reading "from a strong desire to know, and in orderly sequence and relation was to give me a clear connected general outline of the story of life on earth, and of our nature and progress, which has proved lastingly useful." The insight gained from this six-year period of intensive reading influenced her work for the next half-century.[26]

Charlotte's study of the implications of natural law resulted in a philosophical outlook founded on Charles Darwin's theory of evolutionary change. Rejecting a static world view based on absolutes, she conceived of reality in terms of constant flux and thus viewed society as subject to improvement. Like William James she envisioned an open, unfinished universe in which human action played a vital part. She found hope and optimism in the idea of an undetermined, changing world, for it offered man freedom to direct his own life and that of society. All her later ideas of social reform rested on the premise that change was a fundamental fact of life.[27]

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[26] CPG, Living, p. 37. Charlotte's studies were interrupted in the early 1880's when an emotional illness diminished her power of concentration and impaired her reading comprehension.

[27] Charlotte's position anticipated the reform Darwinism of Lester Frank Ward, who argued in Dynamic Sociology (1883)

Charlotte's intellectual development during late adolescence crystallized into an empirical method of logic consistent with her autonomous self-image. In studying physics she had become intrigued with the rational aspect of natural law. "Here was Law, at last," she exclaimed; "not authority, not records of questionable truth or solemn tradition, but laws that could be counted on and Proved. That was my delight, to know surely." She based her epistemology on two principles of scientific research: the examination of assumptions and the study of cause and effect. Being one's own authority necessitated reliance upon personal intellect, and she determined to accept no ideas she could not understand. This decision led to a formidable task, that of constructing her own religion.[28]

Exposed as a child to the Swedenborgian precepts of her mother, Charlotte had acquired a distaste for mysticism. Theology as a rational concern claimed her interest while reading books on ancient history sent by Frederick. James

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that man, through force of mind, could direct and hasten the course of evolution. Her later work refuted the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, who warned in Synthetic Philosophy (1860) that man's interference with the process of natural selection in human society would impede progress of the race.

[28]CPG, Living, pp. 29, 38-39; CPG to Charles Walter Stetson, 20 February 1882, Folder 39, CPG Collection.

Freeman Clarke's Ten Great Religions focused her attention to the contradiction in man's worship of gods and his failure in ethical conduct. Applying the concept of evolution to this enigma, she concluded that the progress of religion had been arrested by adherence to a "fixed revelation." Undue reliance upon authority had forced man into the precarious position of coping with a changing environment through application of static ideas. A religion based on reason would free one from trying to live by outmoded beliefs.[29]

Charlotte saw Biblical justification for creating a rational theology rather than accepting by faith a priestly authority. Ecclesiastes 1:13 seemed an imperative to individual truth-seeking: "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven; this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith." She sought to replace faith with understanding through the "sore travail" of using her intellect.[30]

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[29]CPT, Living, pp. 25-27; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 24 August 1897, Folder 44, CPG Collection.

[30]Forerunner 1(June 1909):6.

In seeking spiritual understanding Charlotte probed fundamental questions in search of self-evident answers. She viewed the basic fact of creation as action, power, force--"Call it God." Nature's progress ranged upward, from lower to higher life forms; therefore, its creative force, God, was good. Definitions of good and evil came from observing nature's telic impulse: "That is right for a given organism which leads to its best development." Evil resulted from that which hindered growth. Thus, pain and suffering could be alleviated by removing obstacles to functional development. Death was an essential part of life; its absence would result in an unnatural, static world. The devil? Simply an anachronism from primitive times when man projected his own sense of evil to a personified being.[31]

A major problem in constructing a rational theology concerned the relation of human beings to a God defined as "Force" rather than person. Charlotte's deism did not preclude a relational structure. She reasoned that contact with God as an impersonal power was not only possible, but necessary. The relationship entailed making one's self open to God--like tapping a universal reservoir--and

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[31]CPG, Living, pp. 39-40; CPG, "God," Folder 16-2, CPG Collection; Forerunner 1(January 1909):13.

letting the Force flow through one in the form of love and service. To know God was to _do_ God. But toward what end?[32]

She approached the problem of purpose by imagining what a conscious, rational Force would want of its creation:

> What does God want of the earth? To whirl and spin and keep its times and seasons. What of the vegetable world? To blossom and bear fruit. Of the animal world? The same and more. We with all life are under the great law of evolution.

She perceived human purpose, then, in terms of assisting mankind's growth and progress. This meant creating heaven for all in the present world, not seeking salvation for self in another world. It meant being used, not being saved. Charlotte faulted organized religion for distorting this purpose by emphasizing an afterlife. As an adult, she chose not to affiliate with any religious group, but to be an "apostle-at-large" preaching social evolution.[33]

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[32] _Forerunner_ 2(September 1910):233; Charlotte argued that to think of God as person imposed human restrictions on a non-human being. To call God "He" postulated sex--"a man-shaped deity without internal organs." _Forerunner_ 7(December 1916):326. Charlotte referred to God as "He," but considered the pronoun merely a survival of anthropomorphic terminology, CPG, _Living_, p. 182.

[33] CPG, _Living_, p. 42; _Forerunner_ 2(June 1910):162; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 1 August 1897, Folder 44, CPG Collection. Although Charlotte rejected most labels, she accepted that of preacher. During her career as a lecturer she frequently filled the pulpit of various churches, delivering sermons on moral truths.

Social sensitivity had long been part of Charlotte's nature. As a young child she had awakened one morning with a "vast concept my vocabulary utterly failed to describe . . . an enormous sense of social responsibility with power to handle it." This humanitarian impulse had been further stimulated by Thomas Nast's cartoons in Harper's Weekly lambasting political corruption. As a ten-year old school girl, her pretend games at recess involved eradicating the civic crimes of Boss Tweed.[34]

Charlotte's social awareness became more sophisticated as a result of her theological exploration. She concluded that religion's emphasis on salvation sanctified individualism at the expense of a larger concern for humanity. Social progress rested on the premise that society, not the individual, comprised the basic human unit. Moreover, society was not simply an aggregate of discrete individuals like grains of sand. Charlotte defined society as a collective life form comprised of organically related human beings. Just as a physical body consisted of specialized cells functioning to maintain the body through nourishment and protection, so a social body consisted of specialized persons who worked to maintain the well being of the community. Social service,

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[34]CPG, Living, pp. 13, 21.

therefore, meant contributing to society's nourishment and growth through human work, that is, "in the crafts, trades, arts, and sciences through which we are maintained and developed."[35]

By late adolescence Charlotte's social sensitivity extended beyond childhood concepts of righting the world's wrongs to a philosophically defined course of action. As she viewed it, "The first duty of a human being is to assume right functional relation to society--more briefly, to find your real job and do it." In effect, she had translated the imperative of personal growth through the full use of one's powers to that of society's progress through the full participation of its individual members.[36]

Charlotte thus completed an important phase in developing a humanist philosophy. Striving toward an autonomous, responsible lifestyle, she had cultivated her own growth in four dimensions--physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social. She now envisioned nurturing society's growth in these same areas. Assessing her life at age twenty-one, she noted the advances she had made thus far and reaffirmed

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[35]CPG, "A Study in Ethics," p. 1, Folder 230, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, p. 42.

[36]CPG, Living, p. 42.

her desire for continued self-improvement in order to elevate the human race. Presently self-supporting (a status she deemed essential to autonomy) through painting and teaching art, she anticipated expressing her ideas of social progress through some form of writing. She felt "tremendously upheld inside by the sense of power, of purpose, of big work before me, and by the triple-plated defense of my strong philosophy." Exulting in "good health, great hopes, and constant industry," she could imagine no circumstances that would make her unhappy.[37]

Charlotte's personal pilgrimage exploring humanist values had equipped her for a remarkable public mission. Its full expression, however, would be postponed by fifteen years of turmoil. In 1881 she wrote in her diary, "This year I attained my majority--may I never lose it." She could not foresee that events in the ensuing decade and a half would sorely test that resolve. The forging of her humanist philosophy continued, albeit through fire.[38]

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[37]Ibid., pp. 70-71, 77, 81.

[38]Ibid., p. 81.

CHAPTER III

A PERIOD OF TRANSITION, 1882-1896

A certain poignancy marked Gilman's twenty-first year. At the height of her powers, she nevertheless intuited the loneliness in store for one filled with high ambition. As she expressed it, "No one I knew had any interest in 'the human race.'" To contemporaries attuned to self-interest, a young woman bent on serving humanity would seem a remote figure indeed. Although she had enjoyed many acquaintances growing up, she had developed only a few intimate friendships. During this twenty-first year she lost her closest friend, Martha Luther. Martha's marriage and subsequent departure from Providence left Gilman desolate.[1]

This loss was assuaged the following year when she met Charles Walter Stetson, a talented, struggling Providence artist. Mutual aesthetic and intellectual interests led to a companionship that Gilman found deeply satisfying. She

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[1]CPG, _The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography_ (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), pp. 48, 76-80.

wrote Stetson of her "glorious happiness" in knowing him--the first man whom she recognized as an equal. As she reflected in her autobiography, "It seemed as if I was at last to find what I had hardly known enough of to long for--companionship." But she was unprepared for the suddenness with which friendship turned into courtship. Stetson's quick proposal of marriage, "though scarce ten times met," left her disconcerted.[2]

Not wishing to complain "of being offered the crown of womanhood," she explained to Stetson: "I knew of course the time would come when I must choose between two lives, but never did I dream that it would come so soon, and that the struggle would be so terrible." Gilman had never faced such a wrenching conflict between duty and pleasure. She regarded the question of marriage to be hard enough if one were just considering the matter of love. But to add the question, "Which life can I work best in?" presented a cruel dilemma. She told Stetson, "I'm not a tenderhearted child, nor an impulsive girl--but a clear headed woman weighing a lifetime in her hand." It was "not just a question of if I love you or not--that would be easier."

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[2]CPG to Stetson, 13 February 1882, Folder 39, CPG Collection; ibid., 21 February 1882; ibid., 5 February 1882.

The verse she wrote for him best describes her feelings at having to choose between mission and passion:

> Do you think it is nothing . . . .
> To suddenly meet with a brother soul
> Earnestly seeking the same goal?
> Happy is she of a single mind
> Who could leave this mountain path behind
> For a tenderer ministry.[3]

Gilman's conscientiousness allowed little room for spontaneous desire. "I have studied and practiced self-control," she said, "til it is second nature that pleasure to me is always a thing to be distrusted"; thus, despite "every force of nature driving me to you . . . I am crushing my heart under foot." She prayed "for strength to turn my face from the paradise that lies before me," from a life "which I should most enjoy." She rejected Stetson's proposal of marriage.[4]

Her formula for making decisions involved carefully weighing the consequences of conflicting choices. She described her reasoning to Stetson:

> If I marry I can never reconsider. If I try my own way--if I find on fair trial I cannot do as I think--perhaps--Therefore . . . it is right for me to give a fair chance to feeling and instinct which are certainly

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[3]Ibid., 21 February 1882; ibid., 20 February 1882; ibid., 6 March 1882.

[4]Ibid., 21 February 1882; ibid., 20 February 1882.

> well founded; to risk the loss of a few years of possible happiness, rather than to risk the endurance of a lifetime's possible pain.[5]

Gilman admitted that at times the new humility Stetson had taught her made it seem absurd to have such trust in her own opinion, particularly in an opinion that stood alone "against the precedent of centuries." But the girlhood resolve to be her own authority prevailed:

> Here is a force--the strongest known to human nature which says, "Yield!" and I stand quietly against it. The voice of all the ages sounds in my ears, saying that this is noble, natural and right; that no woman yet has ever attempted to stand alone as I intend but that she had to submit or else repented in dust and ashes--too late! And I have nothing to answer but the meek assertion that I am different from--if not better than--these, and that my life is mine in spite of a myriad lost sisters before me.[6]

But out of a sense of fairness to Stetson, she agreed to re-think her decision and to wait a year before reaching a final conclusion. Her reconsideration stemmed from a need to analyze what she should do, not what she wanted to do. While believing in theory that marriage and motherhood did not preclude a career, she continued to have misgivings that domestic obligations would threaten her hard-won autonomy.

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[5]Ibid., 20 February 1882.

[6]Ibid.

Inner conflict raged during the ensuing months, leaving her debilitated and disoriented. Theretofore rational, decisive, and hopeful--she now registered emotional extremes, uncertainty, and a forboding of gloom. At one point she requested of Stetson, but could not secure, a year's separation "to recover clear judgment." When she finally agreed to marriage--after an occasion when Stetson had experienced a personal disappointment--resignation rather than happiness characterized her mood; but "in spite of reactions and misgivings," she said, "I kept my word."[7]

Gilman seemed capable of intellectualizing her love for Stetson but not enjoying it. She wrote on 3 November 1883: "I have promised to marry Charles Walter Stetson. Now love is more than _wanting_. _Love_ is the infinite desire to benefit." In evaluating contributions she could make to Stetson, she concluded that "the only thing to do is to sanctify and upbuild myself, and then, loving him, he can be bettered and made happy thereby." She approached matrimony duty-bound to increase in wisdom, strength, bravery, and unselfishness.[8]

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[7] CPG, _Living_, p. 83.

[8] CPG, "A Word to Myself," pp. 1-2, Folder 16, CPG Collection.

But her resoluteness mingled with dispair. On 1 January 1884 she greeted the year of her wedding with the following statement in her diary:

> With no pride, with little hope, with uncertain occasional happiness, with no glad energy and living power, with no faith or nearly none, but still, thank God! with firm belief in what is right and wrong, I begin the new year. Let me recognize fully that I do not look forward to happiness, that I have no decided hope of success . . . . Perhaps it was not meant for me to work as I intended. Perhaps I am not to be of use to others. I am weak. I anticipate a future of failure and suffering. Children sick and unhappy. Husband miserable because of my distress, and I--
> . . . .
> And let me not forget to be grateful for what I have, some strength, some purpose, some design, some progress, some esteem, respect and affection. And some Love. Which I can neither see, feel nor believe in when the darkness comes. I mean this year to try hard for somewhat of my former force and courage. As I remember it was got by practice.[9]

Gilman's words characterized a dilemma faced by many nineteenth century feminists who sensed the threat of marriage to their identity. Women who valued intellectual independence and who sought a career often rebelled against the authoritarian structure of Victorian marriage which cast wives into submissive roles limited to the domestic sphere. Angelina Grimké, Antoinette Brown, and Lucy Stone were three early feminists who agonized over the effect of marriage upon their mission to "work in the world." Each

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[9]CPG, Living, p. 84.

married only when assured of an equitable husband-wife relationship. Grimké and Theodore Weld, in their wedding vows in 1838, rejected a woman's obligation to obey her husband and repudiated laws granting a man control of his wife's property and person. Brown and Samuel Blackwell agreed to be "self-sovereigns" in their marriage in 1856. Stone and Henry Blackwell (Samuel's brother) read a joint statement at their wedding in 1855, denouncing laws and customs which sanctified a wife's inferior legal, social, and intellectual status. In a more startling gesture, Stone retained her maiden name. Although the marital decisions of these women predate Gilman's experience by several decades, they give insight into the dilemma faced by independent women contemplating marriage in the nineteenth century. The three feminists cited were unique in basing their marriages on equality.[10]

Gilman's marriage to Stetson on 4 May 1884 carried no such guarantee of autonomy, and from the first it promised disaster. Despite Stetson's love and attentiveness, despite his bride's domestic skills, despite mutual assurances of

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[10] Page Smith, Daughters of the Promised Land; Women in American History (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), pp. 107-117; Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1959), p. 64.

happiness--Gilman experienced a malaise of spirit which by winter had deepened into extreme depression. She attributed the "gray cloud" enveloping her to pregnancy. But the birth of her daughter, Katharine, the following March brought no relief. For the next five months Gilman, the stalwart Spartan, lacked the strength to read, talk, write, paint, or even eat. She spent her days and nights crying, and, for no apparent reason. The strong will had collapsed.[11]

The knowledge that no physical malady existed only intensified Gilman's melancholia. Avant-garde physicians in the Gilded Age recognized a new disease arising from the tensions of industrialization; they called it "neurasthenia" or "nervous prostration." However, most people in Gilman's milieu had little understanding of neurasthenia (and even less patience). It seemed but a euphemism for laziness. Gilman later recalled: "To be recognizably ill one must be confined to one's bed, and preferably in pain. That a heretofore markedly vigorous young woman, with every comfort about her, should collapse in this lamentable manner was inexplicable." A range of advice came from friends of this modern-day, female Job: "You should use your will." "Force some happiness into your life." "Read a good book." "Think

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[11] CPG, Living, pp. 85-89.

pleasant thoughts." She did try to follow her mother's advice, "If you would get up and do something you would feel better," but to no avail. It all seemed inexplicable to Gilman too, and she blamed herself: "You had health and strength and hope and glorious work before you--and you threw it all away. You were called to serve humanity, and you cannot serve yourself. No good as a wife, no good as a mother, no good as anything. And you did it yourself!"[12]

Gilman's doctor knew nothing to prescribe for an illness with no visible cause, but he did recommend a change of scene. In October 1885 she left for an extended visit with her friend, Grace Ellery Channing, in Pasadena, California. She felt a renewal of strength at the very start of the journey, and the months spent among friends in the midst of California's natural beauty seemed to complete her recovery. She returned to Providence in March 1886, ready to resume her duties as wife and mother. She had been home scarcely a month when the illness reappeared, and she again lay prostrate in tears.[13]

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[12] Ibid., pp. 90-91; see John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), Chapter 1, for a perceptive view of female neurasthenia in the nineteenth century. Betty Friedan discusses a twentieth century version of this malady in The Feminine Mystique (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963), Chapter 1.

[13] CPG, Living, pp. 92-95.

In 1877, the third year of her illness, Gilman went to Philadelphia to consult with Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, a nationally prominent neurologist. Diagnosing her problem as hysteria (a form of neurasthenia), he advised her to accept a more domestic life style as an antidote. Mitchell shared with his medical peers the theory that a woman's life force centered around her reproductive system and that intellectual activity siphoned vital energy from this area, leaving women vulnerable to nervous prostration. He therefore recommended that Gilman curtail mental activity to two hours a day and never again attempt to write or paint.[14]

She followed Mitchell's advice for three months and came close to a complete mental collapse. Then summoning the strength left to her, she resumed a partial work schedule and recovered enough to realize that divorce was inevitable. A pattern had emerged during four years of marriage whereby her illness abated when she left home, only to intensify upon her return. It now seemed clear that the marriage had been a mistake and must be severed before permanent mental damage resulted. With mutual affection

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[14] _Forerunner_ 4(October 1912):271; Haller and Haller, _Physician_, p. 37.

and sorrow she and Stetson separated in 1888, postponing divorce until arrangements could be worked out.[15]

Gilman attributed her breakdown to an emotionally deprived childhood, to a rigid girlhood idealism, and to the "mis-marriage" with Stetson. Undoubtedly a major factor must have been a realization of the fear she had expressed to Stetson during their courtship: that domestic life might impede her mission to improve society. It is important to note that, contrary to some interpretations, marriage and motherhood per se did not cause her illness; nor did "failure" in these roles make her an embittered feminist. In 1900 she married George Houghton Gilman, with whom she lived happily for thirty-four years; and her relationship to Katharine reflected consistent efforts to be a wise, loving parent.[16]

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[15] Forerunner 4(October 1912):271; CPG, Living, p. 96. Their divorce was granted in 1894.

[16] CPG, Living, p. 98. William L. Doyle portrays Gilman as an unsuccessful wife and mother whose feminist writings were an attempt to justify her failure in domestic relations. He attributes her popularity to a mass feminine neurosis among her generation which fostered response from women as frustrated as she. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1960), pp. 211-12. For a discussion of Gilman's relationship with Katharine see CPG, Living, pp. 153-164. An undated note (about 1894) from Katharine reveals the following assessment of her mother: "A good mother have you ever been to me dealing with me justly as if I'd been a man." Folder 34, CPG Collection.

These positive marital and maternal experiences give a perspective that is essential to understanding Gilman's feminist ideology which criticized certain aspects of both roles. She did not reject the institutions of marriage and motherhood but sought to reform them through a more humanized womanhood.[17]

Gilman's mental affliction was not unlike that of many nineteenth century women who clashed with society's expectations of them as hearth-centered non-intellectuals. Women of note who experienced similar nervous disorders included Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher, and Jane Addams. Stowe and Beecher both sought treatment for nervous prostration in the 1840's. Stowe spent seven months at Brattleboro, a Vermont health resort, to recover from paralysis attributed to the strain of living with an authoritarian husband. Beecher, suffering from periodic depression, found at Brattleboro "an oasis of self-interest

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[17] An example of the subtle distortions possible in interpreting Gilman's divorce is William L. O'Neill's account in Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), pp. 38-39. O'Neill describes her as a wife suffering "from the conflict between ambition and motherhood," a problem she resolved by divorcing an "entirely satisfactory husband and giving up an agreeable child," a "brutal" way of extricating herself from "the domestic trap." "Having thus cleared her decks," she then enjoyed success as a writer and feminist.

in the world of self denial she had created for herself." She spent two months of each year there from 1843 through the next decade. Her biographer interprets Beecher's recurring bouts of nervousness as a reaction to the "tension between her assertive public role and the society's preference for passive women." Beecher herself addressed the problem of female nervousness in her book, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (1854), arguing that the abnormal number of chronically ill American women was due to conflicts between their own needs and society's definition of their role. Polling over 1,000 women in seventy-nine communities, she found the ratio of sick to healthy women to be three to one.[18]

Between the 1840's and 1880's psychologically troubled women turned increasingly to hydrotherapy for relief, and by the 1880's water-cure spas such as Brattleboro numbered over 200. During the 1890's the tension felt by a rising number of emancipated women resulted in a deluge of neurasthenics who flocked to health spas, smoked opium, experimented with galvanic electrization, tried "nerve food" diets, and

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[18] O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave, p. 142; Smith, Daughters, pp. 133-38; Kathryn K. Sklar, Catharine Beecher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 184, 204-5.

converted to Christian Science. The most frequent prescription that physicians offered neurasthenic women, however, paralleled that given to Gilman by S. Weir Mitchell: a more domestic life with minimum intellectual activity. Even a prominent woman physician, Dr. Margaret Cleavers, herself a product of rare intellectual achievement, gave women this counsel. Cleaves believed that neurasthenia plagued women who engaged in mental pursuits, and claimed that her own depression had resulted from a "sprained brain."[19]

Gilded Age women found it difficult to resist the admonition of learned physicians to adjust to a domestic, non-intellectual life, particularly when doctors added the warning that neurasthenia signaled a loss of sexual instinct. Jane Addams proved to be an exception, for despite a long seige of depression experienced after graduation from college in 1882, she continued to pursue an intellectual, independent life. Addams did, however, accept the prognosis that woman's renunciation of a domestic role was often gained at a high emotional cost. In contrast, Gilman deplored this idea; for it was by escaping the

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[19]Sklar, Beecher, p. 206; Haller and Haller, Physician, pp. 26, 29.

limitations of the domestic sphere that she finally emerged from the deep morass of depression, at least to a functional degree.[20]

Although Gilman gradually recovered mental and emotional stability, she never regained full use of her faculties. An inability to concentrate proved the most serious impairment. Episodic blanks in memory plagued her, and exhaustion accompanied any strain of her attention span. Never again could she read, study, or listen for long periods of time. She did retain, however, the ability to think clearly and logically, to relate ideas creatively, and to articulate her thoughts in speaking and writing. Indeed, she developed a remarkable capacity for graphic expression, writing easily a thousand words an hour for three hour stretches--enough to equal twenty-five books, as she reckoned it, between 1890 and 1935. She lamented that at that rate she should have produced a great deal more, had she kept "the natural power" of her mind. In subtracting work periods from the time then spent resting, she estimated that "that early error in mating cost me twenty-five years of . . . helpless idleness and black misery."[21]

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[20]Haller and Haller, Physician, p. 28.

[21]CPG, Living, pp. 100-103. Gilman described her state of mind as follows: "My head swoons over other people's

In the fall of 1888 Gilman, accompanied by Katharine, moved to Pasadena with the hope of becoming well and self-supporting; California remained her home until 1895. Stetson joined her for Christmas in 1888 to attempt a reconciliation. But a year's trial proved useless, and he returned to Providence in January 1890. During the ensuing year Gilman experienced a new sense of freedom. Body and spirit revived; renewed physical strength allowed a resumption of intellectual activity. By the end of 1890 she had written thirty-three articles, twenty-three poems, and a short story--as well as several plays in collaboration with Grace Ellery Channing. Furthermore, she sold enough material to newspapers and magazines to achieve her goal of economic independence.[22]

A high point of that year came in April when the Nationalist published her poem "Similar Cases," a satire on evolution. William Dean Howells, the dean of American literature in the Gilded Age, wrote to thank Gilman for the

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thoughts. But my own have sprouted fast." CPG to Houghton Gilman, 11 May 1897, Folder 41; CPG, Note, Folder 153, CPG Collection.

[22]CPG, Note, Folder 266, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, pp. 109-111. Gilman also helped edit the Pacific Monthly between 1889 and 1901. Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1930-1968), 4:107.

poem, saying, "We have nothing since the Biglow Papers half so good for a good cause as 'Similar Cases.'" Within a short time he wrote again requesting a poem for Cosmopolitan, the magazine he edited. He wanted "something as good and 'wicked' as 'Similar Cases.'"[23]

Howells' commendation provided personal affirmation for Gilman and helped launch her reputation. In 1898 she credited Howells with being the first critic to speak of her work. "He didn't wait for others anywhere or for more books, he reached out a strong hand at the first word. I'll never forget it." Well aware of Howells' reputation as a patron of new talent, she recognized her debt to him. She noted that it was "Howells' nature to carp at accepted masters and to dare speak at once to the unrecognized new author. I think very highly of him for more than personal reasons."[24]

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[23]Howells to CPG, 9 June 1890, Folder 120, CPG Collection; ibid., 19 December 1891.

[24]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 20 October 1898, Folder 57, CPG Collection; ibid., 23 October 1898. Theodore Dreiser described Howells as a "lookout on the watch-tower, straining for a first glimpse of approaching genius." Quoted in Van Wyck Brooks, Howells: His Life and World (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1959), p. 268. The relationship between Howells and Gilman, begun by correspondence in the 1890's, developed further after her move to New York City in 1900. Two significant parallels in their lives perhaps helped

Gilman's most significant literary effort in 1890 was "The Yellow Wallpaper," an autobiographical short story. The plot concerned a woman who suffered a nervous breakdown, consulted a doctor whose philosophy paralled that of S. Weir Mitchell, and then followed his orders to abstain from all intellectual activity. The resulting insanity experienced by the woman represented Gilman's fictionalized projection of what her own fate would have been, had she done as Mitchell advised.

Gilman asked Howells' help in submitting "The Yellow Wallpaper" for publication in the Atlantic Monthly, but to no avail. Despite Howells' position as former editor of the Atlantic (from 1871 to 1881), his recommendation of the story carried little weight, for the staid magazine had become increasingly conservative in the 1890's under the editorship of H.E. Scudder. In returning the manuscript to Gilman, Scudder included a jarring note: "Mr. Howells has handed me this story. I could not forgive myself if I

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foster their friendship. Like Gilman, Howells empathized with socialist principles (increasingly so after the Haymarket riot in 1886); but he refused to join the Socialist party, declaring that he did not wish to wear a label. Howells' choice of a literary vehicle (in his case the novel) to express social criticism also paralleled Gilman's course. Edward Wagenknecht, William Dean Howells: The Friendly Eye (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 270.

made others as miserable as I have made myself." When "The Yellow Wallpaper" did appear in the New England Magazine in January 1892, it elicited further extreme responses. A Boston physician protested that "the story was enough to drive people mad to read it" and should not be allowed in print. Another doctor called it the "best study of incipient insanity I have ever seen, and, begging your pardon, have you ever been there?" But most important to Gilman, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell (for whom she had written the story and to whom she sent a copy) changed his treatment of neurasthenics after reading "The Yellow Wallpaper."[25]

Gilman considered "The Yellow Wallpaper" to be "no more literature than my other stuff, being definitely written for a purpose." But in fact the story ranked highly as a work of fiction. It was included by Howells in his 1919 compilation, Masterpieces of American Fiction.[26] Moreover, the story was significant as an example of naturalist literature written by a woman. In the 1890's a naturalist

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[25] "Mr. Scudder and the Atlantic," Atlantic Monthly 89(March 1902):433-34, describes Scudder's influence on the magazine. Scudder to CPG, 10 October 1890, Folder 126, CPG Collection; Notes on "The Yellow Wallpaper," Folder 221, CPG Collection.

[26] Published as Great Modern American Stories (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920).

trend in writing began to displace the realism which had prevailed since the 1870's. Whereas realism portrayed commonplace aspects of life, naturalism stressed harsher realities. "The Yellow Wallpaper," incorporating the pessimistic determinism characteristic of naturalism, represented a breakthrough in the literary pattern of female writers whose work in the Gilded Age ranged from sentimentalism to realism.

Howells, considered the foremost realist of his era, held conservative opinions regarding the propriety of literature, feeling that nothing should shock middle class sensibilities. Ostensibly, then, his selection of Gilman's "terrible story" (as he described it) as a "masterpiece" of fiction seems out of character. During the half-century span of his career, however, Howells registered increasing openness to unconventional literature. In the 1870's he described himself as being "very Victorian in my preference for decency"; but two decades later he reacted to "the puritanic narrowness" that "cramps our whole race." He reflected that naturalist novels "viewed in the old fashioned way" would be shocking, but "why look at them that way." Howells demonstrated positive response to naturalism in his endorsement of Stephen Crane and Frank Norris in the 1890's.

He praised Crane's Maggie, A Girl of the Streets (1892) as a "grimy" tale having the "quality of fatal necessity"; and he lauded Norris' McTeague (1899) and The Octopus (1901) as novels of "signal mastery." By 1919 Howells had helped affect general acceptance of naturalism.[27]

Howells' high regard for "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be attributed not only to his growing interest in naturalism, but to a propensity for psychological plots apparent in his own work by 1903. Influenced by the work of Henrik Ibsen and by his own "preternatural experiences," Howells began studying psychological case histories in medical texts and analyzing his dreams. He subsequently wrote two volumes of short stories about "filmy shapes that haunt the dusk." He confided to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell that the psychic stories in these books, Between the Dark and Daylight (1907) and Questionable Shapes (1903), were autobiographical. In a striking parallel with "The Yellow Wallpaper," Howells created in The Shadow of a Dream (1890) a character called Dr. Wingate who was a nerve specialist reminiscent of Mitchell.[28]

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[27]Brooks, Howells, pp. 89, 269-72.

[28]Ibid., pp. 223-24.

When in 1893 Gilman published In This Our World, a collection of her poems dealing with social progress, Howells once again commended her work, both publicly and privately. In the North American Review he praised her "civic satire" as a "form of her own invention." He later wrote her of his pleasure in reading the poems: "They are the wittiest and wisest things you have written . . . you speak with the tongue of a two-edged sword." He added that in his "bourgois moments" he feared that her frankness might limit her success. The contrary appeared true. In 1895 a second edition of In This Our World sold at a price double the first, and in 1898 a third edition appeared; in 1895 T. Fisher Unwin of London printed an English edition. When Gilman visited England in 1896, she found her reputation greater there than in America, due to the popularity of Unwin's publication of her poems.[29]

The beginnings of literary success did not bring commensurate financial reward. In 1891 Gilman moved from Pasadena to the San Francisco Bay area to find a broader area for her work and to provide a home for her ailing mother. Mary Perkins lived with her in Oakland until 1893

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[29]William Dean Howells, "The New Poetry," North American Review 168(May 1899):589; Howells to CPG, 11 July 1894, Folder 120, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, p. 201.

when she died of cancer. These were difficult years as Gilman struggled to support her mother and her daughter with meager income from lectures, writing, and boarders.[30]

They were at the same time years of expanding interests as the West Coast predilection for social innovation stirred her reform instincts. She began to participate in the activities of California socialists and feminists, rapidly becoming an acclaimed speaker in both movements. From these associations her goal to improve the human race assumed a twin focus: the problems of labor and of women.

Gilman's first exposure to organized socialism came through an invitation to address the Nationalist Club of Pasadena. A chain of Nationalist Clubs had spread throughout the country following the 1888 publication of Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, 2000-1887. The utopian novel portrayed twenty-first century America as a socialist commonwealth in which economic competition had been replaced by cooperation. Bellamy rejected Marxian concepts of class warfare and violence. He envisioned a gradual nationalization of American industries and natural resources as the logical end to capitalism's abuses. Gilded Age critics of laissez-faire industrial society responded to Bellamy's

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[30]CPG, Living, p. 152.

ideas in large numbers. By 1890, 162 Nationalist Clubs met in twenty-seven states; and the Nationalist, established in Boston, functioned as the party magazine. The influence of Looking Backward can be attributed partly to Bellamy's terminology; for although Nationalism was a form of socialism, its nomenclature had a more acceptable connotation to Americans than the latter term.[31]

Gilman identified with Bellamy's concepts, particularly his organic view of society, and she developed ties with local Nationalist, socialist, and labor groups. In 1896 she was selected as a socialist delegate to the International Socialist and Labor Congress to be held in England. Upon receiving a membership card into the socialist party, however, she refused to sign it because of the party's association with Marxian revolutionism. Like Bellamy, she disavowed the class-struggle thesis. She espoused the "early humanitarian kind" of socialism based on the ideas of Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. Although Gilman had declined socialist membership, she did attend the International Congress as an accredited delegate of the Alameda County Federation of Trades. Her affiliation with this group had

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[31]Daniel Aaron, Men of Good Hope: A Story of American Progressives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 102-4, 113.

begun in 1892 when the Federation awarded her a gold medal for her prize essay, "The Labor Movement."[32]

In England Gilman became acquainted with William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, and other members of the London Fabian Society. The Fabians admired her socialist poetry in _In This Our World_, and she respected their gradualist approach to socialism. When they offered her membership in the Fabian Society, she accepted it as an honor. Upon returning to the United States she became an editor of the American Fabian, contributing articles from January 1897 through mid-1898. Her position as a Fabian who refused to identify with mainstream socialism left her doubly vulnerable to critics. Political and economic conservatives disparaged her as a socialist, while orthodox socialists considered her a maverick.[33]

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[32]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 1 August 1897, Folder 44, CPG Collection; CPG, _Living_, p. 198; Certificate of membership, Federal Labor Union No. 5761, Oakland, California, 28 May 1896, Folder 5, CPG Collection; "The Work and Influence of Charlotte Perkins Stetson in the Labor Movement," _American Fabian_ 3(January 1897):12. This article pays tribute to Gilman for carrying the labor cause "into church societies, press clubs and women's associations, . . . universities," and compelling "educators to see that the fundamental principle of society is an economic principle."

[33]CPG, _Living_, pp. 198-203. During its brief existence (from about 1896 to 1902) American Fabianism emphasized ecumenicism among reformers and, therefore, took an educational rather than a political approach to socialism. Howard H.

Gilman's initial exposure to women's organizations came in 1891 when she joined the Pacific Coast Woman's Press Association. Although she subsequently joined other San Francisco groups, such as the Woman's Alliance and the State Council of Women, the Press Association claimed her primary interest. She served as its president in 1894 and co-edited its paper, the Impress (formerly called the Bulletin), from 1893 to 1895. She helped arrange, and addressed, the 1895 and 1896 sessions of the Woman's Congress of the Pacific Coast, which featured prominent feminists from the East. Among the speakers were Jane Addams and Susan B. Anthony, both of whom became her friends.[34]

Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), p. 261, calls this stance a "lack of political courage characteristic of the whole middle class socialist movement." In 1905 Gilman joined the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, an organization of intellectuals who promoted socialism among college students. The ISS, however, did not participate in Socialist party matters. David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 54-55.

[34]CPG, "Outside Work," Folder 16, CPG Collection; Programs for Woman's Congress of the Pacific Coast, 1895, 1896, Folder 4, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, p. 174. For a discussion of woman suffrage in California, see Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., eds., History of Woman's Suffrage, 1848-1920, 6 vols. (1881-1922; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 4: Chapter 28. This account notes that in 1891 nearly every California organization, male or female, "seemed to be permeated with the

Both Addams and Anthony tried to interest Gilman in their specific areas of reform. In 1895 Gilman accepted Addams' invitation to visit Hull House in Chicago. After a three month stay, during which she gave frequent lectures, she worked for several months at "Little Hell," a settlement house on Chicago's north side. She decided, however, that settlement work was too limiting. "My interest was in all humanity," she said, "not merely in the under side of it; in sociology, not social pathology."[35]

In January 1896 Gilman accepted Anthony's invitation to speak at the National American Woman Suffrage Association Convention in Washington, D.C. This was her first appearance on a national platform. She addressed the convention on "The Ballot As an Improver of womanhood," read several of her poems, and preached two sermons on the opening Sunday. In addition, she addressed the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives on the need for woman suffrage. And in an important business session at the convention she voted with a minority of twelve against a resolution dissociating the organization from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's controversial work, The Woman's Bible (1895).[36]

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agitation for woman suffrage. Among the most effective speakers was Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Stetson," (p. 479).

[35] CPG, Living, pp. 184-85.

[36] Ibid., p. 187; Stanton et al., History, 4:256, 265-66, 277.

Anthony urged her to become a suffrage worker, but Gilman felt that social and economic independence for women held greater priority than winning the ballot. She recalled later, "I worked for Equal Suffrage when opportunity offered, believing it to be reasonable and necessary, though by no means as important as some of its protagonists held." Suffrage reform was too limited for her world view. She envisioned herself not a reformer but a philosopher:

> I worked for various reforms as Socrates went to war when Athens needed his services, but we do not remember him as a soldier. My business was to find out what ailed society, and how most easily and naturally to improve it . . . . It might be called the effort of a social inventor.[37]

The distinction between reformer and philosopher proved too subtle for some critics. According to Gilman, anti-suffragists had her "blackly marked 'Suffragist,'" while suffragists considered her "a doubtful if not dangerous ally on account of [her] theory of the need of economic independence of women." But one suffrage leader told Charlotte, "After all, I think you will do our cause more good than harm, because what you ask is so much worse than what we ask that they will grant our demands in order to escape yours."[38]

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[37] CPG, Living, pp. 174, 182, 186-87.

[38] Ibid., p. 198.

Thus, in the 1890's Gilman established her own approach to feminism. Viewing specific reforms within the Woman's Rights Movement as important but secondary, she limited her involvement to peripheral support. She committed herself instead to a larger role, that of idealogue. By 1895 she had begun to synthesize her ideas concerning labor and women into a unified social philosophy which predicated human progress on women's economic independence.[39]

To articulate her philosophy, Gilman felt compelled to leave California, for slanderous newspaper coverage of her divorce from Stetson in 1894 had damaged her reputation. The divorce had been a complex matter. California law required stringent grounds for divorce, making such action difficult for a couple who mutually desired to end their marriage. By prior agreement with Stetson, Gilman had in 1891 sued for divorce under California law on grounds of non-support and desertion. The state's community property

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[39]Gilman's support of suffrage reform included the following activities: addresses at NAWSA conventions in 1897, 1903-1905, 1908-1910 and at state suffrage conventions in Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, and Texas between 1900 and 1920; lecture tours in Kansas, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania between 1896 and 1900. Stanton et al., History, 4:256, 265-66, 277, 648-49, 717, 899, 5:78, 92, 149, 220, 262, 289, 6:208, 250, 271, 387, 414, 630, 857. In 1904 Gilman served as contributing editor of the Woman's Journal, a leading suffrage newspaper.

law invalidated the first cause, and Stetson's regular correspondence with her nullified the second. In 1892 Stetson made an attempt. He filed suit for divorce under Rhode Island law, charging his wife with desertion (again, by prior agreement). By this time Gilman had attained recognition as a spokesman for Nationalist and feminist causes, and Stetson had won acclaim in New York and New England as an artist. Consequently, Stetson's divorce suit triggered extensive newspaper coverage in California and on the East Coast. Journalistic speculation on the cause of the divorce revealed contemporary attitudes concerning women's domestic role.[40]

The Boston Globe reported that Stetson blamed the divorce on his wife's "crank theories." According to the Globe, Stetson resented Gilman's refusal to wear a corset and her development of a muscular body from gymnastic exercises. He took further offense at her radical view that marriage should not interfere with a wife's carreer, allegedly saying that her dedication to writing left her no time "to attend to me or my wants." And, finally, he castigated her Nationalist sympathies.[41]

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[40]CPG, Living, pp. 109-10, 142.

[41]Newsclipping, Boston Globe, 17 December 1892, Folder 282, CPG Collection. This adverse press coverage made

Stetson refuted the Globe's article and complained of the abuse given his wife. He stated that, "I have never regarded her as a crank though her ideas do not agree with mine," and that his testimony in the divorce had in no way disparaged her. He explained that he and Gilman had different callings as well as different ideas and that these differences made divorce necessary. Gilman also denied the accuracy of the Globe account, claiming that she and Stetson were on the best of terms and that he had sued for divorce with her consent. She said that married life interfered with her literary work and that she preferred the latter.[42]

Despite these disclaimers, the press continued to pass judgment on Gilman's domestic unorthodoxy. The New York Evening World speculated that a woman's becoming muscular

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Nationalist leaders in Boston defensive about the Stetson divorce. They feared that Gilman's advocacy of Nationalism would identify their philosophy with her unorthodox marriage views. L.J. Bridgman, President of the First Nationalist Club, avowed that, "Neither Bellamy nor Nationalists generally have espoused loosening of marriage ties." Henry R. Legate, President of the Second Nationalist Club, further exclaimed that, "Nationalism has nothing to do with the subject of marriage." They emphasized that Gilman's marriage stance reflected her own ideas, not those of Nationalism. Newsclipping, Boston Herald, 20 December 1892, Folder 282, CPG Collection.

[42]Newsclippings, San Francisco Examiner, 20 December 1892, Philadelphia Press, 24 December 1892, New York Times, 20 December 1892, Folder 282, CPG Collection.

from gymnastics "certainly seems provocative of divorce proceedings." The New York Journal suggested that a corset-less wife might well entitle a man to a divorce. The New York Press claimed that "Isms" destroyed the Stetson marriage when the number of Mrs. Stetson's reforms finally made life unbearable to her husband. Most explicit in indicting feminism was the New York Recorder which called the Stetson divorce an indication of the dire results of women's "advancement." The Los Angeles Times provided the cruelest insult to Gilman in charging "that eccentric woman of advanced ideas" with exploiting the notoriety of her divorce to solicit lecture invitations. After enduring this public exposure of their affairs, the Stetsons failed a second time to obtain a divorce. The court held that they had not lived apart long enough to justify desertion as grounds for divorce.[43]

A third attempt at divorce proved successful. Gilman filed suit in California on grounds of willful neglect, and the divorce was granted 18 April 1894. Before the year's end Stetson married Gilman's close friend, Grace Ellery

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[43]Newsclippings, New York Evening World, 19 December 1892, New York Journal, 25 December 1892, New York Press, 18 December 1892, New York Recorder, 22 December 1892, Los Angeles Times, 22 December 1892; New York Times, 2 February 1893, Folder 282, CPG Collection.

Channing. Gilman received this news with pleasure and a sense of relief that some happiness had come to Stetson. She remained friends with both Grace and Stetson and soon decided to send Katharine to live with them. Waiving the great personal loss of her daughter's departure she reasoned that Katharine would benefit from a more financially secure home, the companionship of her artist-father, and the love of "her second mother . . . fully as good as the first, better in some ways, perhaps." Gilman reflected in later years after Katharine had become an accomplished artist, "When I see her work I am recompensed for the years without her, glad of the rich companionship, the unforgettable training she had with her father, advantages I could never have given her."[44]

Circumspect Victorians might forgive a woman for divorce; but a divorcée who sanctioned the marriage of her ex-husband and best friend committed an unspeakable--and to some, an unpardonable--offense. Sensitive to the criticism risked by a woman in her position, Gilman exercised discretion as a new divorcée. She decided not to receive "attentions" from any man, nor even to be seen in male company. So

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[44]Certificate of Divorce, Folder 1, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, pp. 163, 167; CPG, Note, Folder 16, CPG Collection.

"absurdly careful" was she that when the poet Edwin Markham, then an Oakland school teacher, invited her to the local drug store for a soda, she would not go.[45]

The futility of Gilman's caution became apparent as criticism of her grew increasingly vehement. Shortly after the divorce Jane Addams inquired of California friends, "Why is not Mrs. Stetson better thought of?" There came an ominous but vague reply, "She is a brainy woman, but her views are something dreadful." When Addams asked about her views, no one elaborated. Critics were more explicit when Helen Campbell expressed surprise at the lack of support given the _Impress_, which she co-edited with Gilman. One irate woman exclaimed, "Nothing Mrs. Stetson does can succeed here"; and she warned Campbell that associating with this woman would jeopardize her own reputation. A woman doctor added that no self-respecting woman would read the _Impress_ after Gilman had printed a poem by Grace Channing Stetson, but that the paper could be saved if a committee of matrons would guarantee that henceforth the _Impress_ would be kept "clean."[46]

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[45] CPG, _Living_, p. 171.

[46] Ibid., pp. 170-174.

If "pure-minded" San Franciscans considered Gilman's relationship with Grace an obscenity, they were even more condemning of her "unnatural motherhood" in sending Katharine to live with the Stetsons. "To hear what was said and read what was printed one would think I had handed over a baby in a basket," Gilman recalled. No one seemed aware of the pain she suffered at this parting. She recounts that for years afterward the sight of a mother and child together brought her to tears, and that even as she typed the account in her autobiography, some thirty years after the fact, she stopped to weep.[47]

By 1895 recriminations against Gilman's unconventional behavior rendered her work ineffective in California. Bereft of family, she made her way East to begin life anew as a transient lecturer. For the next five years she spoke to groups throughout the country on a broad range of topics, including ethics, economics, sociology, education, and feminism. By the turn of the century she began receiving invitations to lecture abroad. She addressed the International Council of Women in London in 1899, the International Congress of Women in Berlin in 1904, and the International Woman Suffrage Congress in Budapest in 1913. In 1905 she

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[47]Ibid., pp. 163-64.

made a lecture tour through England, Holland, Germany, Austria, and Hungary. Despite her growing acclaim in the United States and in Europe, Californians remembered her domestic transgressions. When she delivered a lecture in Pasadena in 1923, a local newspaper described her as the woman who thirty years earlier had given away her husband.[48]

Gilman's departure from California in 1895 closed a chapter in her life. For over a decade she had struggled with threats to her well-being. Her survival of psychological, physical, and financial problems during this dark period attested to the strength of will and purpose she had developed in girlhood. The years since 1881--potentially destructive--were instead years of transition. In the midst of despair she had exerted her powers, extended her interests, and achieved success as a lecturer and a writer of fiction and poetry. The new century would witness the fruition of these efforts as she moved toward an emotional security which heightened her perception as a social critic. Her humanist philosophy, tempered by trial, would find expression in a new approach to feminism.

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[48]Programs for London and Budapest Congresses, 1899, 1913, Folders 6, 8, CPG Collection; Newsclippings regarding domestic and foreign lectures, Folders 286-292, CPG Collection; Marie Stritt to CPG, 11 March 1904, Folder 7-2, CPG Collection; Alexander Black, "The Woman Who Saw It First," Century 107(November, 1923):38.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRODUCTIVE YEARS, 1897-1935

The year 1897 marked a turning point in Gilman's life, both personally and professionally. She found happiness in a new relationship, which culminated in marriage in 1900; and she wrote the first of several books detailing her social philosophy. As the new century arrived, she began a period of remarkable productivity that reached its zenith in the second decade.

Gilman's productive years were made possible in large measure by the security she found with a person who loved her sufficiently to respect her freedom. In March 1897 she renewed acquaintance with her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman, a patent attorney in New York City. Houghton, seven years her junior, was the son of William Coit Gilman and Katharine Beecher Perkins Gilman, the sister of Frederick Beecher Perkins. In an unusual turn of events, the friendship between the two cousins turned into romance, and they were married 11 June 1900. According to Gilman, they "lived happy ever after"--in New York City until 1922 and then in Houghton's home town, Norwich Town, Connecticut until his

death in 1934. Katharine Stetson returned to live with her mother and Houghton in 1900.[1]

Why was Gilman's second marriage a success when the first proved to destructive? She made no attempt to analyze this question, but evidence from letters she wrote to Houghton from 1897 to 1900 indicates that the element of personal freedom was a crucial difference in the two marriages. During their courtship they evolved a contract providing certain liberties for each party. Disavowing the agreement implicit in most marriages, whereby female domestic service is exchanged for male economic support, they agreed that each would be economically independent and each would be free to do work of their choice.

Although they decided upon marriage in 1897, Gilman insisted they wait until 1900 in order that she earn enough money to become solvent, for she did not want to marry while in debt. She told Houghton not to set his heart on earning money for her; she wanted none. She added: "I have absolute confidence in your making a good living . . . and in skillfully

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[1]Katharine Stetson Chamberlin to Carl N. Degler, 24 July 1960, Folder 156, CPG Collection; CPG, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), pp. 281-82, 324, 334; New York Times 6 May 1934. Houghton's uncle, Daniel Coit Gilman, served from 1875 to 1901 as the first president of Johns Hopkins University.

evading our solemn contract by introducing to the family all manner of luxurious splendor under the head of 'amusements.' I said you might pay for the amusements." Despite Houghton's secure financial position as a Wall Street lawyer, Gilman chose not to be "provided for" but to contribute her own funds to their partnership.[2]

She was explicit in explaining to Houghton that if she had to choose between him and her work, "two hearts might break, but I could choose only one way." On the other hand, if she could harmonize marital love and a home with her "great calling," she would be exceedingly happy. She warned that her sense of mission made her a poor marriage risk:

> I think I've been given unusual powers of expression and I truly hope that my life will count for much good in the world--as Darwin's did and Galileo's.
>
> But regarding marriage--this counts against me. Great men are by no means the best husbands. And to be a great woman is as yet so painful and sacrificial a task as to . . . cripple the female most cruelly. By virtue of what I have of greatness, I am the less desirable wife.[3]

Gilman tried to explain her long and painfully developed rationale for her priorities:

> The thing that matters to me is the aim and direction of my conscious life, and the kind of forces which lift and fill me up if I am aiming right. Since

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[2]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 12 May 1898, Folder 50, CPG Collection; ibid., 20 May 1898, Folder 51.

[3]Ibid., 22 May 1898, Folder 51.

> I began to live I have tried whenever I had strength to work for what I considered to be the good of the world. Doing that I have always been strong and happy. If I stopped . . . to point toward a personal goal--all the light has gone out--the power has failed--and no human love or personal happiness can save a smothered soul.[4]

Remembering the "soul smothering" of her first marriage, she implored Houghton, if he valued her life and sanity, to "work out such a plan of living as shall leave me free to move as move I must." He would have to give up society's image of a home, but he might be recompensed; for if they avoided "household complications," she would be freer to give of her love. But she had no choice: "I must not focus on home 'duties' and entangle myself in them. It is not an external problem with me . . . but a question of life or death." The force of her request reflected her painful experience with Stetson; she allowed that had she been fifteen years younger, she would have asked nothing of Houghton and given all.[5]

After their marriage Gilman and Houghton put into practice her philosophy that home life should not hinder a woman's life in the world. Believing that a wife should find

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[4]Ibid., 15 September 1898, Folder 55.

[5]Ibid., 22 May 1898, Folder 51; ibid., 15 September 1898, Folder 55; ibid., 18 October 1898, Folder 57.

the home a place of rest rather than a workshop, they lived in a kitchenless apartment and secured table-board nearby. With inconvenience to neither, they created a situation which allowed Gilman to work uninterrupted by domestic duties. She continued a strenuous regime of lecturing and writing throughout the marriage. Houghton adjusted to her work, as she did to his. It seemed a fair arrangement and a mutually satisfying one.[6]

Some critics have questioned the happiness of Gilman's marriage to Houghton, inferring that because she gave full time to her work rather than to her home, he played a minor role in her life. To the contrary, she found the relationship to be a sustaining force. An examination of the full-orbed relationship they developed during courtship gives insight into the character of their marriage.[7]

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[6]CPG, _Living_, p. 283.

[7]Andrew Sinclair in _The Emancipation of the American Woman_ (New York: Harper and Row, Colophon Books, 1965), p. 272, presents a misleading interpretation in suggesting that Gilman's marriage to Houghton was "of such little importance that she hardly refers to her husband in her autobiography." Gilman records this marriage in the last sixth of the book and in subsequent pages makes positive references to their life together. The hundreds of letters she wrote to Houghton between 1897 and 1900 (Folders 40-86, CPG Collection) reveal the depth of her feeling for him. She rarely showed this private self in her autobiography.

Gilman felt that knowing Houghton had restored her sense of a "well-based human life." During their courtship he provided "helpfulness, pleasant friendliness, merry companionship, straightforward . . . help." When she said to him, "Why this is better than a dozen marriages," he replied, "If you could have this and marriage too--then you would know what it ought to be." Friends and lovers--this best characterizes their relationship. Gilman wrote Houghton, "You are such a satisfaction to me: as a man, as a lover. You give me all I want of every kind of feeling, friendship, liking, love, and passion." She admitted being surprised at "her passionate response," and described her pleasure "in the fact of your losing all sense of my 'intellectual qualifications' and just wanting to hold me in your arms." She realized "more and more . . . what a good thing it is to have a strong man to help one along. I shall become a clinging vine--I feel it coming."[8]

Gilman's references to the physical aspect of her relationship to Houghton counterbalance arguments that her writings express a distorted attitude toward sex. Her

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[8]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 23 October 1898, Folder 57, CPG Collection; ibid., 23 May 1898, Folder 51; ibid., 16 May 1898; ibid., 2 June 1898, Folder 52; ibid., 21 October 1898, Folder 57.

advocacy of continence in marriage and her protests in the 1920's against the sexual promiscuity she associated with Freudianism suggest to some a degree of personal sexual maladjustment. But her expressions to Houghton indicate otherwise. Her views of sexual restraint are best understood in light of her conviction that for centuries women had been exploited by male sexual indulgence.[9]

Gilman's letters to Houghton not only depict her as an emotionally responsive woman but reveal her attitude toward being an intellectual companion. Her request that he accept her right to work as a writer and lecturer in no way implied a demand that he agree with her views; and in some cases he did not. She recognized and accepted their differences: "I do not feel you near or sympathetic [with my work]. You are sympathetic with _me_--with my intentions; and you are as helpful as can be . . . . But we don't think in the same lines by nature.[10]

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[9]William L. O'Neill, _Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America_ (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), pp. 131-32, says that Gilman "functioned at a low level of sexual intensity." He adds that her "sexual maladjustment was probably less than might have been expected, given her start in life."

[10]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 18 May 1898, Folder 51, CPG Collection. Gilman confided that between 1893 and 1895 two men wanted to marry her, but she did not love them--even though they agreed with her ideas. Ibid., 23 May 1898.

Houghton's classical studies in Greek and Latin at Columbia University and his legal education at Johns Hopkins University inclined him toward a quiet, scholarly life. (Katharine reported that he worked calculus problems for fun.) In contrast to Gilman's "indiscriminate catholicity" (as she described it), Houghton tended to avoid people other than close friends, confining himself to his law library. Basically conservative, he did not share her socialist ideas. He also held a different view regarding physical fitness and exerted little effort in this area. Gilman respected Houghton's freedom to disagree with her (although she did urge him to work out with chest weights) and considered their differences conducive to a constructive exchange of ideas.[11]

As Gilman reflected on the multi-faceted nature of her relationship with Houghton, she in effect described the structure of a humanist marriage, one conducive to the growth of the wife as well as the husband: "The more I see myself surrounded by your love backed up by your wide culture and education, the material details of life settled by our

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[11]Katharine Stetson Chamberlin to Carl N. Degler, 24 July 1960, Folder 156, CPG Collection; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 21 October 1898, Folder 57, CPG Collection.

business partnership and yet my freedom of motion guaranteed--the more I think it means long life and health and good work accomplished." Theirs was an "open" marriage in that it allowed freedom of growth to each as separate persons, while providing mutually fulfilling companionship.[12]

Expressing exhilaration at the wide scope offered by such a relationship, Gilman described herself to Houghton as "free, at large, belonging to everybody. With the world to work in and you to play with." She discerned the value of advocating domestic reforms from the position of a happy marriage: "How beautifully I can hurl every idol from the shrine when . . . I myself am living in blissful content in a small flat with you." Unfortunately, critics throughout her career interpreted her writings without reference to her life. Her image as a domestic iconoclast forced her to reiterate, "a hundred times if necessary," that she believed in permanent, monogamous marriage.[13]

In August 1897 Gilman began writing _Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a_

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[12]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 22 May 1898, Folder 51, CPG Collection.

[13]Ibid., 6 May 1898, Folder 50. Amy Wellington, _Women Have Told: Studies in the Feminist Tradition_ (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1930), pp. 120-21.

Factor in Social Evolution. After years of pondering the relation of women's status to society's progress, her ideas coalesced into a feminist ideology. In a burst of creativity she wrote the first draft in seventeen days and completed the work within two months.

Women and Economics dealt with the economic relation between the sexes as a crucial factor in social progress. Gilman argued that woman's economic dependence upon man had led to an over-development of her sexual characteristics at the expense of her human traits. Because of her diminished humanness, woman not only retarded the world's progress but ensured herself a subordinate role in society. Suffragists provided an inadequate solution, for political equality could hardly free women whose economic existence depended upon their submissive relation to men. The problem of female inequality demanded broader reforms, specifically: specialized, remunerative work for women; a home free of primitive domestic services; an educated motherhood; and a non-sexist society. Gilman treated these ideas comprehensively in Women and Economics, then enlarged upon each respectively in Human Work (1904), The Home: Its Work and Influence (1903), Concerning Children (1900), and Man-Made World: Or Our Androcentric Culture (1911). His Religion and Hers: A Study

of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers (1923), her only non-fiction book not presaged by Women and Economics, dealt with authoritarian aspects of patriarchal religion.

Gilman also published three novels (originally serialized in her magazine, the Forerunner): What Diantha Did (1910), The Crux (1911), and Moving the Mountain (1912). These books, published privately by the Charlton (Charlotte and Houghton) Company, and a fourth novel, Herland (serialized in the Forerunner in 1915 but not published), represent Gilman's poorest work. She wrote the novels to instruct rather than to entertain, and didactic fiction proved a poor vehicle for her philosophy.

Gilman's non-fiction books contained no bibliographies. The ideas presented were products of her thinking, not of research. But she credited Lester Frank Ward, a leading figure in American sociology, with being an important stimulus to her thought. She had admired Ward since reading his article, "Our Better Halves," published in the Forum in 1888. She cited this work as a major influence on her ideas in Women and Economics, for she based her view of woman's human nature on the gynecocentric theory which Ward propounded in the Forum article. Ward's theory held that the female of the species was the true race type, the male being a sex

variant who appeared later in evolutionary development. Gilman called this idea the most significant since Darwin's theory of evolution. It became a central tenet in her feminist ideology.[14]

Gilman met Ward the year prior to writing Women and Economics. He had been impressed with her poem, "Similar Cases," and invited her to visit him during her trip to Washington, D.C. in 1896 for the annual meeting of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. A relationship of high mutual regard developed. The admiration which they held for one another can be seen in Gilman's dedication of Man-Made World to Ward in 1911 and in his tribute to her for propogating "the truth about the sexes" as he had tried to set it forth. He viewed her work not as an echo of his but as a refinement. He wrote her, "All I could do was block out the statue from the slab in rough strokes . . . . Now you come along and touch it up with a fine pointed chisel."[15]

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[14]When Houghton asked Gilman to recommend a textbook on her "line of work," she replied, "I can't seem to make you understand that I have nothing to offer the world but what I think--not what I have read." CPG to Houghton Gilman, 11 May 1897, Folder 41, CPG Collection. Lester Frank Ward, "Our Better Halves," Forum 6(November 1888):275; CPG, Living, p. 187.

[15]CPG, Living, p. 187; Ward to CPG, 11 February 1911, 2 February 1907, Folder 124, CPG Collection. Gilman's response to Ward's ideas predated that of many Gilded Age

Published in 1898, Women and Economics won favorable reviews, had a wide reception, and brought fame to Gilman. The Dial described her work as "profound social philosophy" (written with "enough wit and sarcasm to make the book entertaining") that emphasized progressive trends in economic thought. The Nation, confessing boredom with recent books on women, called Women and Economics the "most significant utterance on the subject since [John Stuart] Mill's Subjection of Women" (1869), and lauded Gilman for a new, imaginative point of view, written in "good temper." The New York Times, also noting the book's "temperate spirit," deemed Gilman's ideas unconvincing but adroit and deserving of consideration. Continuous sales over a twenty-five year period necessitated seven printings of Women and Economics, as well as translations into French, German, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian, and

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intellectuals. Richard Hofstadter in Social Darwinism in American Thought, rev. ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1959), p. 70, observes that in 1888, "Richard Ely was the only man on the otherwise alert Johns Hopkins faculty who knew" Ward's work and that as late as 1893 a bare 500 copies of Ward's Dynamic Sociology (1883) had been sold. Samuel Chugarman in Lester Ward, The American Aristotle (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1939), p. 379, cites Gilman as one of the few women who grasped the significance of Ward's gynecocentric theory. And Ward himself singled out Gilman in 1906 as the only person he knew (other than himself) who perceived and "clearly brought out [a] cosmological perspective" of life's organic evolution. Lester F. Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes," Independent 58(March 1906):541.

Japanese. One historian has noted that as a result of Gilman's ideas in this book, she became "the leading intellectual in the women's movement in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century."[16]

Gilman's popularity as a magazine writer increased after the success of Women and Economics. From 1898 to 1909 she wrote articles for leading periodicals of the day, including: Century, Independent, Forum, Harper's Bazaar, Woman's Home Companion, Arena, Pictorial Review, Current Literature, and Delineator. Her articles concerned subjects treated in her books, as well as current issues--particularly those dealing with progressive reforms such as regulation of monopolies, pure food and drug legislation, conservation, and immigration restriction.[17]

The appeal of Gilman's articles was enhanced by two trends affecting American journalism at the turn of the

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[16] "Present Tendencies in Economic Thought," Review of Women and Economics by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Dial 26(February 1899):84; Review of Women and Economics by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Nation 68(June 1899):443; New York Times, 5 November 1898; CPG, Living, p. 270; CPG, Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution, ed. Carl N. Degler (1898; reprint ed., New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. xiii.

[17] Gilman refused to write for any publication owned by William Randolph Hearst; she felt that Hearst "coarsens and weakens everything he touches." CPG, Note, Folder 126-2, CPG Collection.

century: an enlightened feminine readership and an interest in muckraking. In the early Gilded Age women responded primarily to romantic fiction and articles on domestic issues. By the 1890's, however, periodicals emphasizing intellectual content enjoyed wide appeal among women. A change in taste had occurred for the "new woman" of the nineties; emancipated in spirit, if not in politics, she had begun to identify with the larger world and now wanted to read about it. Muckraking, the journalistic exposé of political, economic, and social inequities, first became popular in 1902 with Ida Tarbell's scathing series, "History of Standard Oil Company," published in McClure's. Lincoln Steffens' "Shame of the Cities" series, published by McClure's the following year, stirred further enthusiasm. There followed a plethora of exposé literature which by 1905 saturated the market with articles more sensational than accurate. In 1906 the popularity of muckraking peaked and began to wane.[18]

Because Gilman's articles dealt with social criticism, they reflected both these trends in American journalism and

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[18] Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1930-1968), 4:208-9, 353.

won a response of corresponding duration. Arthur T. Vance, editor of Pictorial Review, praised her thought-provoking writing and testified to its influence: "You were the one person . . . responsible for starting us off on the line to which we feel we own our success, and that is trying to make a magazine for intelligent women to read." Another editor, more cautious than Vance, urged her to be less doctrinaire by avoiding the word "ethics" in her article on social ethics and by emphasizing "the muckraking factor" instead. He felt she wrote "bully stuff, very illuminating," but that she should offer her ideas as a criticism, not "dictatorially as a plan for regenerating a nation." Gilman did not temper her didacticism, but she did couch her message in a style marked by wit and humor. Phyllis Moir of the Forum wrote, "We need your flair for saying important things in a light and humorous way."[19]

If Gilman's magazine articles were not ponderous, they were perhaps too philosophical for the general public. She reflected that as her work grew in importance, its market value declined. But she was philosophical about that too:

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[19]Vance to CPG, 30 October 1923, Folder 123, CPG Collection; Note, Folder 243, CPG Collection; Moir to CPG, 18 April 1934, Folder 126, CPG Collection.

"As all my principal topics were in direct contravention of established views, beliefs and emotions, it is a wonder that so many editors took so much of my work for so long." With the demise of muckraking, editors tried in vain to steer Gilman toward newer trends. Vance suggested that she make her articles "attractive and snappy." Delineator editor Theodore Dreiser urged her to consider editorial wishes and write in a more popular vein. But Gilman insisted that she wrote "to express important truths," and she refused to cater to public taste.[20]

In the belief that enough people were interested in her ideas to justify the undertaking, Gilman--at age fifty--began her own monthly magazine, the Forerunner. Between 1909 and 1916 she single-handedly wrote, edited, and published each twenty-eight page issue. The format included serialized installments of a novel and a non-fiction book, as well as articles, short stories, sermons, allegories, verse, book reviews, and comments on current events--all amounting to 21,000 words an issue. Yearly publication costs were $3,000. As subscriptions provided only half this amount, Gilman subsidized the deficit from income earned in lecturing and extra writing. She initially wrote

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[20] CPG, Living, p. 303-4.

advertisements for the magazine but would include only those products she could personally endorse; consequently, revenue from this source was limited, and she soon discontinued the advertisements.[21]

The scope of the Forerunner, like Gilman's philosophy, ranged through the problems of humanity. Responding to the question, "Is the Forerunner a woman's magazine?" she wrote in the first issue, "It will treat all three phases of our existence--male, female, and human." The magazine's emphasis was two-fold: the socialization of people through awareness of the unity and brotherhood of mankind, and the emancipation of women through awakening them to their social existence. The Forerunner included treatment of specific women's rights issues, such as suffrage; but it stressed that full emancipation meant woman's freedom to develop her humanness.[22]

The purpose of the Forerunner was to "stimulate thought; to arouse hope, courage and impatience; to offer practical suggestions and solutions; to voice the strong assurances of better living, here, now, in our own hands to make." In

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[21]CPG, Living, p. 305. Mary Austin complained that the worst thing about the Forerunner was that Gilman wrote it all herself, "and she couldn't write." Earth Horizon, p. 326.

[22]Forerunner 1(November 1909):32.

contrast to magazines geared to elicit popular response, written in such fashion "that he who runs may read," Gilman aimed:

> To tell the things we ought to know,
> To point the way we ought to go,
> So audibly to bless and curse,
> That he who reads may run.[23]

The Forerunner had few subscribers, never more than 1,500. Gilman recognized that the magazine's appeal was limited by the radical nature of her thought. She listed among her heresies: a theology that viewed God as "a working power which asks no worship, only fulfillment," and that sought heaven on earth with no expectation of immortality; a value system that measured behavior in terms of its effect on social advancement; a collectivized economic system; a relationship between the sexes based on equality; and a renunciation of amateur motherhood. Some readers agreed with one or two of these positions: but, as Gilman said, "when it came to five or more distinct heresies, to a magazine which even ridiculed Fashion, and held blazing before its readers a heaven on earth which they did not in the least want--it narrowed the subscription list."[24]

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[23]Ibid., p. 32, opening page.

[24]Notes on the Forerunner, Folder 239, CPG Collection. The number of subscribers included thirty-four European and

Many of those who read the Forerunner, however, were lavish in their praise. The Chicago Evening Post endorsed the magazine, observing, "with so much 'advanced' writing impossibly nebulous and sentimental, it is a pleasure to read matter that is clear, sane, and entertaining withal." A representative letter to the Forerunner editor commented, "Your magazine is the most humanizing influence today. To women it is an inspiration; to men it is a revelation."[25]

In 1916 publication of the Forerunner came to an end. Gilman reasoned that a venture unable to support itself financially should be terminated and, more importantly, that she had said all she had to say. Thereafter, she continued to write occasional articles, many of them concerned with support of the allied cause in World War I, advocacy of a world government, and refutation of the sexual indulgence loosed on humanity by the "false prophet" Freud. Increasingly, though, she became preoccupied with the writing of her autobiography.

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fifty English subscribers. CPG to Tadaichi Okado, 30 June 1920, Folder 239, CPG Collection; CPG, Living, pp. 309-310. One reader felt that the Forerunner was not radical enough--that if Gilman were only a vegetarian, her philosophy would be perfect.

[25] Newsclipping, Chicago Evening Post, 21 January 1910, Folder 239, CPG Collection; Forerunner, 5(January 1913):28.

By 1925 Gilman had completed all but the last chapter of the autobiography. Although now sixty-five years old, she did not consider herself an old woman. Old age, she felt, came not with the passage of time but with the failure of one's powers; and hers were undiminished. A year earlier she had assessed her life matter-of-factly:

> I am sixty-four years old. Practically I have done: a shelf of books--some of importance; a mass of magazine stuff--all tending upward; Poems--some excellent, some useful, none deleterious; Lectures--for thirty-four years--thousands I guess . . . all tending upward. I ought to be at work ten more years.

In 1930 she wrote, "Seventy. What of it?" In 1931, "Health good. Nothing the matter with me. May yet have ten years . . . to do the same job: to see and say." In 1934 she mused, "What have I to offer?" This was Gilman's recurring question, even to the end of her life.[26]

When told by her doctor in January 1932 that she had an inoperable case of breast cancer, Gilman asked two questions: "How long does it take?" and "How long shall I be able to type?" She determined to finish for publication her current work, "Ethics," within the year and a half estimated before her death. Her life exceeded this time span, and she survived to experience the loss of Houghton

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[26]CPG, Note, Folder 17-2, CPG Collection; ibid., Folder 17-3.

when on 4 May 1934 he died from cerebral hemorrhage. That fall Gilman moved to Pasadena to be near Katharine and her husband, Tolles Chamberlin, and their two children. Grace Channing Stetson, now a widow, came to stay with her. During these last months Gilman finished her autobiography, compressing ten years into the last chapter. Grace Stetson wrote John L.B. Williams of D. Appleton-Century Company (who published the autobiography posthumously): "Mrs. Gilman did the work of correction and revision herself . . . . That she could do this exacting work seemed incredible and taxed her heavily, but no one else could do it so well."[27]

Gilman wrote that she had "not the least objection to dying," but that she did not intend to die of cancer. She bought a supply of chloroform to use when needed. She did not justify suicide as a means to end pain or sorrow. She did, however, believe in the right to take one's life when the body so failed that human service became impossible. Gilman ended her life on 17 August 1935. She wished to leave life while still in possession of her faculties. This act was her final expression of autonomy.[28]

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[27]"Ethics" was to be a revision of "Social Ethics," published serially in the Forerunner; but despite Gilman's efforts, it was never published as a separate work. CPG, Living, pp. 333-334; Grace Channing Stetson to Williams, 22 July 1935, Folder 126, CPG Collection.

[28]CPG, Living, pp. 333, 335; Katharine Stetson Chamberlin to Carl N. Degler, 24 July 1960, Folder 126, CPG Collection.

A letter that Gilman wrote to explain her suicide appeared in many of the newspapers which reported her death and is included in the final pages of her autobiography. It placed her death within the context of her philosophy:

> Human life consists in mutual service. No grief, pain, misfortune or "broken heart" is excuse for cutting off one's life while any power of service remains. But when all usefulness is over, when one is assured of unavoidable and imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one.
>
> Public opinion is changing on this subject. The time is approaching when we shall consider it abhorrent to our civilization to allow a human being to die in prolonged agony which we should mercifully end in any other creature. Believing this open choice to be of social service in promoting wiser views on this question, I have preferred chloroform to cancer.[29]

Various acquaintances and friends commented on Gilman's suicide. Ida Tarbell, author and social critic, criticized Gilman's act, denying any justification for suicide. Carrie Chapman Catt, a prominent feminist who had ranked Gilman first in a list of twelve "greatest American women," defended Gilman's suicide on the basis of her incurable illness. Fannie Hurst, novelist, also upheld Gilman's decision: "She was a wise woman. She died as wisely as she lived." Lyman Beecher Stowe, Gilman's cousin and close friend, supported the suicide decision even before its occurrence:

> It's heart breaking to have you speak of your final ceremony as due this coming month but as you know I

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[29] CPG, Living, pp. 333-334.

> agree that you should not stay beyond your possibility of giving or receiving pleasure.
>
> It is very hard--the thought I shall never see you again but thank heaven I cannot lose the inspiration of your stimulating ideas and your beautiful gallant character. Fortunately the more people take when they go the more they leave behind.[30]

Gilman did leave behind an important legacy: the example of a life lived by humanist values. Throughout her life she engaged in the full use of her powers along the lines of excellence. Alexander H. Abbott paid tribute to this achievement in a letter written to Gilman shortly before her death:

> To thank you for so many, many things of the mind and spirit, and the body in which they live. Your own fine philosophy that holds to the necessity of growing a fine body, never advocated anything but the best kind of mind and spirit within it. And what a living combination you made of them.[31]

As she intended, in addition to her life Gilman left a further legacy: her thought. Near death she penned, "My life is in humanity--and that goes on." Her life did extend beyond itself through the humanist philosophy to which she gave forceful expression in championing female autonomy.

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[30]Newsclippings, Pasadena Star News, 20 August 1935, New York World Telegram, 20 August 1935, Folder 284, CPG Collection; Stowe to CPG, 30 July 1935, Folder 35, CPG Collection.

[31]Abbott to CPG, 5 April 1935, Folder 114, CPG Collection. Abbott was minister of the United Congregational Church in Norwich Town, Connecticut. CPG, Living, p. 335.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF WOMAN

Charlotte Gilman advocated a humanist approach to feminism, based on her affirmation that woman was by nature human and therefore autonomous. Gilman argued that human nature encompassed the power of expression in four dimensions--physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social--and that growth in each of these areas constituted the fundamental condition of human life. She held that growth involved the use, not merely the possession, of one's powers. Hence, curtailment of expression in any of the four human faculties arrested growth and, in proportionate degree, dehumanized a person. It followed, then, that autonomy, the status of self-governance, was essential to achieving the human potential inherent in woman's nature.

Gilman alleged that woman's subordinate relation to man had dehumanized the female sex. She attributed this situation to society's definition of woman's nature as female rather than human. Throughout recorded history, she said, there had prevailed the erroneous idea "that only men

are human creatures, able and entitled to perform the work of the world; while women are only female creatures," suited to domestic functions. The denial of woman's humanity rendered her unequal and inferior to man and thus provided the key to understanding the "woman question."[1]

Because society sanctioned female subordination on the assumption that woman's nature differed from man's, Gilman diagnosed woman's predicament as an ideological rather than a political problem. In her view, resolution of the problem required that woman claim her right to full expression in the four dimensions of human life. The uniqueness of Gilman's approach lies in the autonomous character of her solution: Woman, through full use of her powers--physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social--could herself achieve the equality that decades of political agitation had failed to accomplish.

To help women assert their human powers, Gilman analyzed in detail their status and their potential in regard to body, mind, soul, and heart. As an introduction to this

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[1]CPG, "Are Women Human Beings," Harper's Weekly 56(25 May 1912):11-12. In 1930 Gilman noted the lack of attention given to the problem of woman's dehumanization: "You see in my judgment the 'woman question' has hardly been asked, much less answered. We have had the struggle for 'rights,' and all this uproar about sex, but hardly any study of the biological and sociological effects of the aborted development of half the race." CPG to Samuel Schmalhausen, 28 July 1930, Folder 122, CPG Collection.

humanist approach to feminism, she first set forth her theory of the nature of woman. She believed that redressing the grievances created by female inequality subsumed an awareness of woman's true nature and an analysis of the historical process of her "de-naturing." She advised the women of her generation, "Until we can see what we are, we cannot take steps to become what we should be."[2]

Gilman defined woman's nature as primarily human and secondarily female. She equated being human with the capacity to engage in activities beyond those required for mere existence. In her view, three functions were imperative to human life: physical maintenance, reproduction, and improvement. (She sometimes referred to these functions as the three laws of human nature: "to be, to re-be, and to be better.") The first two functions involved existence, and human beings shared these with other animals. The third involved growth and was uniquely human. Growth not only characterized human life but constituted its purpose. According to Gilman, "The duty of human life is progress . . .; we are here, not merely to live, but to grow." Thus, woman's female functions in maintaining and reproducing the race were basic, but they were only a prelude to her larger

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[2]CPG, "A Real Woman," p. 6, Folder 165-2, CPG Collection.

purpose of human development. In this sense woman's femininity was secondary to her humanity. Gilman further asserted that woman possessed a greater potential for humanness than man because in her capacity for giving birth she had developed as a gender trait the essential requirement for being human: a propensity for nurturing life and fostering its growth.[3]

Gilman based her concept of woman's nature on Lester Frank Ward's gynecocentric theory in which the female sex represented the sole life form at creation, the male appearing later in evolutionary history. She maintained that the female sex was originally the race type, "once capable in itself of the primary process of reproduction," while the male was later "introduced as an assistant to the original organism in the secondary process of fertilization." In his role as sex variant the male developed three gender traits: desire, combat, and display. These "sex-distinctives," as Gilman called them, equipped him to compete for and attract the female, for sexual selection rested with the female in the gynecratic stage of evolution. This arrangement of mate

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[3]CPG, "Social, Domestic and Human Life," p. 2, Folder 165, CPG Collection; CPG, Women and Economics, ed. Carl N. Degler (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 207; CPG, "Who Owns the Children?" p. 1, Folder 165, CPG Collection.

selection resulted in species improvement as the female chose from competing males the strongest and swiftest, the most beautifully ornamented, and the most able.[4]

As human life evolved the male progressed beyond his adjunct role as sex variant to develop racial (that is, human) qualities commensurate with the female's. Eventually he exerted his dominance and reduced the female to an inferior position--"a thing no other animal has done," Gilman said. In becoming woman's master, man inaugurated a period of "androcentric," or man-centered, culture. Like Ward, who first coined the term, Gilman described androcentric culture as a pattern of gender hierarchy, existing since recorded history, in which the male sex monopolized human activities such as trade, commerce, industry, government, art, science, and religion (in short, all activities beyond the subsistence level of life) and called them "man's work."[5]

Woman's humanity diminished with the spread of androcentric culture. Denied access to human affairs as they assumed a "masculine" label, woman digressed to the level of maintenance

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[4]Forerunner 1(October 1909):26; CPG, The Man-Made World: Or Our Androcentric Culture, (1911; reprint ed., New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), pp. 28-30.

[5]Newsclipping, New York Tribune, 17 December 1903, Folder 228, CPG Collection; CPG, Man-Made World, p. 25.

and reproductive activities, a sub-human status. Divested of human functions, she became only female. Gilman analyzed the history of this de-naturing process in order to show that woman's subordinate role had neither divine nor natural origins, but arose from man's economic exploitation of the female sex.

She theorized that the subjugation of women originated in prehistoric times when man began to appropriate the domestic labor of the mother caring for her young. As human infancy became prolonged, maternal functions expanded accordingly. To provide for dependent progeny, women developed primitive industries such as planting, harvesting, cooking, weaving, and decorating. According to Gilman, "While the male savage was still a mere hunter and fighter, expressing . . . the katabolic force . . . ," the female savage "gathered together and saved nutrition for the child . . . . She wrapped it in garments and built a shelter for its head." It was through "the tireless activity of this desire, the mother's wish to serve the young, that she began the first of the arts and crafts by which we live."[6]

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[6]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 126-27. Gilman showed no concern for specificity in regard to historical time periods. When referring to pre-recorded history, she used such terms as "prehistoric times," "ancient times," "primitive times," "early period," "the days of savage and squaw."

Viewing maternal energy as the source of human work, Gilman described woman as the original worker, and she labeled work as a female gender trait. She characterized "human work" as the translation of woman's nurturing instinct into concrete expressions of love and service. Since man lacked the maternal instinct, he found work foreign to his nature. Motivated by the masculine instinct of combat, he obtained food by killing not by cultivating. As the agricultural revolution made planting a more secure means of livelihood than hunting, man began to usurp the fruits of woman's agrarian and domestic labor intended for her children. She became an economic asset to him "as no other female is to a male"; and it appeared advantageous to subjugate her.[7]

At an earlier stage in human evolution man had desired the female for sex. But there existed no reason to confine her for this purpose, since these were episodic encounters following which he had no further use for her. Later, when the mother developed work skills, man desired her service sufficiently to confine her for his continued use. The desirability of both sex and service made woman vulnerable

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[7]Ibid. p. 126; CPG, Note, Folder 161, CPG Collection.

to male dominance, but the latter proved the stronger attraction. Hence, Gilman concluded that man's subjugation of the female sprang from economic motivation, that is, from a desire to exploit her labor.[8]

Gilman cited woman's economic dependence as a direct corollary of female subordination. Woman's original role in producing her own food supply had made her self-sufficient, the essence of freedom. Her service to young dependents did not infringe upon this freedom, for as procurer of their food she had authority over them; she was arbiter as well as servant. When man appropriated the products of woman's agricultural industry, he then controlled the food supply (even though he did not produce it) and thereby assumed dominion over her. As he restricted the female to domestic service for himself, he had to provide for her; a man must feed his servant, as he would any animal that he owned. In so doing, he controlled woman's subsistence, making her dependent upon him economically. Woman's economic dependence, then, did not arise from her inadequacies but was predicated on her servitude.[9]

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[8]CPG, "Service, Domestic and Social," pp. 5-6, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection.

[9]Forerunner 4(August 1913):220.

The first relationship, however, of man the hunter to woman the worker was not dominion but dependence. Initially, he related to her more as an "overgrown child" than a master, and her service for the children extended to him with no threat to her freedom. Yet Gilman viewed even this arrangement as an ill-founded diversion of woman's efforts. Service could be justified toward those with legitimate needs--the young, the old, the sick or incapacitated--but not the well and strong. Female service did not belong to a healthy, adult male. It only kept him at an infantile state--an "unweaned" creature, "fond of play, but not of work." Furthermore, the "kept" male assumed that his own activities of hunting and fighting were superior to the female's domestic tasks; consequently, he disparaged women and all who did what he defined as women's work. According to Gilman, "The scorn of work as proper to women" intensified with the advent of slave-labor, especially since for a long period women constituted a slave class.[10]

The subjugation of women proceeded gradually from this intermediary stage of male dependence. As man's demands upon the female's service increased, he compelled her to live with him. Then, "unable to keep woman in freedom, he had

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[10]CPG, "Service," pp. 6-13.

to imprison her." Whereas before pairing the two sexes had existed on comparatively independent and equal terms, now the female lost both freedom and equality. She became man's property.[11]

Gilman considered the prehistoric shift to male authoritarianism the origin of slavery. She refuted the theory that male captives from early warfare were the first slaves. "Why make a slave of man? He could not do anything but hunt and fight. He had no use value. He was quarrelsome and dangerous." Gilman deemed it more logical that "peaceful, industrious women" were the first slaves. Subjugated because of their labor value, their usefulness to man augmented as they also became "sex-slaves and produced children-slaves." Polygamy replaced pairing as man added to his profitable slave group as many women as he could capture or purchase.[12]

According to Gilman, the institution of marriage changed woman's status from slave to wife. But the patriarchal family, the enduring social unit of androcentric society, continued the authoritarian sexual structure which had characterized female slavery. Thus, the essential factors

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[11]CPG, Note, Folder 288, CPG Collection.

[12]CPG, "Service," p. 11, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection.

of woman's former position--servitude and economic dependence--remained unchanged: The wife's chief function was to be a house servant to the man who provided her livelihood. Gilman called this marriage situation a "sexuo-economic relation." Underlying the love, honor, and economic support a husband might give his wife, the implications of ownership prevailed. Gilman elaborated:

> Owning her, he used her--shall not a man do what he will with his own? And this usage, this peculiar form of sexuo-economic exploitation, made her his body servant. She performed for him the same offices of care and service naturally due from the mother to the child, most unnaturally demanded from the wife to the husband . . . .
>
> This service, as an economic function, consists mainly in the preparation of food. The managing and cleaning processes are subsidiary to this.[13]

The obligation of wifely servitude superceded maternal responsibilities. Child-care must not interfere with service to the husband; cooking and cleaning took precedence over mothering. The proprietary male thus changed the family from an institution designed to nurture the young "to one modified to his own service, the vehicle of his comfort, power and pride." The perversion of woman's child service to husband service went unchallenged throughout the history of marriage, and by the nineteenth century the idea that an

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[13] Forerunner 4(August 1913):220.

entire sex should be the domestic servants of the other had become accepted as an essential part of family life.[14]

Gilman speculated that society had grown so accustomed to the centuries-old equation of wifehood and servitude that people had become blind to its ignominious source: female slavery. Stressing the power of an idea to persist after the original reason for its existence had been forgotten, she wrote:

> Conditions change faster than ideas. The world always moves faster than it thinks. We are invariably found from age to age acting under the influence of long previous ideas, after they have been utterly outgrown in actual conditions.

Gilman's observation echoed the reasoning of her contemporary, United States Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who wrote in *The Common Law* (1881):

> The customs, beliefs, or needs of a primitive time establish a rule or a formula. In the course of centuries the custom, belief or necessity disappears, but the rule remains. The reason which gave rise to the rule has been forgotten, and ingenious minds set themselves to inquire how it is to be accounted for. Some ground of policy is thought of, which seems to explain it and to reconcile it with the present state of things; and then the rule adapts itself to the new reasons which have been found for it, and enters on a new career. The old form receives a new content, and in time even the form modifies itself to fit the meaning which it has received.[15]

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[14] CPG, "The Family in Modern Society," pp. 1-2, Folder 175, CPG Collection.

[15] *Forerunner* 7(March 1916):76; ibid. (February 1916):58; CPG, "Family," p. 2, Folder 175, CPG Collection; Oliver

Suggesting that such a transformation had occurred regarding the economic origins of female servitude, Gilman cited religious orthodoxy and evolutionary naturalism as two sources which provided new reasons for woman's subordination. The first justified male authority as God's will; the second explained male supremacy as nature's evolutionary goal. Gilman analyzed the misconceptions contained in both ideologies in an attempt to distinguish between "new wine and old wineskins."[16]

According to Gilman, Biblical history sanctified male authority by ignoring the gynecocentric stage of evolution and recording the primacy of man at creation. In Genesis' "erroneous" account man represented the race type; while woman, created as an "addendum--an afterthought," represented the sex type. Gilman called this "Adam first" theory the "source of all our troubles" because it unleashed upon the world an abnormal degree of masculine drives. The male gender traits of desire, combat, and display were necessary for preservation of the race and harmless if held in check. But when man assumed an unnatural position of dominance,

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Wendell Holmes, The Common Law, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1881), p. 5.

[16]CPG, "Service," p. 13, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection.

these traits exerted an excessive, injurious force which resulted in war, intemperance, and exploitation of women. Gilman proposed that by correcting the misconception concerning the order of creation--that is, by recognizing woman as the race type and man as the sex type--harmony could be restored in human affairs. She did not advocate a return to female supremacy, however, but rather the structuring of a new relationship between self-dependent sexes--a relationship based on equality and freedom.[17]

Darwinian in outlook, Gilman accepted the subjugation of women as an expression of evolutionary naturalism. But unlike determinists, such as Herbert Spencer, who interpreted male supremacy as a permanent manifestation of nature's final plan, she considered it a temporary stage leading to a higher plane of human relationships, that of sexual equality. This position coincided with her belief that humanity represented a high level of social organization but one that remained unfinished and subject to continual growth. Because of her faith in a positive life force, she construed change as being ultimately constructive. She reasoned that the inequitable relation between men and

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[17]Newsclipping, New York Tribune, 17 December 1903, Folder 288, CPG Collection; Forerunner 1(September 1909):26; CPG, Man-Made World, p. 249.

women, "so long established, so widespread, so permanent . . . could not have been introduced and maintained in the course of social evolution without natural causes and uses." Committed to the idea that "no wildest perversion of individual will could permanently maintain a condition wholly injurious to society," she theorized about the advantage society had reaped from woman's subordination to man.[18]

Gilman argued that despite all its evil by-products, female subjugation had served the race by enabling man to become humanized. For "geologic ages" the male of genus homo had been merely a reproductive agent, playing no part in rearing the progeny he helped produce. His racial growth required close association with the female who through maternal functions had become more human than he. In one of nature's "calm, unsmiling miracles" a master-slave relationship enforced such a union. The bonds of subjection worked in reverse as man assumed the burden of providing not only for the enslaved female but for her children. Forced into new parental functions as a "man-mother," he became more than just an incident in fatherhood. As Gilman described it, "He has had to learn to love and care for

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[18] Herbert Spencer, Principles of Sociology, 3 vols. (New York: 1910) 1:767-69; CPG, Women and Economics, p. 122.

someone besides himself. He has had to learn to work, to serve, to be human." "Throned as woman's master, chained as her servant," he absorbed a portion of the female trait necessary for civilized society: the capacity for love and service. In becoming "maternalized," man became humanized.[19]

Gilman called the male feminization process a necessary step in racial progress. The positive force of maternal energy had to overcome the negative aspects of male energy before human life could advance. Civilization required that the female tendencies to cooperate, conserve, and construct somehow temper male tendencies to compete, spend, and destroy. Yet Gilman recognized that humanity also benefited from a converse process of female masculinization that occurred in androcentric life. Lacking the tendency to vary, which distinguished the male, woman gained a capacity for change and progress from her exposure to the expansive force of male energy. It was in this de-polarization of masculine and feminine gender traits that Gilman recognized nature's reason for female subjection: "To blend the opposing sex-tendencies into the fruitful powers of a triumphant race."[20]

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[19]Ibid., pp. 122-134. Gilman used the term "racial" in the sense of "human race."

[20]Ibid., pp. 128-132.

Nature achieved some success in this purpose as, through the centuries, man changed "most nobly and advantageously." Exercising his powers "fruitfully" in physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions, he advanced "through all the stages of industrial development, of religious, artistic, scientific, mechanistic, political, legal, educational development." The rise of civilization, a singularly masculine accomplishment, bore witness to at least half a "triumphant race."[21]

And woman's role? With her human drives suppressed, her vast storage of female energy "acted like a coiled spring upon the only free agent in society--man." Under its stimulus, he "conquered" the world. Gilman explained the rise of modern industrialism in terms of the androcentric sexuo-economic relationship:

> The expansive and variable male energy, struggling under its new necessity for constructive labor, has caused that labor to vary and progress more than it would have done in feminine hands alone. Out of her wealth of power and patience, liking to work, to give, she toils on forever in the same primitive industries. He, impatient of obstacles, not liking to work, desirous to get rather than to give, splits his task into a thousand specialties, and invents countless ways to lighten his labors. Male energy made to expend

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[21]CPG, "Is Feminism Really So Dreadful?" Deliniator, 85(August 1914):6; CPG, "Parasitism and Civilized Vice," in Woman's Coming of Age, ed. Samuel D. Schmalhausen and V.F. Calverton (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), p. 118.

> itself in performing female functions is what brought our industries to their present development. Without the economic dependence of the female, the male would still be merely the hunter and fighter, the killer, the destroyer.[22]

According to Gilman, women could well afford their period of subjection for the sake of a civilized man. Unlike many feminists, she did not begrudge the centuries of injustice inflicted upon women. Calling for an end to bitter feelings expressed by her contemporaries, she urged women to view their plight in historical perspective:

> Right as is the change of attitude in the woman of today, she need feel no resentment as to the past, no shame, no sense of wrong. With a full knowledge of the initial superiority of her sex and the sociological necessity for its temporary subversion, she should feel only a deep and tender pride in the long patient ages during which she has waited and suffered, that man might slowly rise to full racial equality with her.[23]

At the same time, Gilman counseled against continued acceptance of male sovereignty. Although she considered androcentric culture an essential stage in humanizing men, she believed its purpose had been accomplished and that "our strange relation is coming to an end." Since she viewed woman's inferior status not as nature's final decree but as a temporary accommodation to social evolution, she

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[22]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 133-34.

[23]Ibid., p. 129.

regarded female independence inevitable once sexual hierarchy no longer proved advantageous to society. She interpreted the feminist movement as a sign, not the cause, of such progress:

> The change in woman's status . . . is not one merely to be prophesied and recommended; it is already taking place under the forces of social evolution; and only needs to be made clear to our conscious thought, that we may withdraw the futile but irritating resistance.[24]

Gilman clearly believed that rationality would prevail--that when the history of human evolution became "clear to our conscious thought," society would reject female subordination as no longer useful to the race. To implement this process she assessed the results of androcracy to show that its deleterious effect on women now outweighed its beneficial development of men.

Man had realized his human potential at great cost to the opposite sex: androcentric culture had aborted the human development of women. Gilman reiterated that growth occurred through the exercise of one's powers in physical, intellectual, spiritual and social diminsions. The patriarchal family, based on female servitude and economic dependence, restricted woman's expression in all of these areas. According to Gilman, woman's powers began to atrophy when her

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[24]Ibid., p. 122.

"great power as male selector" was abrogated. Pressured to attract a mate to insure her livelihood, woman cultivated certain attributes pleasing to men: physical frailty and sexual purity, ignorance and credulity, piety and submissiveness, domesticity and dependence. These qualities became synonymous with femininity, trapping woman in a category of inferiority.[25]

Non-assertive physically, mentally, and spiritually, women fared poorly in social relationships--domestic and otherwise. Marriage offered superficial companionship between a submissive, servile wife and a dominant husband engaged in human activities. As Gilman said, "The home-bred brain of the woman puzzles and baffles the world-bred brain of the man." Motherhood afforded limited relationships, for an unlearned woman provided little more than physical care for her children. She could hardly communicate with them about a world she did not know. Relationships outside the home were difficult to establish for the patriarchal wife. Domestic confinement deprived her of group associations and specialized labor, essential factors in social intercourse.[26]

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[25]CPG, _His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers_ (New York and London: Century Co., 1923), p. 8. Gilman noted that the qualities defining femininity also characterized slaves.

[26]CPG, _The Home: It's Work and Influence_ (1903; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 276;

Women emerged from the androcentric experience as "social dwarfs" who individually endured "a life with no beyond" and who collectively inflicted a millstone upon society. To Gilman the latter was the more serious situation, and it served as her feminist motivation. She perceived society as an organic form of life, "dependent for its health on the well-being of its component parts and suffering when any of its members were diseased." As the deficient member undermining social progress, woman must be rehumanized. She must claim her right to be human as well as female--not only for personal happiness, not only for female justice, but for the good of the race.[27]

Gilman was confident that women were "not so far aborted that a few generations of freedom will not set them abreast of the age." But because they were far behind in their human task of improving the world, she emphasized a sense of urgency:

> We have unnumbered centuries of inferiority to make up. We must work our best for a long time not only to recover the position we should have had all along,

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Newsclipping, Cincinnati Enquirer, 3 November 1913, Folder 288, CPG Collection; CPG, "All the World to Her," Independent, 55(9 July 1903):1615; CPG, Man-Made World, p. 37-41.

[27]CPG, In This Our World (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1898), p. 131. Forerunner 7(April 1916):104.

> but to help the whole world on to the place it would have won long since had we been in harness instead of on the cart or under the wheels.[28]

Gilman did not minimize the advances already made in female equality. She lauded the Woman's Rights Movement as important and successful. Through its impetus women had in one century "moved forward in every line of progress." But she believed that feminism had value only as it helped humanity, not simply women. And feminists, for the most part, did not demonstrate this priority.[29]

Gilman discerned within the pluralistic Woman's Rights Movement two distinct and opposite schools of feminism. "Human Feminists," as she termed them, viewed sex as only a part of life, its proper range being personal relations such as love, marriage, and reproduction; whereas the human plane of life bore no relation to sex. "Human Feminists" perceived woman's problem to be debarrment from human affairs and confinement to a female role. On the other hand, "Female Feminists" (by far the larger group) considered sex paramount in all aspects of life and held that woman needed greater recognition and development of her feminine

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[28]CPG, Women and Economics, p. 134; CPG, "Social," p. 8.

[29]Woman's Journal, 30 July 1904.

role. They regarded woman as "pre-eminently and most valuably a female, and as such she should be indulged, honored, paid, and allowed full and free activity."[30]

Gilman disagreed with Female Feminists, arguing that women were one-half of humanity, not a separate race. She identified with Human Feminists, agreeing with this radical minority that feminist reforms such as suffrage were vital but insufficient--that "what women need most is the development of human characteristics." But Gilman was unique among all feminists in advocating an autonomous solution to woman's dehumanization and in formulating guidelines to restore their humanity.

> Women can do it. There is no need for legislation . . . . We are one-half the race, wives to the other half, mothers to all of it . . . . When we see _our_ responsibility, and _our_ power there is no need to say anything to men.[31]

Woman's pressing need was not for "theoretical salvation," but for personal growth. Gilman recommended that women survey their position in physical, intellectual,

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[30]_Forerunner_, 5(February 1914):45. Gilman's description of "Human Feminists" and "Female Feminists" corresponds to that of radical and conservative feminists, although she did not use the latter terms.

[31]CPG, "A Woman's Party," p. 8, Folder 253, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 5(February 1914):45; CPG, "A Real Woman," pp. 25-34.

spiritual, and social areas of life; assess how these conditions affected their growth; and then "keep what helps and discard what hinders." Once "we make ourselves"--achieving strong bodies, autonomous minds, free souls, and wide social relationships--then, promised Gilman, "we can make mankind." As a guideline in verse, she capsulized her vision of the "real woman," the fully human woman, in "She Who Is To Come":

> A woman--in so far as she beholdeth
>   Her one Beloved's face;
> A mother--with a great heart that enfoldeth
>   The children of the Race;
> A body, free and strong, with that high beauty
>   That comes of perfect use, is built thereof;
> A mind where Reason ruleth over Duty,
>   And Justice reigns with Love;
> A self-poised, royal soul, brave, wise, and tender,
>   No longer blind and dumb;
> A Human Being, of an unknown splendor,
>   Is she who is to come![32]

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[32]CPG, *Our World*, p. 146.

CHAPTER VI

"EDUCATED BODIES"

"We educate our minds, why not our bodies?" Gilman posed this question as a direct challenge to women, for she regarded their lack of physical development a needless human deficiency. She acknowledged the slight progress her generation had made in female athletic participation but lamented that woman did not yet have a proper pride in her own body. While men had always valued physical prowess, women had been concerned with face and fashion--not the body. Gilman attributed women's lack of physical pride to a narrow masculine view of womanhood which idealized delicacy and innocence. Victorian women's efforts to meet these standards of femininity resulted in physical weakness and sexual repression.[1]

Gilman refuted the validity of both these standards, labeling their results the genesis of female dehumanization. The ideas she propounded in response, however, are best

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[1]CPG, "Educated Bodies," Forerunner 5(March 1914):75; CPG "Mending Morals by Making Muscles," p. 1, Folder 247, CPG Collection; Forerunner 1(September 1910):22-23.

understood against a background of nineteenth century concepts of woman's physical incapacity. Of importance to note is the fact (as Gilman recognized) that women acted as accomplices in their physical denegation.

Gilded Age gentility, upheld by both sexes of a rising middle class, gave an aura of propriety to female delicacy. Nineteenth century chivalry equated frailty with femininity; and the shibboleth, "woman's weakness is her charm" became too entrenched to resist. Women willingly proved their femininity by cultivating physical weakness even to the point of ill health. According to a woman writer in 1873, to be ladylike meant reclining on a sofa with smelling salts and fan, "lifeless, inane, and dawdling." Consumptive heroines reigned in literature of the period, and a contemporary verse typified etiquette of the day in stating, "the bride, _of course_ fainted, for, being acquainted with manners, she knew what was right."[2]

Women further acquiesced to expectations of weakness and ill health in regard to their reproductive systems.

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[2]David M. Kennedy, _Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger_ (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 54-55. The emphasis on female frailty was a phenomenon confined to the middle and upper classes; the working class could ill afford to indulge its women in helpless fragility.

Medical orthodoxy viewed woman as a creature controlled by her reproductive functions, all of which had pathological implications. Puberty represented a crisis that disoriented the entire female organism. Menstruation, considered a hereditary disease, turned women into monthly invalids. Pregnancy, an embarrassing illness evoking social taboos, caused women to withdraw from society "to hide their imagined shame as long as possible." Menopause, a "final, incurable ill," symbolized the "death of the woman within the woman." In 1900 the president of the American Gynecological society gave a dismal summary of woman's sex-centered life:

> Many a young life is battered and forever crippled in the breakers of puberty; if she crosses these unharmed and is not dashed to pieces on the rock of childbirth, it may still ground on the ever-recurring shallows of menstruation, and lastly, upon the final bar of menopause ere protection is found in the unruffled waters of the harbor beyond the reach of sexual storms.

Gilman satirized the situation in verse form:

> They talk of disabilities--a long array of these,
> Till one would think that womankind was merely a
> disease.[3]

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[3]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," Journal of American History 60(September 1973), pp. 335-37. Few years remained to women beyond the "sexual storms," for as late as 1900 their life expectancy was only fifty-one years. Lois Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 14; Forerunner 5(March 1914):64.

Ramifications of female frailty widened as medical authorities began to relate the central role of female organs to the theory of energy conservation. According to this idea, human beings possessed a limited amount of vital energy which supplied one set of organs only at the expense of another. Women were told by physicians that brain activity diverted energy from the womb, the literal and symbolic core of their being; therefore, to take seriously their womanhood, they must forego intellectual pursuits and instead focus all energy on their reproductive system. An example of practical suggestions toward this end appeared in a gynecology textbook published in 1879 which stated that a girl should spend one year before puberty and two years afterward at rest and that each menstrual period should be spent in bed.[4]

Ironically, despite the attention given woman's body, physicians placed little emphasis on strengthening her physique. Strenuous athletic exercise seemed inappropriate for congenitally frail women hampered by monthly illness. Horseback riding threatened pelvic problems; bowling presented a stabbing hazard if corset stays should break; tennis furnished little activity, for running after the ball was

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[4]Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "Female Animal," pp. 340-42.

considered unladylike; swimming posed a drowning threat, for women "bathed" fully clothed from neck to ankle; calesthenics produced masculine muscles, and no woman wanted a "gymnasium" look; bicycling offered women the safest exercise, but doctors advised pelvic exams before such a venture. In light of these hazards, physical culturists frequently recommended housework as the ideal exercise for women.[5]

The concept of women as "the weaker sex" became a self-fulfilling prophecy as women adherred to popular and medical opinions about their physical limitations. But accompanying their loss of strength and health, a further indignity occurred: the denial of their sexuality. The identification of femininity with sexual innocence transpired over a fifty-year period, beginning in mid-nineteenth century.

Health crusaders in the pre-Civil War era popularized the idea that sexual indulgence weakened the male constitution. Increasingly thereafter, physicians alert to the theory of energy conservation advocated sexual restraint for men, lest vital energy be diverted from the brain--the dominant

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[5] John S. Haller, Jr. and Robin M. Haller, The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), pp. 174-76.

male organ. This counsel coincided with a growing middle class concern with the disruptive effect of sexuality on America's industrializing society. Capitalism required orderly, predictable behavior; thus, "all passions . . . were suspect because passions interfered with orderly procedures, with planning and organization." By the late nineteenth century preoccupation with sexual repression had evolved into a moral philosophy upholding platonic, or "ethical," love as mankind's highest goal. Sex manuals ascribed physical love to man's lower instincts--necessary to preserve the species, but an obstacle to society's progress if engaged in excessively. Darwinian Victorians perceived sex as a primitive, earthy passion destined to become spiritualized with humanity's evolutionary ascent.[6]

The major impediment to achieving a platonic society was the association of pleasure with sexual activity. Victorian moralists, therefore, decreed sex to be functional but not enjoyable. Expressing fear that sensuality had penetrated marriage, the very institution entrusted with regulating sex, purity literature began to stress continence within marriage. A 1901 article in the New York Medical Journal prophesied: "As long as mankind marries in order

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[6]Ibid., pp. 96-97. Page Smith, Daughters of the Promised Land (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), pp. 64, 76.

to indulge in licensed sexual intercourse, it will seek happiness in vain. No purely animal pleasure can satisfy its nature, which is striving Godward." To a generation steeped in optimistic faith in progress, such calls toward moral perfection proved irresistible. In aspiration, if not in reality, Victorians lived in an "age of innocence."[7]

In an ignominious phenomenon of social history, it fell the lot of women to uphold the ideal of innocence through themselves becoming sexless. In contrast to eighteenth and early nineteenth century marriage manuals which portrayed sex as a healthy passion enjoyed equally by both sexes, a double standard prevailed in the Gilded Age as sexologists differentiated between male and female sexual natures. Men were considered incapable of purity because of their strong sexual drives, the character of which was varyingly described as "aggressive," "brutal," or even "bestial"--but in all cases, irrepressible. If sexuality were to be suppressed, women must assume responsibility.[8]

In a classic example of John Galbraith's paradigm, the convenient social virtue, Gilded Age society ascribed such

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[7]Haller and Haller, Physician, pp. 91-92; Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (New York: Knopf, 1959) cites pre-World War I Americans' faith in moral progress as a characteristic of their innocence.

[8]Haller and Haller, Physician, pp. 92-99.

merit to female sexual purity that it became the keystone of respectable womanhood. Women heeded admonishments to associate sex with maternal functions rather than passion. By the 1870's female frigidity, considered a necessity for controlling man's "animal nature," had become a norm accepted by both men and women; and by the turn of the century passionless women were extolled as the product of natural selection. To Victorian Americans, a "good" woman was a "pure" woman--one devoid of sexual knowledge, interest, or feelings. She remained ignorant of sex until marriage and thereafter endured the act as a conjugal duty. Throughout either role--as chaste virgin or continent wife--she single-handedly upheld society's standard of innocence.[9]

Gilman deplored the Victorian idealization of feminine delicacy and innocence, claiming that physical weakness and sexual repression curtailed woman's physical expression and thus dehumanized her. Gilman considered the body a fundamental means of expression, upon whose well being and full use depended one's human growth. Happiness--a state she deemed synonymous with humanness-derived from the fulfillment of function (that is, the full use of faculties), for life consisted of action; it involved a continuous cycle of

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[9]Ibid., pp. 100-102.

receiving stimuli and discharging energy. Nature's corollary necessities were nourishment and exertion. Denial of either curtailed happiness. But neglect of the law of exertion proved the more common malady--and had dire, if subtle, consequences: to be "unused" diminished one's humanity.[10]

Disuse of physical faculties, in particular, undermined human growth. In Gilman's view of integrated personality, an active body was a prerequisite to intellectual, spiritual, and social development. She rejected the Victorian dichotomy of body and mind, emphasizing instead the unity and interdependence of these faculties. Physical fitness served a direct end, since health in itself provided a source of contentment; but beyond this immediate result, physical expression facilitated mental development. There existed a "direct reactive effect between body and mind--both ways." Hence, mental health depended upon "the smooth adjustment of these two interacting parts of every living thing."[11]

Shifting to more abstract terminology, Gilman made further application of the relationship between physical

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[10] CPG, Human Work (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1904), pp. 123, 152-53, 205-6.

[11] Forerunner 2(June 1911):154; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 23 October 1898, Folder 57, CPG Collection; Forerunner 7(August 1916):203.

development and a unified personality: "In every living creature there is a close likeness between its spirit and form. Given such a spirit, it tends to evolve such a form. Given such a form, it tends to evolve such a spirit." She noted that the power of mind over matter was a common observance, but that the influence of matter upon mind--of the body upon the spirit--received inadequate attention. She regarded the body as an affective instrument which not only expressed the spirit, but modified it--either positively or negatively. Maximum physical development allowed for commensurate psychic expansion and, as Gilman emphasized, must precede it. The "soul is all ready for expansion as fast as it finds or makes new forms," she said. Conversely, minimum physical exertion imprisoned the spirit. In order to grow, the spirit must discard old forms and rely on new ones; if the body resisted development, remaining fixed and rigid, the spirit within would be crippled.[12]

Gilman warned against perceiving "living forms as we do rocks--as permanent facts," unused and unchanging. She asserted that women had fallen prey to such condition and that their physical disuse had caused mental lethargy and crippled spirits, as well as the more obvious result,

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[12]CPG, Human Work, pp. 157, 165-66; CPG to Houghton Gilman, 23 October 1897, Folder 57, CPG Collection.

defective bodies. Since "the spirit of every living thing is expressed through its form," to become fully human, women must begin with physical improvement.

Gilman challenged women toward such improvement in calling for "educated bodies." The educative process she espoused required an understanding of human standards of physical excellence to which she alluded in the verse:

> A body, free and strong, with the high beauty
> That comes of perfect use.

Gilman's humanist view of the body incorporated and equated the elements of freedom, strength, and beauty--all stemming from the full use of physical powers.[13]

Dismissing male definitions of female beauty which fostered and exploited women's physical weakness, she set forth the following principle of human beauty, "the only true beauty": "Any living animal to be beautiful must be a sterling specimen of its kind, capable of full activity. An unused organism cannot be sound and strong. If it is not sound and strong, it is not beautiful." Human beauty, or physical excellence (the terms were identical for Gilman), necessitated being true to one's race type, to one's human nature; and Gilman reminded women that it was their human

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[13]CPG, _In This Our World_, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1898), p. 146.

nature to be strong, healthy, and sexually responsive. A woman should compare in these characteristics with a man--as the lioness does with the lion, the mare with the stallion. She would be no less womanly with these attributes, rather more human.[14]

The development of woman's physical capacity, however, depended on the freedom to be active; and centuries of economic dependence had limited her freedom. Woman's subservience to man had necessitated the development of "feminine charms"--those qualities pleasing and appeasing to men--at the expense of her human beauty. Gilman asserted that physical limitations were not part of woman's nature, as Victorians believed, but were unnatural traits acquired in adjusting to androcracy. Seeking to educate women concerning the history of this process, she elaborated one of her most significant theories: the modifying effects of women's economic relationship to men.

Although Gilman was not a determinist, she had profound respect for the effect of environmental conditions upon humanity. These included climate, geography, physical force, and social relationships. She considered economic factors,

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[14]CPG, "Woman the Enigma," Harper's Bazaar 42(December 1908):1196; CPG, The Man-Made World (1911; reprint ed., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), p. 65.

however, to be the most powerful modifying conditions. The means of attaining one's livelihood--the specific process of obtaining one's food supply--comprised the strongest force in shaping a person's development. "It is these activities, the incessant repetition of the exertions by which he is fed, which most modify his structure and develop his functions."[15]

Gilman reasoned that functions and organs used most often became those most highly developed. Since the supplying of economic needs involved the fundamental activity of life, those physical and psychic aspects utilized in making a living emerged as prominent characteristics. It followed, then, that special economic conditions affecting a specific class of people would cause unique results. Gilman cited such a "peculiar condition" in woman's economic dependence upon man: "We are the only animal species in which the female depends upon the male for food; the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation." This sexuo-economic relation adversely affected

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[15]CPG, _Women and Economics_, ed. Carl N. Degler (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966), pp. 2-3.

humanity by exaggerating "sex-distinctions" between men and women, to the detriment of their common humanity.[16]

In a situation where both sexes obtained their food independently and under the same conditions, they were modified alike by their environment, and the force of natural selection produced identical race qualities. Although they differed in sex, the likeness in species was greater than the difference in sex. But in that phenomenon, "unparalleled in nature," whereby one entire sex fed the other, man became woman's economic environment--hence, the most powerful modifying force acting upon her. "And all the slow blind forces of nature bent themselves _to fit her to her environment_." Under this arrangement, woman became modified by sexual rather than natural selection.[17]

Under equal economic conditions the female had functioned as sexual selector, and the results of her choice coincided with the aim of natural selection--that is, progressive racial improvement. But in the sexuo-economic relation, where man became master as well as mate, he usurped the female prerogative of mate selection. By force, by purchase,

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[16]Ibid., p. 5.

[17]Ibid., p. 38; CPG, "A Real Woman," p. 29, Folder 165-2, CPG Collection.

or by invitation he did the choosing. According to Gilman, he was "not good at it," and the race suffered. "The males were no longer improved by their natural competition for the female; and the females were not improved; because the male did not select for points of racial superiority, but for such qualities as pleased him." Forced to compete for man's favor to insure her livelihood, woman found sex-attraction essential to self-preservation. As a result, she developed an abnormal degree of sex-distinction; Gilman described this condition as being "over-sexed."[18]

Gilman equated woman's being over-sexed with being over-feminized. "To manifest in excess any of the distinctions of sex, primary or secondary, is to be over-sexed," she said. Primary sex-distinctions consisted of reproductive organs and functions; secondary sex-distinctions included "all those differences in habit, manner, method, occupation, behavior which distinguished men from women." It was in the latter category that women had become excessively sexual, or over-feminized. Gilman argued that while a degree of sex differentiation was essential to race preservation, an overabundance hindered racial progress by obliterating human attributes. She considered the most detrimental aberrations

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[18]CPG, _Women and Economics_, pp. 23, 38-39; CPG, _Man-Made World_, pp. 30-31.

in female sex distinctions to be physical weakness, "sex-decoration," and distorted sexuality.[19]

Woman's physical weakness represented the most visible inbreeding of masculine preferences. Qualities of strength, speed, and agility which the free, primitive female had developed for survival atrophied in the sexuo-economic relation; and the androcentric woman evolved into a small, feeble, clumsy creature. Her "comparative inability to stand, walk, run, jump, climb, and perform race-functions common to both sexes is an excessive sex-distinction." She transmitted these deficiencies to her progeny, male and female, thereby limiting physical development in the race as a whole. Gilman emphasized that in no other advanced species did there exist such physical discrepancy between the sexes.[20]

Gilman attributed the development of female weakness to man's desire for mastery. "Since man, using his strength against woman, found her weaker than himself and enjoyed the fact--he has erected a myth as to her weakness and its charm." To demythologise the idea entrenched in Victorian

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[19] CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 38-43.

[20] CPG, "Enigma," p. 1195; CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 37, 44-47.

society that "woman's weakness is her charm," Gilman emphasized its exploitive rationale. Because men defined women in self-serving terms--as sexual and subject creatures--they valued those traits conducive to female subordination. Initially male dominance came through brute force; but with the growth of civilization, persuasion replaced coercion. Yet despite civilized subtleties, the necessity of maintaining male sovereignty through physical superiority remained unchanged. Man's strength, and thus his control, predicated an exaggeration of female weakness.[21]

Gilman refuted chivalry's claim that woman benefited from her "appealing helplessness" because it evoked man's protective instinct. Rather, the feminine trait of helplessness served as a temptation to male aggression. She noted the irony that "'weaker vessels' work fields as men do, bear and rear children as men do not--and then have to wait on men in the bargain." Thus her question: "How does the man protect his wife against himself?" Gilman held that masculine protection was geared toward one purpose--the defense of his female property; hence, a man protected a

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[21]Forerunner 1(September 1910):22; CPG, Home, p. 287. Gilman speculated that if female weakness benefited men by highlighting their strength, then a man should marry an invalid or an idiot for maximum benefit.

woman against other males--for himself. She contended that if man acted as woman's true protector, he would not deny her the necessities for self-defense: freedom, equality, and justice.[22]

Gilman cited female sex-decoration as a second abnormal sex-distinction because it involved an unnatural reversal of gender characteristics. In most other animal species the male competed for the female through display of sex ornamentation. Equipped "to strut and languish . . . to sacrifice ease, comfort, speed," he exhibited every beauteous lure--"in the overflowing ardor of song, as in the nightingale and tom-cat" and in the "wasteful splendor of personal decoration"; he spared "no expense of spreading antlers or trailing plumes" to win the female's favor. In contrast, nature created the female in drab, unobtrusive design as a protective device for motherhood, her chief function. Exercising her power of mate selection, she had no need for display; to the male motivated by sexual desire, she was attractive without decoration.[23]

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[22]CPG, "Her Natural Protector," pp. 3-5, Folder 177, CPG Collection; CPG, "Enigma," pp. 1193-97. Gilman perceived chivalry's class-consciousness; she called chivalry a "standard of sentiment affecting a very narrow class for a limited time," and never affecting the "ordinary run of women." CPG, "Motherhood and the Modern Woman," p. 4, Folder 255, CPG Collection.

[23]CPG, Man-Made World, pp. 12-13, 24-25, 29, 173.

Gilman asserted that nature intended human beings to follow this same pattern. The responsibility for sex-attraction, and thus sex-decoration, rested with the human male. Woman had no need for ornamentation; she was "in herself the attraction, the eternal drawing power." But when man began to control woman's food supply, he no longer had to woo her through exhibitions of strength and splendor; and a peculiar exchange occurred whereby men wore conservative attire associated with the female animal, while women assumed the masculine role of sex-ornamentation. "She alone in nature adds to the burden of maternity, which she was meant for, this unnatural burden of ornament which she was not meant for," Gilman said. She attributed this reversal of nature's laws solely to women's economic dependence upon men. "As all broader life is made to depend . . . on whom they marry . . . they have been driven into this form of competition so alien to the true female attitude." Sex-decoration became woman's means of survival, a "way to be chosen for the protective harem."[24]

Gilman decried the ignominy of women "decorating and preening themselves in borrowed plumage." Their "blooming forth as the peacock or bird of paradise" was "enough to make

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[24]Ibid., p. 60; Forerunner 7(February 1916):49.

the angels weep--and laugh." She noted the irony that despite women's adoption of the masculine propensity for display, no one criticized them for being unwomanly; indeed, society labeled their vanity "feminine." Gilman attempted to show that women's cultivation of beauty through disfigured bodies and irrational fashions represented a denial of both their femininity and their humanity.[25]

Gilman maintained that woman's beauty as a female and as a human being involved the body, not its ornamentation. Yet women, bred and trained through centuries of masculine selection, had emerged as "decorated darlings," oblivious to the natural shape of the human figure. Gilman insisted that man's admiration of woman's physique had nothing to do with beauty but rather with "gross overdevelopment of certain points which appeal to him as a male." She noted that masculine canons of taste in the female figure ranged from the orientals' preference for bound feet, to the Hottentots' penchant for steatopygia, to the westerners' fascination with cinched waists and padded hips.[26]

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[25]CPG, Man-Made World, p. 60; CPG, "Masculine, Feminine, and Human," Appleton's Magazine 13(May 1909):517.

[26]Forerunner 1(September 1910):22; CPG, His Religion and Hers, (New York and London: Century Co., 1923), p. 54; CPG, Man-Made World, p. 53; CPG, "The New Status of Women," p. 5, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection.

Gilman considered attempts to alter the body's shape arbitrarily the lowest form of savagery. She marveled, "It would seem that a painful injurious deformity would be recognized as wrong--but not so." American women suffered bodily injury through the decorative function of three articles: the skirt, the shoe, and the corset. Long, heavy skirts exerted such friction and pressure as to alter the shape of leg muscles, giving women disproportionately short legs; hobbled shirts inflicted upon women a "mincing, twittering gait"--a permanent clumsiness. Constricting, high-heeled shoes so misplaced the weight of the body that they caused bent spines as well as malfunctioning feet. Woman's body was most severely injured by the corset, "that amazing object . . . which runs from waist to knee, almost; which binds up hip and abdomen with steel, bone and elastic." Gilman challenged any man to wear this device and then try to pursue his customary activities. But men allegedly had no need for artificial support because of the strength of their muscles. Whereas, "it was generally supposed that a woman's body lacked the mechanical advantages of a spine, and of the supporting muscles of the trunk, and had to be reinforced by a species of permanent splint; a stiffened bandage, to hold it together or hold it up." Gilman saw little

improvement in the later styles of the 1920's. Short, narrow skirts continued to hobble women, while the new "boyish brassiere" was "psychological blasphemy." It showed "lack of a sense of beauty and lack of respect for that proud mark of our high place in nature--the wholly feminine distinction of Order Mammalia."[27]

Gilman counseled women to reject artificial devices which restricted the body and instead to develop a proportioned body shaped only by its natural activities. A major obstacle must first be overcome, however. Afflicted by a false sense of modesty, women had begun to regard the body as virtually non-existent. According to Gilman:

> Clothes have come to be part of the body in our estimation. The body without clothes is a thing as foreign and unknown in our mental universe as a bird without feathers, a turtle without his shell. I do not mean that we consider the naked body indecent--though many of us still do even that--but that we do not even consider it at all--it has no existence in our minds . . . . We never think of each other save as head hands and feet, with an indefinite mass between.

Gilman accepted modesty as a valid human trait when it signified, for either sex, a realistic assessment of inferiority; but she labeled modesty "false" when regarded

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[27] Forerunner 1(May 1910):11; CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 25, Folder 228, CPG Collection; Forerunner 6(April 1915):102-3.

as a female virtue connoting shame and concealment of the body. Furthermore, she called "feminine modesty" a contradiction in terms, for despite the fact that women were "collared to the chin, gloved to the elbow--covered utterly," their attire so exaggerated sexual features as to cry aloud, "I am female; don't forget it."[28]

Gilman asserted that women must be educated to see the body as a source of beauty rather than shame. She proposed to accomplish this through two means: aesthetic training and physical exercise.

Aesthetic training was paramount, she said, because, "We know so little of human beauty, and think so much of sex, that we have let the race deteriorate sadly, without noticing it." Women had been dulled by the ugliness of "defective bodies concealed in garments." They had lost sight of the fact that "we ought to live in a world of overflowing loveliness--and that our contribution to it should be the loveliest of all." Gilman recommended that the beauty of the human body be taught in school through literature and art and be upheld as an attainable ideal. An

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[28]CPG, "The Dress and the Body," pp. 1-2, Folder 175, CPG Collection; CPG, "Modesty, Feminine and Otherwise," Independent 58(22 June 1905):1447-48.

admirer of all things Grecian, she suggested that women study Greek female statues to learn appreciation for: beautiful feet, bound only by sandals; natural waistlines, unfettered by cinches; and athletic bodies moving freely in light garments.[29]

While women lacked aesthetic appreciation of the body, they were even more negligent of its physical culture. Paradoxically, they cultivated beauty in their surroundings but did little to develop beautiful bodies. Gilman observed, "The virtuous housewife is proud of her house or garden--but she is stout and in poor shape. She would make a grotesque statue." She attributed this tendency to environmental conditioning, arguing that house-bound people became indifferent to exercise. She discounted the prevailing idea among physical educators that housework provided good exercise; rather, "it wears the nerves, not the muscles." Athletic development dictated an out-door life, but "the _House_ forbids it." Gilman therefore advised women to become "unhousebound" as the first step in their physical education.[30]

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[29]CPG, "Masculine," p. 517; CPG, _Man-Made World_, p. 46; CPG, Note, Folder 161, CPG Collection; CPG, "Status," p. 5; CPG, "Poise Begins at the Feet," p. 1, Folder 177, CPG Collection; CPG, "Enigma," p. 1194.

[30]_Forerunner_ 1(May 1910):10; Newsclipping, _Woman's Journal_, n.d., Folder 251, CPG Collection.

For a well organized system of physical culture, Gilman again referred to Greek culture as a model. The ancient Greeks viewed the person as a unity and thus integrated use of the body into daily life. Through games to kindle incentive, through gymnastics for balance and power, through dance which united body and mind, they exulted in the pleasure of physical activity. The lives of American women seemed quite remote from this vigorous pattern; but Gilman felt it could be theirs for the choosing if they ignored those critics who still believed in "some mysterious disability in the female which unfits her for strenuous activity." Like the ancient Greeks, women could and should engage in sports and gymnastics to build up a "standard of splendid bodily efficiency." Gilman further proposed that women participate in "year-long series of beautiful games and dances suitable for young and old." She regarded games as essential activities, for people were most human when they played. Like most human affairs, sports and games had been monopolized by men; yet the play instinct was common to both sexes and needed cultivation in women. Gilman anticipated that as women played, danced, and acquired physical prowess,

their "educated bodies" would more nearly resemble human bodies.[31]

Women manifested the abnormalities of sex-decoration not only through misshapen bodies but through irrational dress unsuited to either function or form. Men's clothing had been modified by physical working conditions, resulting in practical, comfortable attire. But women's dress had been modified by male preferences which emphasized sex appeal at the expense of rational design.

As evidence that sex rather than reason modified women's clothes, Gilman cited society's dictum that men and women dress in totally different costumes. "And to keep up the distinction," she said, "we make it a penal offense for one sex to wear the clothes of the other." The

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[31]CPG, "Status," p. 5; CPG, "Why Are There No Women on the President's Commission?" Good Housekeeping 48(January 1909):120-22; CPG, Man-Made World, pp. 107-8, 124. Gilman paid tribute to Isadora Duncan for reviving the Greek use of dance (its highest form) as a physical expression of emotion. Forerunner 6(April 1915):101. According to Gilman, a reduction of the play impulse in women began in infancy with the imposition of maternally oriented toys and games. "Being females--which means mothers, we must needs provide them with babies before they cease to be babies themselves; and we expect their play to consist in an imitation of maternal cares . . . . We do not expect the little boy to manifest a father's love and care for an imitation child--but we do expect the little girl to show maternal feelings for her imitation baby. It has not yet occurred to us that this is monstrous." Man-Made World, pp. 109-110.

differences concerned primarily the shape and fabric of their respective garments. The skirt represented the major item of distinction. Because of its broad shape it could be discerned at long distances. Gilman recounted that on the western plains a mile was measured by the following standard: "'As far as you can tell a man from a woman,' meaning, of course, as far as you can tell a skirt from trousers." Because society identified skirts with femininity and convention made them mandatory, Gilman called the skirt "that hoary Emblem of Sex." Fabrics deliniated gender through texture and color: femininity denoted by thin, soft materials in light and rich colors; masculinity conveyed by rough, dark textiles. Gilman described a typical novel scene in which the heroine delighted "in laying her cheek against his 'rough tweed,'" and the man experienced "mild ecstasy in 'the frou-frou of her silken skirts.'"[32]

To the oft repeated question, "Do women dress to please men?" Gilman replied, "Of course." Bound by economic necessity to attract a mate, they were obliged to wear clothes suited to that purpose. Such pressure forced them

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[32] Forerunner 6(January 1915):23; ibid. (February 1915):50; ibid. (April 1915):102; ibid. (May 1915):132-33. Gilman illustrated the arbitrary aspect of associating skirts with femininity with a reference to oriental harems filled with trousered women.

to exhibit "the most conspicuous prominence of femininity:"

> In the heavy gorgeousness of her decorations; in her profuse beads and jewels; in rich and sumptuous stuffs and bizarre outlines; in unnecessary furs and more than superfluous feathers, we still see the woman labeling herself with a huge W; crying aloud to all "I am a female and I wish to please."

Woman not only succumbed to male pressure but became a willing participant in exaggerating sexuality in her clothing. She "admires and delights to wear . . . a kind of dress which emphasizes in a thousand subtle ways the fact that she is female." Yet Gilman only mildly chided women for this response, recognizing that to secure a living a woman must secure a man, and that--his stomach notwithstanding--the way to a man's heart lay through his eyes. "There have been millions of assiduous female cooks," she said, "but the record heart-breakers, from Aphrodite down, did it by good looks."[33]

Gilman did, however, castigate women for their blind obedience to the dictates of fashion, for she believed that their submission to arbitrary changes in style stemmed not from sexuo-economic pressure but from the primitive

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[33]CPG, "Do Women Dress to Please Men?" pp. 652-53, Folder 253, CPG Collection; Forerunner 6(January 1915):23; ibid. (February 1915):50-51; ibid. (May 1915):136-37.

tendency to conform, an affliction common to all mankind. When "Dame Fashion" decreed, "This is beautiful! Wear it!" women did so unquestioningly. Gilman said:

> One would think they would lift their heads and say "Why must I?--I will not!" But no, they bow their heads all one way, like river grass streaming in the current, and over them, . . . flows this stream of clothing and decoration . . . . It does not cross the minds of most women that it would be possible for them to wear what they personally preferred . . . . They have deified the power that governs them, and worship it. They call it--"Style."

She warned that by obeying the orders of fashion, women waived their right of judgment and, by disuse, risked its loss. They thereby negated their claim to possess human as well as female qualities.[34]

Gilman had no specific program for dress reform. She supported no protest groups such as the "Rainy Daisies," a society of women who wore short skirts on rainy days. She recommended no special attire such as the Bloomer. A rational standard of dress for women involved not so much a change of costume as a change of mind. In her view:

> all that is needed is the use of the individual judgment, the individual will, and both grow stronger with that use. There are no real lions in the path--nothing but mere false ideas. We slavishly do as we

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[34] Forerunner 6(October 1915):273-75; ibid. (November 1915):303.

> are told under the impression that something terrible will happen to us if we do not. But nothing does happen. How could it? There are no legal penalties for being sensible.

Thus, in keeping with her philosophy of autonomy, Gilman felt women themselves could solve the problem of irrational clothing. To hasten the development of their "individual judgment" and "individual will," she offered certain guidelines.[35]

An educated taste in clothes must be based on clear knowledge of four basic laws of beauty. (1) Truth--Clothing should be free of falsehood, imitation, or pretense. (2) Simplicity--Clothing should serve a clear, direct purpose; it should be functional and comfortable. (3) Unity and harmony--The part must be true to the whole; no dress could be beautiful if it contradicted, limited, or injured the body. (4) Restraint--Clothing should not be excessive--in design, or expense, or in time required for its selection and upkeep.[36]

The development of a strong will to implement an informed judgment of clothes depended upon women's economic independence. Only when released from the "overmastering

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[35]Ibid. (December 1915):329-334.

[36]Ibid. (December 1915):329; CPG, Home, pp. 144-45, 159.

pressure of sex-economic force" could women choose clothes to please themselves instead of their "bread-winners." To further support their self-determination in dress, women must become aware that the unnatural reversal of decorative roles had "unsexed" both women and men. Through her sex-specialized, highly ornamented dress woman had adopted a male distinction; and man, in his plain, serviceable attire, had assumed a female quality. Each sex had been robbed of the highest beauty in the other.[37]

Gilman anticipated restoration of nature's harmony in both sexes once women applied their judgment and will to dress reform. In claiming their right to dress rationally--to wear clothes suited to the human body and its activities, clothes aesthetically pleasing but practical--women would encourage men to return to their rightful state of "blazing masculine splendor." As man displayed "rich variety, a conspicuous impressive beauty, the world would throb and brighten to the color music of Nature's born exhibitor, the male." As woman expressed peace and power in her attire, she would "strike the true note of womanhood." Neither sex would sacrifice personality or originality. Rather,

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[37] Forerunner 6(February 1915):51; ibid. (May 1915): 134-37.

"free bodies, honestly expressed spirits, needs well met, and all the lovely play of fresh invention . . . will give us a world of beauty in human dress such as we have not yet dreamed of."[38]

The third abnormal sex-distinction resulting from the sexuo-economic relation involved a distortion of woman's sexuality. This occurred by relegating her exclusively to female functions and by depriving her of sexual autonomy. As a non-human example of the singularly female role, Gilman pointed to "those insects where the female, losing economic activity and modified entirely to sex, becomes a mere egg-sac." With such insects, preservation of the species could be justified as their sole concern, she said; "but with a race like ours, whose development as human creatures is but comparatively begun, it is evil because of its check to individual and racial progress. There are other purposes before us besides mere maintenance and reproduction." Yet woman's purpose in life had been limited to these functions. She nurtured and reproduced life, but she contributed little to human growth--either her own or that of society.[39]

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[38]Ibid. (May 1915):134-38.

[39]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 58-59. Gilman's reference to the female as a "mere egg-sac" is analogous to a nineteenth century physician's view of woman's primary

Gilman claimed that the great error of history was the conviction that women were to "make people, not be people." She believed the world had made little progress since ancient man first said to woman: "You are a female, and that's all. We are the people." As evidence of continued acceptance of this idea among modern men, she referred to the following statements by contemporary writers. H.B. Marriot-Watson described the American woman seeking greater independence thus: "Her constitutional restlessness has caused her to abdicate those functions which alone excuse or explain her existence." Grant Allen gave scientific sanction to the idea that women functioned only as females: "Women are not only not even half the race, but a sub-species told off for reproduction only." Rudyard Kipling wrote: "For the God from whom she came, made her for one purpose only, armed and engined for the same." Gilman claimed that this view permeated the world's literature and represented a constant preoccupation of men's minds. She noted, however, that women writers occasionally expressed the same fallacy and cited Ida M. Tarbell as an ironic example. A successful

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distinction: "It was as if the Almighty created a uterous and built a woman around it." Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "Female Animal," p. 335.

journalist herself, Tarbell declared homemaking to be woman's true destiny.[40]

To the androcentric mind, past or present, woman's value as wife and mother outweighed her faults as an inferior being; but for her to overstep these areas and participate in life outside the home was unthinkable. Human qualities had become synonymous with masculinity, and women who ventured into such human affairs as education, politics, or business were accused of usurping man's nature. They elicited such epithets as "unwomanly," "unsexed," "masculinized," "de-natured," "epicene," or--as Tarbell described the professional woman--"making a man of herself." Gilman illustrated the paradox in this attitude by quoting a critique of American women: "'Your women are so sex-less,' says the pitying European--_meaning only that they manifest something besides sex_."[41]

As further indication of woman's singularly sexual identity, Gilman referred to the custom of calling women

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[40]CPG, "Service Social and Domestic," p. 10, Folder 177-2; _Forerunner_ 1(January 1910):12; CPG, "Why Women Are Unhappy," p. 64, Folder 253; CPG, "Are Women Human Beings?" p. 11. In the _Forerunner_ 3(February 1912):38, Gilman refuted Tarbell's views which had appeared first in article form, then in Tarbell's book, _The Business of Being A Woman_ (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912).

[41]CPG, "Unhappy," p. 64; _Forerunner_ 5(March 1914):65; ibid. (December 1916):333.

"the sex," a clear sign of their role in society. "So utterly has the status of women been accepted as a sexual one" she said, "that it has remained for the woman's movement of the nineteenth century to devote much attention to the claim that women are persons! That women are persons as well as females,--an unheard of proposition!" Yet Gilman recognized the difficulty in viewing women as people, for centuries of conditioning to excessive femaleness had left them bereft of many human qualities. She allowed that the "eternal feminine" aura of "airs and graces, weeping and frailty" seemed "a bit indecent" in the arenas of human activity. She underscored the poignancy of this contrast in suggesting that women were attracted to a man not just because of sex but because of his humanness. "She has hung around him as devotedly as the cripple tags the athlete." On the other hand, men were attracted by a woman's sexuality but contemptuous of her non-human nature. "Men turn with loathing from the kind of woman they have made," Gilman said. When seeking human companionship, they turned to other men.[42]

Despite woman's definition as a sexual creature, she exercised little sexual autonomy. "She specialized in

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[42]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 49, 98; CPG, Home, p. 222.

sex--not for her own share in it--but for his pleasure and satisfaction," Gilman said. As the subordinate spouse, woman had no recourse but sexual submission; and her mate "indulged his desires continually." Only the human male engaged in sexual license because "no other animal controlled a subject female who could neither defend herself nor escape."[43]

From her perspective as an evolutionist, Gilman viewed sex as a natural relation but one designed for a specific purpose and thus requiring discriminate use. She held that "sex was introduced, not as necessary to life or even to reproduction, which had gone on efficiently for many ages, but as an agent for variation and selection, so tending the improvement of the species." Sex for any purpose other than intelligently planned procreation constituted an abuse of its intended function to refine the race; hence, male indulgence increased sexual activity beyond its proper scope. The masculine trait of desire "that should operate in a minor degree for a brief season to sexual advantage--operates in a major degree all the time, to social injury." Such injuries included sexual exploitation within marriage, which produced innumerable unwanted children, and prostitution,

[43]CPG, "Social Ethics," pp. 130-134.

which produced illegitimate children; in both cases the offspring received deficient parenting. Verereal disease, a further injury, increased in proportion to male promiscuity. It afflicted not only the wife forced to tolerate a profligate husband but also their progeny. Dismayed by the growing popularity of Freudian psychology, which regarded sex as a "hygienic necessity" and advocated its full expression, Gilman feared humanity was "entering a new period of limitless indulgence, completely divorced from its original purpose." With an uncharacteristic note of pessimism she asked, "What is there in the sex behavior of the human race which leads us to believe that it is normal and advantageous?"[44]

Historically, society had responded to the misuse of sex by trying to regulate its conduct. These attempts ranged from primitive taboos to modern divorce laws, from phallic worship to sanctified virginity; and bases for control varied from the personal right to sexual choices to society's right to sterilize the unfit. But common to all sexual mores was a masculine frame of reference which resulted in

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[44]CPG, "Parasitism and Civilized Vice," in Woman's Coming of Age, ed. Samuel D. Schmalhausen and V.F. Calverton (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), pp. 122-24; CPG, "Progress Through Birth Control," North American Review 224(December 1927):628; CPG, "Social Ethics," pp. 126, 129, 134-35.

separate, discriminatory standards for women. Gilman called this double standard a false morality because it required chastity only of women, when in fact chastity was a human virtue applicable to both sexes. She attributed the discrepancy in sexual standards to the androcentric view of women as chattel. In tracing the history of female chastity she argued that its valuation was economically motivated rather than ethically inspired.[45]

According to Gilman, the concept of chastity as a feminine virtue arose not only from man's wish for exclusive female ownership but also from his desire to protect material possessions. As men developed the practice of preserving property through legitimate heirs, it became an economic necessity to validate male parentage. Female chastity, the logical means of such validation, was first required of married women, then of unmarried women as well. Expressed as fidelity or virginity, chastity became a mandatory feminine trait in order that men be safeguarded from "fathering" another man's child and from willing property to a false heir. Preserving the purity of the family name gave further

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[45]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 126.

impetus to requiring female chastity but one secondary to economic realities.[46]

By the nineteenth century, however, chastity had been transformed from an economically motivated male dictum for women into the guise of a moral virtue applicable to both sexes. Gilman paid no heed to the contemporary view that this change represented society's progress toward moral perfection. She interpreted the shift from economic to moral justification of chastity as a reinforcement of androcentric purpose: a moral frame of reference cast female chastity in more acceptable terms, making it more binding and thus strengthening male domination. The transformation of chastity into a moral absolute occurred with ease, "since suitors had _absolute freedom of selection_ and fathers had _absolute freedom of coercion_ and since all the modifying influences of religion, education, and social customs were in male hands"--and since a double standard rendered male chastity only a theoretical goal.[47]

Gilman argued that the double sexual standard revealed male self-interest as the continuing, albeit disguised,

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[46]CPG, _Religion_, p. 65; _Forerunner_ 4(November 1913):296.

[47]_Forerunner_ 4(November 1913):296.

motivation for valuing chastity. If fornication and adultery were moral transgressions, male participants would be as guilty of sin as women. Such was not the case:

> Masculine ethics colored by masculine instincts, always dominated by sex, has at once recognized the value of chastity in women, which is right; punished its absence unfairly, which is wrong; and then reversed the whole matter when applied to men, which is ridiculous.[48]

Chastity had indeed become so valued in women that it affected their economic survival. As no man wanted to marry "damaged goods," virginity--a sign of man's sole ownership--was essential to marriage. Moreover, chastity was in effect a woman's only virtue. Once lost, it mattered not how many other virtues she had, they did not count. Even a distinct virtue such as honesty became intertwined with her chastity, as evidenced in the proverbial statement, "I'll make you an honest woman." Gilman remarked that no man would equate his chastity, if he had that virtue, with his honesty.[49]

The value given to female chastity dictated severe ramifications for its absence: A woman who "lost her virtue"

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[48]Ibid. (August 1913):224; CPG, Man-Made World, p. 134.

[49]Forerunner 1(September 1910):5.

could never recover it, and so to the androcentric mind she became worthless. Male transgressors suffered no such fate. Chastity was never required of men. Neither did it even seem important, as society "openly believed a reformed rake makes the best of husbands." Nor was chastity even admired in men, "being considered mainly a feminine distinction." Men, in fact, could have the option of sexual license. In the most flagrant example of the double standard, many husbands who required chastity of their wives maintained mistresses and patronized prostitutes. Furthermore, many men who overtly protested sexual vice were unwilling to dismantle its structure: prostitution laws "made illicit only one side of the dread evil"--that of the woman. According to Gilman, "Society didn't punish men because men were society."[50]

If society refused to chastise men, Gilman had no such qualms. She charged men with irresponsible fatherhood in the creation of bastards. "Since the '_name_' considered such a necessity to honorable life was wholly man's (women having no name of their own--merely the use of their father's

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[50]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 52; _Man-Made World_, pp. 133-34; CPG, "Birth Control," p. 629; CPG, _Concerning Children_ (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1900), p. 26; _Forerunner_ 4(November 1913):296; CPG, "Protector," p. 9.

til given their husband's) and was denied to the child born 'out of wedlock,' a bastard's life was hard indeed." How could a man so handicap his offspring from birth, consigning the child to a life of disgrace? Gilman ascribed this inhumane attitude to masculine priorities unfettered in an androcentric world. She predicted that when women assumed their rightful position of equality, all children would be recognized as legitimate. When women possessed names of their own, names not relinquished in marriage, "then the male prerogative will no longer be given or withheld at his pleasure." When women earned independent incomes, "they can care for the child as the father would." Gilman enjoined women meanwhile to demand new standards of fatherhood in two ways: by refusing to accept "diseased men," thus curtailing the vice which produced them and their bastards; and by exercising their "honor--to breed from the best, to choose a husband wisely and keep the race pure--as man has tried to keep his name pure."[51]

Ultimately, woman must demand a single sexual standard which "will require chastity of man as he has of her, not for her own pride or pleasure, but for the good of the race."

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[51] Forerunner 4(November 1913):296-97; ibid. 1(May 1910): 11.

Dismissing economic reasons for chastity as exploitive and moralistic rationalizations as cant, Gilman based her judgment on empirical observation: Chastity had value, and thus was a virtue, because by providing children permanent parentage, it had proved beneficial to human development.[52]

In Gilman's view, eradication of the double standard would normalize the sexual activity of both men and women. The "misuse of function" by men would be corrected as they observed nature's plan of "seasonal sex" for the purpose of procreation. The "disuse of function" by women would also be remedied as they rejected the Victorian myth of female frigidity and claimed their right to sexual feelings.

Gilman maintained that both sexes had the desire to mate, but that under the burden of the double standard many women never admitted their desire--nor recognized it. Seeking to allay the fears of Victorian moralists, she contended that a woman's acknowledgement of sexual feelings in no way compromised her conduct. Nor did sex information affect a woman's innocence. "We do not consider that a young girl ceases to be innocent because she knows that people steal or kill . . . ." Why, then, would one presume that "if she is acquainted with the facts of sexual immorality,

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[52]Ibid. 4(November 1913):297; CPG, "Parasitism," p. 126.

or even the facts of sexual morality, she has lost that 'virginal innocence' which is her chiefest charm." Sexual ignorance was of no merit but rather a "serious evil" for it made women "easy prey." Gilman concluded that to abolish the double standard, women had no need of legal, religious, or moral laws. They had only to exercise powers they already possessed--refusing male sexual incontinence, accepting female sensuality, and becoming sexually informed.[53]

Although a single standard of morality would contribute to equality, there remained for women one further challenge in reclaiming their human sexuality: they must exercise the female prerogative and duty of sexual autonomy. Gilman interpreted woman's self-determination in sex as the right to control her body by refusing sexual coercion, in or out of marriage, and by regulating childbirth, through abstinence or contraception. Although apprehensive that popular knowledge of birth control methods would increase sexual indulgence, she reasoned that "the social effect of barren unions" would be to "gradually weed out that kind of people" and that dangers from the abuse of contraception were outweighed by its advantages. These included relief for the over-burdened mother; population control, which would both

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[53] Forerunner 7(September 1916):17; ibid. 5(February 1914):51; ibid. 4(November 1913):297.

alleviate starvation and help curtail wars initiated by over-populated, land-hungry nations; and the "conscious improvement of our stock."[54]

Gilman's rationale for woman's sexual autonomy rested on the premise that "the business of the female, as such, is not only the reproduction but the improvement of the species":

> That it is her duty to bear children has been universally admitted, even urged; but that she should have the decision as to when, where and how many, is not so plain . . . . For so long her high mission was summed up in the simple formula of "bearing him a son" . . . that we are slow to grasp the distinct proposition that it is her place to regulate the population of the earth . . . . Biologically, politically, economically and ethically, women should face their special work of regulating and improving the race.

In urging women to assert their sexual autonomy, Gilman spoke peremptorily: "Maternal duties are <u>our</u> duties, not man's, and we should not allow any claim on earth to interfere with them."[55]

Gilman believed that the pressure of economic dependency had forced women to act as accomplices in their physical denegation but that their acquiescence to such dehumanization need not continue. "Educated bodies" were possible "with

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[54]CPG, "Birth Control," pp. 627-28.

[55]Ibid., p. 628; CPG, "The Question of Life for the Married Woman," p. 16, Folder 165-2, CPG Collection.

or without the ballot"; women need only reject the sexuo-economic relation. Just as woman had become "over-sexed" through centuries of economic dependence upon man, so would financial independence enable her to pursue physical excellence. By attaining "freedom of the purse," she could risk changing those excessively feminine qualities, delicacy and innocence, acquired to attract a male provider. She could develop "human beauty" rather than "female beauty."[56]

How would men react to these changes? Gilman doubted that women would lose masculine admiration or love by becoming physically fit. "In every race," she said, "the female . . . is attractive to the male. Even those Greeks, thickwaisted muscular women though they were, had their little love affairs now and then. Agree to be Beautiful and see if you lose anything by it." Gilman prophesied that the "Real Woman"--"she who is to come"--would be "beautiful as we 'frail and fair' ones never have been nor can be. Beautiful because she is a full proportioned, perfectly exercised Human Being." "Man will find the charm still there"; and woman will take pleasure in that fundamental means of human expression--an "educated body."[57]

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[56] Woman's Journal, 4 June 1904; CPG, "Real Woman," p. 34.

[57] CPG, "Real Woman," pp. 25-34; CPG, "Enigma," p. 1195.

CHAPTER VII

"ATHLETIC MINDS"

"The mind we need," Gilman said, "is the clear-seeing, fair judging, athletic mind, able and willing to do things." Advocacy of "athletic minds" constituted a major theme in her humanist philosophy. She believed that the full utilization of one's powers had special importance in regard to intellect, for the ability to reason was the essential human distinction. She observed, however, that although the mind was what made one human, it was the faculty least used: "We are reasoning creatures, but we use our powers so little that they are sadly feeble."[1]

According to Gilman, women in particular suffered from disuse of the intellect because of the centuries-old idea that mental activity was a male province and the corollary idea that women had inferior minds. The enduring myth of the mindless woman, generally subscribed to by both sexes, comprised the most powerful force in female dehumanization; an intellect judged sub-standard to that of man rendered

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[1]CPG, "What Our Children Might Have," p. 11, Folder 177-3, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 5(April 1914):109.

woman, by implied definition, sub-human. Gilman exerted her strongest efforts toward shattering the myth of an inferior female mind, arguing that women could become fully human only by reclaiming their intellectual birthright. Specifically, she suggested that women retrieve use of their mental faculties through a three-fold process: by recognizing their intellectual capacity; by understanding "mental mechanics"; and by stretching their minds through "mental calisthenics."

To make women aware of their mental capability, Gilman raised questions concerning the brain as a human organ: "Is the brain modified by sex? Are the mental processes and capabilities of women different from those of men?" She answered negatively, arguing that organs of the body were not subject to distinctions of sex; they were common to the race. A female brain was no more plausible than a female lung or liver. But Gilman realized the difficulty of making this point because, "It has been universally believed that women's minds were not as men's minds."[2]

And indeed, the work of nineteenth century scientists reinforced belief in a distinctive female mind. Intent on proving Caucasian racial superiority, Gilded Age anthropometrists

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[2] Forerunner 3(September 1912):245.

had investigated differences in the skull capacity and brain weight among various races. Since their studies included men and women, they accumulated data on sexual as well as racial differences in cranial characteristics. Their analyses of Caucasians showed the female brain to be both smaller (by as much as 220 centimeters) and lighter (by nine to twelve per cent) than the male's. This evidence seemed proof of a distinctive--and deficient--female mind. Thus, the idea of woman's intellectual inferiority, an a priori belief in earlier centuries, gained acceptance as scientific fact in the Victorian era.[3]

Although Gilman rejected the idea of a distinctive female brain, she agreed with contemporary opinion that a vast gap in mental development differentiated the sexes. She concurred with those who described women's minds as "more submissive, less critical, less argumentive, less experimental," and lacking in initiative. With unrelenting candor she assailed "the so-called 'female mind,' with its

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[3]John S. Haller, Jr. and Robin M. Haller, The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), pp. 49-51. Neither Negroes nor women fared well in these studies; according to statistics compiled by several scientists in 1878, both groups occupied a position inferior to white men. Such studies justified the common practice of equating the intellectual capacity of Negroes, women, children, and senile white males.

pathetic and ridiculous limitations, its lack of the later human faculty of reasoning, its persistent retention of the . . . pre-human faculties of 'instinct' [and] 'intuition.'" But unlike most Victorians, Gilman attributed the phenomenon of a female mind to environmental conditioning and not to biology.[4]

She argued that the brain, like any other human organ, developed only by use. Yet for centuries, while men utilized their minds through the whole range of human experience, women were restricted to a "female environment" of submission and service which precluded exercise of their intellect. This "artificial environment" severely checked women's mental power. Gilman considered this a tragedy:

> If one wishes to gather a sense of pain . . . cast one shuddering look down the ages at the condition of women's brains. Each girl born with as much brain as her brother. Each woman, throughout her life, denied the use of it . . . . It is all there at birth; all there in the keen eager questioning of the child. But for all these ages . . . it has been denied the exercise essential to human growth.

By denying woman full use of her brain, society had "stunted and atrophied 'the female mind.'" In truth, said Gilman, there were no female minds--only crippled minds.[5]

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[4]Forerunner 3(September 1912):247-49.

[5]Ibid.

Society, however, remained oblivious to the nature of its own creation. Having stifled the intellectuality of half the populace, it attributed woman's mentality to the peculiarities of her sex and then glorified the "baffling, wonderful" differences between male and female minds. After producing "a paradoxical, contradictory, sub-human, extra-human creature [society] regarded it with fond pride and sagely remarked, 'Woman is an enigma.'" Gilman speculated that the male mind would likely be called enigmatic too, had men been exposed to women's set of circumstances: defined as a separate class and kept isolated at home; confined to primitive domestic industries; and denied education, experience, and achievement. She deplored society's explanation of the problem it had created and continued to sustain. Woman's underdeveloped intellect could not be dismissed as simply a capricious mystery, for it inflicted grave injuries upon all of humanity--men, children, and women.[6]

Men, possessing the more normal brain, suffered from unavoidable contact with the less normal brain of women. Gilman felt that although men were "always being bewildered, puzzled, enraged, by the unaccountable differences . . . between their minds and women's," they tolerated (and even

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[6]Ibid., pp. 248-50.

idealized) women's enigmatic minds "because it was not their minds that they married." But she insisted that whether men objected or not, they experienced detrimental effects from the narrow female mentality.

> Even the scant association of home life, from which most men escape as far as possible, has its benumbing and belittling effect on the minds of men. "Women talk about such little things!" said one disgusted man. He thought it was because they were women . . . . He talks of his experience and his responsibilities. So does she . . . sex experience and household experience.

According to Gilman, men fled from the effects of such a limited mind by establishing a schizophrenic relationship: "Man seeks woman as a female--and avoids her as a friend and companion."[7]

Children lacked such means of escape. Born and reared by intellectually deprived mothers, they spent their most formative years in the presence of untrained, inactive minds; consequently, they were cut off from "the transmission of thought from mind to mind which is so essential to human life." Moreover, Gilman warned that children reared by parents with mis-mated mentalities--a twentieth century father and a pre-historic mother--contributed little to progress of the race. She observed, "It would be as if

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[7]Ibid., pp. 248, 250-51.

Mr. Horse was mated to Mrs. Eohippus--the same species, but a trifle behind the times."[8]

Notwithstanding the damage suffered by men and children, women themselves received the greatest injury from their mental deprivation. As with man, the brain constituted woman's most dominant organ. Gilman declared, "[It] cries for use, for exercise, and suffers without it like a man in prison." Denied mental activity, women experienced unappeasable intellectual hunger--"a wholly natural and righteous appetite, the strongest appetite in human life," that of the psyche. She called such impoverishment more inhuman than physical starvation.[9]

Gilman thereby rested her case for making women aware of their mental equipment. Her argument for native female intelligence incorporated two aspects. Through rational analysis she traced the cause and effect of woman's intellectual inferiority, a phenomenon she assessed as the product of androcentric culture. Through existential appeal she encouraged women to accept as evidence of their mental potential the intellectual appetite which they experienced.

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[8]Ibid., pp. 248-250.

[9]Ibid., pp. 247-250.

And what next? Gilman posed two options to women newly conscious of their intellectual tools: they could remain ignorant and retard progress by their dead weight; or they could "lift yoke from shoulders and step into line with the rest of our kind." Their lack of mental power was but a temporary state, and with time and training they could rejoin the mainstream of humanity as thinking persons. To facilitate exercise of the second option, Gilman set forth her view of "mental mechanics," comprehension of which she deemed essential to proper use of the mind.[10]

Gilman compared the brain to a power transmitter, its function being to receive energy through stimuli and discharge energy through action. The charging and discharging of the brain involved four phases: "receiving impressions, retaining impressions, correlating impressions, and--most vital and highest--transmitting all that held and balanced energy into expressions." If any of these channels of energy became clogged, this human engine, the brain, through which one perceives, remembers, relates, and acts would be "thrown out of gear." In such case the ability to think diminished, leaving one to "see through a glass darkly."[11]

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[10] CPG, "A Real Woman," p. 13, Folder 162-2, CPG Collection.

[11] Forerunner 3(February 1912):53; ibid. (October 1912):271; ibid. (December 1912):333.

Gilman felt that this fate, albeit to a lesser extent, befell men as well as women. But she had great confidence that the dysfunctioning mind, male or female, could mend itself--not through the acquisition of mental power but by removing obstacles to the power already possessed. Furthermore, she held a non-exclusive view of intellectuality, saying: "No exceptional brain is here proposed, but a condition which should be common to everyone. The normal brain, whatever its personal limits, should be free grown to those limits." (She entertained no thought of "intellectuals" as an esoteric class.) Convinced that some concept of a "normal brain" must precede attempts to mend defective mental machinery, Gilman described the workings of the brain's four faculties: perception, retention, correlation, and transmission.[12]

Perception furnished the brain nourishment, its most basic requirement. Literally "hungering for knowledge," the mind fed on mental stimuli and starved without it. Although the brain received percepts most often through exposure to facts and ideas, it needed a wider "diet" than just information. It needed the stimulus of intercourse with other lively minds. Gilman called this "nutrient" essential to

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[12] Ibid. 3(February 1912):49.

mental health, for she considered the human brain a social organ. As a physical organ it existed separately; but its functioning was collective, not individual. It withered in isolation. "The mind cannot live unto itself, but must have contact with other minds," she said; and the more the better: "Exclusive relationships between two persons form too short a circuit for stimulating social intercourse."[13]

To evaluate the proper functioning of one's perceptive apparatus, Gilman offered a guideline: "The normal individual should retain throughout life the pleasure of new sensation, the joy of learning." She stressed that life-long pursuit of learning was not an exceptional activity but one common to all healthy minds.[14]

Memory, the power to retain and recall impressions, served a useful function. Through its capacity for retention, the brain could summon past events into consciousness and regain the value of the original impressions. The mind's "backward vision, necessary for wise living," helped one avoid errors of the past. Gilman did not equate a "phenomenal"

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[13] Ibid. (February 1912):50-51; CPG, "Social Consciousness," American Journal of Sociology 12(March 1907):690-91.

[14] Forerunner 3(February 1912):49-53.

memory with a normal brain, but she stated that "'a good memory' is a general characteristic of good brains."[15]

Correlation, the faculty for relating ideas, encompassed two facets: imagination and judgment. In contrast to the hindsight of memory, imagination involved foresight--the ability to envision new things. While all higher animals possessed the faculties of perception and memory, imagination was pre-eminently a human trait. In Gilman's view, "One of the brightest blessings of a normal brain is the possession of [imagination]; the natural power of picturing to one's self consequences and results; of setting up ahead a vividly seen goal, to direct and stimulate action." She called imagination "common foresight," emphasizing that it did not constitute a special gift possessed only by creative artists.[16]

Judgment, the second aspect of correlation, involved the power to reason. Gilman described elements of the reasoning process as follows: Seeing relationships in ideas; analyzing cause and effect; checking inner feelings against outer facts; and drawing logical conclusions from

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[15]Ibid. (January 1912):25; ibid. (February 1912):50.

[16]Ibid. 3(January 1912):25; ibid. (February 1912):50.

rational premises. Defining logic--the basis of reason--as simply the use of "clear connections," she lamented the esoteric connotation given this discipline. "We think of logic as an abstract science suitable only to college minds," she said. "Yet it is logic that so confounds us in the child's interpretation of what we have told him." "A child's 'why'--his appetite for causes--shows it is natural for him to reason." The ability to discriminate between what did and did not make sense, the mark of a logical mind, depended upon neither age nor educational level. At any age, the normal brain demanded logic. Gilman claimed, "It is as natural for the brain to be logical as for the heart to beat."[17]

The logical thought of a healthy brain, then, did not require special conditions, only "common sense." But being sensible, said Gilman, should be merely "our bottom level." The highest manifestation of reasoning minds "lies, (a) in our capacity for original thought, (b) in our capacity for expressing our own thought, (c) in our capacity for receiving other people's thoughts." Thus, an active mind would have ideas of its own, articulate them clearly and be open to

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[17]Ibid. 3(February 1912):50-51; CPG, "Why is 'Why'?" pp. 1-2, Folder 181-2, CPG Collection; CPG, "Children," p. 10.

others' ideas. Such a mind "will *think*, easily and consciously. It will be free in expression, able to relieve itself of feeling in proper words, able to convey its exact ideas; also able to receive and understand the feelings and ideas of other people." Operating at this level, "the healthy brain, be sure, will have good judgment."[18]

Action, the transmission of energy, represented the brain's fourth and highest use. According to Gilman, "Living consists in doing things; to know them is merely a preliminary." The brain must act as a transmitter rather than a container, for its function was to process energy, not possess it. Having received a stimulus, the brain's natural tendency was to discharge that stimulus with commensurate intensity. Gilman applied this principle of brain dynamics to behavior modification. In normal brain activity where the energy current flowed freely, the perception of facts resulted in appropriate changes of conduct.[19]

In summary, Gilman said that of the four faculties of the brain--perception, retention, correlation, and transmission--

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[18] *Forerunner* 3(February 1912):50-51.

[19] Ibid. (August 1912):218; ibid. (February 1912):53; ibid. (November 1912):302.

their value as human distinctions increased in the order given. But, she warned, the brain should be exercised in each capacity, not overworked in a few to the neglect of others. The brain was intended for diverse processes, with the whole being greater than its parts. If forced to concentrate upon one area, the brain deteriorated.[20]

Having described proper mental mechanics and having upheld normal brain activity as an attainable goal, Gilman posed the question, "What, as a matter of fact, ails our brains?" What had gone wrong? Why was the human being, the most intelligent of all creatures, "the sickest beast alive . . . the most vicious, the most unhappy?" With the accumulated knowledge of centuries, why had right knowledge not led to right conduct? Gilman asserted that our "ailing brains" were due to the uneven use of brain faculties. Most people utilized only the first two, perception and memory, while neglecting the power to reason--the most crucial stage of mental activity. "To think is the business of the brain . . . . Yet we do not think." Why?

> What strange paralysis arrests this power? Why is it that so few people think at all, that so few who think have power of expression, and that so few are willing to listen to, much less accept new thought?

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[20] Ibid. 3(February 1912):49; ibid. (March 1912):78.

> So general . . . so important . . . so natural a capacity must have received a severe and continuous artificial check to be universally lacking.[21]

According to Gilman, an adverse force had indeed checked the power to think. She called this force "mental inertia." It worked as follows: "An idea once started, tends to go on until something stops it. An idea, once stopped, tends to remain stationary until something starts it." A natural deterrent to initiative--that force most vital to correlation--inertia brought to abeyance the flow of energy within the brain. It in effect created a short circuit between learning and doing. In this state of lethargy people absorbed and retained ideas, but they lacked the necessary nerve energy for critical thought and decisive action. "It is easier," Gilman observed, "physically easier, for most minds to believe than to think," thus the tendency to accept and repeat old ideas rather than seek new discoveries. Inertia required less energy than initiative.[22]

If yielded to completely, inertia hardened minds into fixed beliefs. But Gilman felt that the brain's own dynamism could offset this force. "Left alone, the growing process

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[21]Ibid. 3(January 1912):22, 25.

[22]Ibid. 5(January 1914):5; ibid. 3(April 1912):107.

would have kept the way open," the mind being naturally propelled toward new percepts. Unfortunately, the development of "Tradition plus Authority" intervened. The "natural inertia of the average mind" received artificial reinforcement as primitive peoples began attributing "all virtue to what was behind them." This veneration of the past led to a value system in which belief and obedience superseded thought and initiative. Such an atmosphere proved antithetical to that necessary for the release of mental energy: a climate of freedom. According to Gilman, "Always our gain has been along lines where we are able to learn, to think, to do, in freedom. Always we have been held back by tradition and precedent, in religion, in art, in law and medicine, in government."[23]

Tradition and precedent served a constructive function if used simply as a guide, she allowed. Through an awareness of the past "the knowledge of one becomes the knowledge of all, and we do not have to repeat personally the experiments of each discoverer." However, blind adherence to ideas that, once useful, were long since outgrown made one a prisoner of the past. Race habits that fossilized into tradition gave to the past an undue power: that of authority, the right to

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[23] Ibid. (April 1912):108-9.

command obedience. Gilman argued that belief and obedience, the concomitants of tradition and authority, had assumed values disproportionate to reality and destructive to intellect. She proposed to disengage their hold on society by tracing the mortal origins of tradition and authority. She conjectured that by examining these origins we would no longer worship the past and submit to its power.[24]

In Gilman's view, tradition commenced when human beings learned to communicate. The process of thinking began in simple stages for the "child-race." Our earliest ancestors experienced the same universe that we do, she said, but they lacked the ability to understand it. With a subjectivism characteristic of primitives, they personified natural forces and projected their own consciousness onto things. But ideas, to be valid, must correspond with fact; and these "original thinkers" had no means of establishing fact. They made "hasty deductions from imperfect observations, and forthwith established them as Truth . . . . What those earnest savages thought seemed to them to be So, and there was none to contradict." Then, in accordance with the brain's

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[24]Ibid. (July 1912):191; ibid. 1(April 1910):9.

natural tendency to transmit, they communicated this "mind-made Truth" to succeeding generations.[25]

And herein lay the first introduction of authority: the parent-teacher transmitting "Truth," as he saw it. "To each child was given the thought-content of the parent mind, poked in like 'pigeon's milk,' before the child-mind was able to discriminate or criticise; and to the teaching of the parents was added the higher authority of the most aged." The aged mind not only carried greater authority but had a greater propensity for distortion. To an old person, impressions from his youth seemed more vivid than recent ones. But memory unchecked by fact could not be trusted. Gilman elaborated:

> Tales of the individual youth of the instructor were always magnified by that natural enlargement of early memories. The aged teacher really believed that men were braver, bigger, stronger, when he was young; the fruit sweeter, the beasts fiercer, his young achievements far greater than things done in the present.

From this magnified vision of past splendor, passed unceasingly from older to younger generation, there originated the universal race mythology of a nobler, grander past. Such an aura successfully disguised the true nature of reactionism.[26]

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[25]Ibid. 3(April 1912):104-5.

[26]Ibid.

In contrast to the tribal elders' fabrication of social legends, their instruction of practical skills more nearly corresponded to fact. The validity of ideas concerning war, hunting, fishing, or agriculture could be measured according to achievement or by the "fruit of actual deeds." Consequently, the world's mechanical progress had been greater than its intellectual and ethical advance. Gilman observed, "In those things we have done we use the clearest thinking and show the most assured progress. Our machines have gone beyond our minds." She offered a reason for this discrepancy: In the area of physical things the mind was free of doctrinal assumptions, and so it could freely change its beliefs to accord with new facts; but in the area of behavior, the mind was enslaved by the authority of religion. Gilman proceeded to analyze this form of authority.[27]

Not content with perpetuating ancestral beliefs through customs undergirded by parental and tribal authority, primitive society "forced old views upon new minds with a vast pressure of collateral emotion" administered through religion. Religion's addition of ethical values to certain ideas encouraged their reception and retention, while

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[27]Ibid., p. 105; ibid. (July 1912):192.

religion's leverage of fear enforced their belief. Gilman made clear that her criticism of religious authority was directed toward methodology rather than doctrine: "We are not here discussing the truth or untruth of any religion, but the effect on the brain of the way in which religion has been taught and enforced throughout our whole historic period." Religion's disservice to the intellect lay not in the influence of given dogmas but in its demand for unquestioning acceptance of dogma. Religious authority made the act of believing more important than the belief itself. In Gilman's view:

> The major requisite in all religions is a single mental faculty--that of Belief. For almost the whole duration of religion Believing constituted at least seven-tenths of our piety; the rest being universally divided between a large amount of "worship" with its "sacrifices," and a small amount of conduct, mostly rites and ceremonies. The Belief was practically the whole thing.[28]

Ideally, said Gilman, religion should be a "way" toward truth. But by making belief an end in itself, religion had curtailed thought processes essential to discovering truth. The demand by religious authorities "for wholesale acceptance of a group of disconnected ideas" conflicted with the brain's functional activity which "seeks to arrange

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[28]Ibid. 3(April 1912):107; ibid. (July 1912):189-90.

ideas in legitimate relation; to establish order and sequence, to sift, compare, relate." Gilman illustrated the early stage of this conflict by describing the action of a child's mind when first taught the doctrines of religion (of any religion). When a child asked, "How do you know?" the answer was, "It is so because God says so." When he probed further with the logical question, "How do you know he says so?" the response came that it was wrong to question--he must believe. She described the full impact of this process:

> Into the young, active, struggling mind is packed . . . ideas of Life, Death, and Immortality; Heaven and Hell; codes of conduct based on sheer authority . . .; directions for behavior which the lives around him make no pretense of following. This mass must be accepted and held, for life, as the most important thing, without doubt or question.

As organized religion developed, systematic instruction forced these "reactionary mysteries" upon the defenseless child-mind by "a cumulative, hypnotic machinery of sight, sound, smell and rythmic repetition."[29]

Gilman cited two reasons for the human brain's accommodation to this "ceaseless artificial feeding." First, some truth existed in all religions, thus providing a degree of relevance even to the most intelligent. Second, it was costly to disbelieve. The premium placed on belief made

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[29] Ibid., p. 192.

non-belief the ultimate sin; "and the wages of sin was death," Gilman reminded, or at least alienation. To doubt, to inquire, to think--these were dangerous pursuits; throughout history execution came often to the heretic and the infidel. The threat of physical death, however, proved insufficient to compel the growing mind to carry the dead weight of dogma. Therefore, according to Gilman, religious authorities devised the threat of eternal punishment. As she described it:

> The pains and penalties of eternity were brought to bear. Whether it were in the slow shame and suffering of a debased incarnation, the blank negation of exclusion from the Happy Hunting-Grounds or convivial banqueting halls of futurity; or in our monumental proof of the morbid possibilities of the human mind--Hell; in any case the Threat was there, to enforce the Belief.[30]

Yet despite the double threat of physical and spiritual punishment, healthy minds periodically resisted the unnatural attitude enforced by religion. They reacted "not to the belief but to the _act of believing_." Although religious authorities attributed this resistance to man's sinful nature, Gilman regarded it as proof of the mind's innate urge to think for itself. She regarded the scientific attitude ushered in with the Darwinian age as a hopeful

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[30]Ibid., pp. 190-92.

sign that man's imperative for truth-seeking might ultimately free him from authoritarianism.[31]

In her view, a vast difference existed between the religious mind and the scientific mind, the latter being incapable of belief as in the "cast iron" sense of the former. The scientific mind had developed a new attitude toward truth, one employing hypothesis instead of dogma. In this approach one assumed, or believed, an idea to be true and then tested the idea, with a willingness to relinquish it if proven wrong. Although beliefs were relied upon as a beginning point, they were lightly held and subject to change without regret in light of new evidence. Gilman explained, "The thing believed was supposed to be a fact; if proved not to be a fact, it was no longer believed--that is all." Whether in religion, education, science, or any other area of life, the scientific mind kept "a steady watch on its beliefs, continually discarding errors, freely accepting new truths, always ready to change." While the religious mind held doubt to be sinful, the scientific mind considered dogma to be dangerous.[32]

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p. 191.

Gilman deemed the scientific attitude natural to the normal mind and of greater value to society than the religious attitude; the first led to knowledge, the second to credulity. She held knowledge and belief to be not only distinct, but incompatible: "The less we know, the more we believe. The more we know, the less we believe." In short, after you knew something, you did not have to believe it. "To know requires no belief." Gilman allowed that belief was a useful faculty but nevertheless a low one. It prevailed in the absence of knowledge; hence, credulity characterized children, women, peasants, and savages--"the ignorant and primitive groups everywhere." In contrast, the learned mind treated belief as only a preliminary, conditional state--a means toward knowledge based on fact. Gilman concluded that "a free-thinker seeks knowledge--thus is not a believer." In society's view, however, only men could be free-thinkers; "women must be believers," as befitted their subordinate role.[33]

Gilman had no illusions that the new scientific mind was impervious to the lingering effects of "ancestoral religious training." The race-habit of exalting belief was not easily outgrown within a generation or two. She

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[33]Ibid.; ibid. 1 (May 1910):7-8.

said, "Because religion has for so long placed unflinching acceptance of 'the faith' as the head and font of all virtue, so today we make 'a faith' of whatsoever we are interested in and require unflinching acceptance by all its followers." Even scientists, the vanguard of objective thinkers, were not immune to the temptation to transform discoveries into orthodoxy. Gilman noted, "It is sadly stated that it takes thirty years for a new scientific theory to be accepted by those in that special line of study."[34]

She, in fact, considered all thinkers vulnerable to the temptation of deifying their own truths. To her credit, she recognized this problem within three movements with which she personally identified: socialism, temperance, and women's suffrage. According to her analysis, socialism had made a religion of economic determinism, complete with "bibles, preachers, martyrs, and devotees"; and the same fallacy afflicted those who made a "cause" of non-drinking and female voting. Gilman supported these movements, but she objected to their absolutism in claiming final answers and labeling all critics "unsound." She warned that this "religious" attitude must be outgrown: "We must leave off this ardor of faiths and causes, this tendency to pious

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[34] Ibid. 3(July 1912):193.

enthusiasm, mad devotion, and martyrdom." Integrity of intellect demanded the recognition that no truth was final, not even one's own. The profound love of truth, she said, "brings a modesty that knows its ignorance in contrast to the old religious pride possessed by all faiths alike."[35]

Gilman called for athletic minds to counteract the inertia, both natural and artificial, that impeded proper mental mechanics. Describing an "athletic" mind as one actively engaged in thinking, she viewed it as the only defense against tradition and authority--against "the mind behind which enslaves us." The Biblical precept, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," could prevail only if one used the mind in its ultimate function: to think.[36]

Gilman had an optimistic outlook about developing athletic minds, claiming that anyone not an idiot could be taught to think. She considered men and women equally capable of strengthening their mental muscles and equally open to enjoying mental exercise. Although women, the "crippled half of the race," had farther to go, both sexes

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[35]Ibid., pp. 193-94.

[36]Ibid. (November 1912):301; CPG, Note, Folder 242, CPG Collection.

needed to improve their minds. "For our lives' sake," she said, people must develop greater rationality, "which is merely the normal use of the brain." She described the way this could occur:

> Just as one screws and makes adjustments in a machine, one may reset one's mind and train it to better action. To see clearly, to understand, to properly relate one idea to another, to refuse superstition and mere repetition of other people's opinion, to make a habit of clear statement: all this is pleasant work and may be undertaken by anyone.[37]

To train athletic minds, Gilman formulated a process of "mind-stretching" which involved a series of "mental calisthenics." Designed to "exercise the brain, widen its range, and strengthen its action," mind-stretching called first for an evaluation of one's mental disabilities. Unfortunately, most people recognized limitations in only the first two faculties of the brain, perception and retention. Complaints often heard were "It's very hard for me to concentrate." "I have such a poor memory." Seldom did anyone admit deficiencies in the faculties of correlation and transmission, such as, "I cannot think clearly." "My judgment is utterly unreliable." "I do not govern my own conduct." Yet the malfunctioning of these latter categories, correlation and transmission, comprised the most universal

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[37] Forerunner 3(November 1912):301-4; ibid. (December 1912):329.

mental problems--and the most serious. Having evaluated all four faculties, how did one overcome deficiencies of the brain? Gilman prescribed specific mental calisthenics for each faculty.[38]

The improvement of perception required two exercises: the discarding of antiquated ideas and the exposure to new ones. The latter was predicated on the former, for only by removing the "refuse and debris" that clogged channels of energy could the mind be open to fresh impressions. "Mental heirlooms"--those ideas useful and valid at one time but long since outgrown--dammed the brain, making it sluggish if not stagnant. Relics of the past, these ideas held sway over the mind but for the most part went unnoticed. The "awakened" mind must change this. It must confront each of these hitherto unnoticed "inhabitants" and ask: "Do I really believe this? Is it _so_? What are the facts?" Some ideas would withstand the test and thereby gain authenticity. On the other hand, many ideas would lose credibility when seen to be based on authority instead of reality. As the final, and hardest, part of this mental

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[38]CPG, "Mind-Stretching," p. 1, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 3(December 1912):328; ibid. (November 1912):304.

calisthenic, Gilman advised: Keep the valid ideas and discard the rest.[39]

She anticipated protests arising from this exercise, such as: "I don't know what I do believe now. I'm all at sea." To be "at sea," however, was precisely the desired effect; for "moored minds that never left their wharves" retarded human progress. Minds were meant to move, to get different points of view, and to change. Contrary to those who regarded it a "woman's privilege" to change her mind, Gilman called this a human privilege--and a duty as well. The adage about women conveyed a tacit reproach, as if changing one's mind were a weakness. But not so. Change was essential to growth. According to Gilman, "The mind keeps growing--thus changing. To <u>never</u> change your mind is a weakness. Like a bottle filled when young and permently corked." Gilman reassured that there did exist basic principles which provided a frame of reference in the midst of change. But one should rest lightly on them as on a moving chair. "Rest on what you know," she said, "but all the time realize that knowledge changes."[40]

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[39]Ibid., p. 304; ibid. 6(October 1915):253; ibid. 3(December 1912):328.

[40]Ibid. 3(December 1912):329; ibid. 6(November 1915): 286-7.

To encourage people to examine their old ideas and discard the outdated ones, Gilman explained why the exercise was so difficult. It presented a fundamental conflict between one's desire for freedom (a sign of growth) and one's desire for security (a retreat from growth). If one accepted the idea that "the truth shall make you free," which Gilman did, then it followed that the desire for freedom impelled one to seek new knowledge. But freedom could be awesome because of the insecurity that accompanied it. Hence, the contrary attraction of old, established ideas--the essence of order and security. Gilman felt that societal forces undergirded the choice for security; for every movement toward freedom in thought--whether in religion, politics, economics, or even education--inevitably faced society's opposition as "interfering with her established order." She referred to massive resistence to female equality as a case in point. She hoped that by understanding the nature of conflicting desires for freedom and security, one could withstand societal pressures and develop the will power to discard archaic ideas.[41]

Healthy perception required not only the updating of old concepts but the exposure to new information. Toward

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[41]Ibid. 3(February 1912):38.

this end Gilman suggested the following mental calisthenic: an empirical examination of natural law. One must be adventurous in the pursuit of learning; this meant-first-hand observation of facts, rather than dependence upon others' deductions. And Gilman considered natural law the ultimate source of knowledge. "An open book" available to all, it provided a broad array of facts if one but looked. It took "heroic" effort to consult this source in lieu of revelation and authority. But those who did--studying and discovering, experimenting and knowing--would develop a new respect for their minds.[42]

As Gilman had done with the first perception exercise, she explained why exposure to new ideas was a difficult task. The brain demanded order; therefore, new information must either conform to preestablished ideas or the latter must be adjusted, an unsettling process. The brain could receive with ease new ideas that did not contradict its previous knowledge. It assimilated them into the "long-rooted network of fixed beliefs" with no disruption to orderly arrangement. On the other hand, new and contradictory information jarred the brain, causing it to become temporarily disoriented. At this point, the brain's need for order posed

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[42]Ibid. (July 1912):194.

two options: (1) rejection of the disturbing idea or, (2) rearrangement of older ideas to incorporate harmoniously the new. Because the adjustment of preconceptions to new realities required change--an uncomfortable way to reorient the brain, choice of the first option occurred more frequently than the second. To illustrate, Gilman cited the dilemma posed by the Christian imperative to love one's enemies. This radical idea required a rearrangement of long-held ideas about vengence and retribution. Those unable to change--that is, rearrange--their minds rejected Christ's commandment; and true to the brain's demand for consistency, they projected a God of wrath who consigned his enemies to Hell.[43]

The difficulty of accommodating new truths, then, inclined one to tolerate anachronisms rather than confront fresh evidence. Those yielding to this path of least resistance locked themselves into a reactionary stance. As Gilman said, "They occupy an impregnable fortress and are safe from all attacks in the field of reason. 'Therefore' is a word having no existence in an illogical mind; one and one equals one." She marveled that such a "retarded mental perspective" still prevailed in the age of Darwin. Itself

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[43]Ibid. 7(October 1916):271; ibid. 6(November 1915):287.

an anachronism in light of evolutionism, this "motionless and reactionary attitude" needed a defense by its adherents. And so it assumed a new name: "They call it Conservatism," Gilman said, "and they protest that but for this 'magnificent system of checks and balances' the progressives would send us all spinning into space on unnumbered tangents." She called it a poor disguise and a poor defense. She justified a progressive stance toward new information as the only way to keep abreast of current reality: "To live in the present is like standing on a rolling barrel--you must move in order to stand still."[44]

Although both sexes needed broader exposure to new ideas, women had a far greater handicap to overcome. Because of their "prehistoric state of sub-social domesticity," their mental lives were emptier than men's. Their "small minds" reflected their small world. Beginning with childhood, boys outdistanced girls in the quest for knowledge. Allowed into the wider world, boys knew "more streets, more places, more people, more processes, more 'life.' And the differences increased with their growth." The major disability of the feminine mind, therefore, was not an inability to reason--as commonly thought--but a lack of information ordinarily

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[44] Ibid. 4(November 1913):288; ibid. 3(April 1912):107-8.

gained through exposure and experience. According to Gilman, "The judgment of women is narrowed because they do not know the premises." She urged women to overcome their especial lack of learning by spending at least an hour a day reading and studying. How could "these domestic creatures" have an hour to themselves? "By taking it." A woman had duties to herself as well as to her family; and chief among these was the duty to expose her mind to broadening influences.[45]

Such exposure was necessary to widen the consciousness of women whose horizons extended no farther than the home. Confinement to the kitchen, the parlor, and the nursery severely foreshortened one's vision because it focused the mind on close personal concerns. Service to the body through cooking and cleaning emerged as the major duty in life. It occupied a woman full time; it was the main work a child saw his mother do. The "kitchen mind," as Gilman termed it, looked at life through a knothole, seeing events from a subjective viewpoint. Family affairs assumed undue importance, while others' affairs seemed remote. This narrow perspective was natural in children, expected in idiots, but abnormal in healthy adults. Gilman held that

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[45] Ibid. 3(September 1912):250; Woman's Journal, 9 July 1904.

women need not remain myopic spectators of the world. By extending their field of knowledge they could widen their consciousness and thus gain clearer perspective. She concluded that broader exposure to new ideas was important for both sexes, but essential for women. Only through a larger consciousness could they begin to understand human life.[46]

Gilman gave short shrift to the faculty of retention, prescribing no mental calisthenics for it. She felt that people overworked their memory, as it had long been considered the brain area most responsive to training. Little good had come from these efforts, by her reckoning: "At present we abuse this faculty in infancy and are largely deficient in it in later life. Some seek to repair our earlier ravages by artificial 'memory helps' and 'systems'; but the average remains low." She asserted that with only normal use of the power to remember, one could recall whatever was necessary and do so with ease.[47]

The faculty of correlation received the greatest emphasis from Gilman in regard to mental calisthenics. She

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[46]Forerunner 1(February 1910):7-11.

[47]Ibid. 3(February 1912):50.

acknowledged that the science of logic loomed as "a terror to the ordinary minds"--and rightly so when practiced by experts using sophistry. Yet she insisted that average minds would enjoy practice in clear thinking just as average bodies enjoyed physical exercise. "To think, to voluntarily consider and discuss a given idea, in a clear and logical manner . . . should be the daily habit of the brain."[48]

Gilman suggested the formation of "thinking classes" to facilitate the exercise of reasoning powers. Through games and "races of the mind," participants could "play ball with ideas, learning the interesting game of honest argument, and the difference between logic and sophistry." One activity might involve matching syllogisms, with partners alternating in stating premises and drawing conclusions, the trick being that all "Therefores" must make sense. Another activity could be the practice of critical thought in relation to one's life. She suggested that "By simply using the reason, turning it on like a searchlight [to] the confused masses of things we do, clothes we wear and food we eat, we might at the same time clarify our lives and strengthen our brains." To pursue this process, one would

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[48]Ibid. (December 1912):329.

ask "What is the reason?" for a given course of action and then determine either to proceed or to stop because of that reason.[49]

As a more complex thinking exercise, Gilman construed a game of argument. Waiving the oft-heard admonition, "Never argue," she claimed: "Argument, or debate as it ought to be, is not the heated ward-fight we associate. Real argument is a very pretty game to be enjoyed by both participants." The essential process in an argument "is to reach and direct another mind to enable it to perceive what it had not before." Gilman set forth rules to follow in this process: (1) choose a non-emotional subject; (2) establish some common premise, a beginning point on which both parties agree; (3) define terms; (4) search for admissible premises, asking "Will you admit this? that?" (5) follow with a "Therefore" statement, such as "If you admit this, then . . . ." The key to the game was to present each sequential statement "as so irresistibly following the first" that it too must be conceded. Gilman likened argument to fencing as an excellent exercise for training one to think.[50]

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[49] CPG, "Children," pp. 9-10; Forerunner 3(December 1912): 329; ibid. 5(April 1914):109.

[50] CPG, "How to Argue," pp. 1-3, Folder 176, CPG Collection.

The game of philosophizing utilized the imagination, making it one of Gilman's most interesting thinking exercises. She defined a philosopher as "one who thinks largely of life--has a wide context." The act of philosophizing--or, as she termed it, of being "a practical philosopher"--meant applying the larger context of life to more immediate problems. For instance, "ordinary persons--unaccustomed to using the brain--surrender to the distress of the moment"; but a philosopher gained consolation through envisioning ideas that outweighed or lessened painful ones. Through practice, however, "ordinary" minds could become more philosophic. Gilman considered philosophizing--the ability to reason about life--a mental skill that could be learned, and she offered steps to aid the process: use the influence of one thought to check another; detach the consciousness from a painful thought by thinking of something pleasant; think of personal troubles in light of world problems; rearrange combinations of ideas; use free association to envision new relationships. Gilman summed up the importance of philosophizing with the maxim, "As a man thinketh, so is he."[51]

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[51] Forerunner 6(April 1915):109; Woman's Journal, 13 August 1904.

Improvement of transmission, the culminating brain faculty, represented the hardest task in mind-stretching. Ideally, impressions received by the brain resulted in appropriate deeds. But when this process short-circuited, conduct bore no relation to knowledge. Gilman illustrated such a break-down by observing that although people know the earth is round, they act as if heaven were a fixed roof to our flat world. She believed that if our brains were normal, it would suffice to show a person once of the desirability of an action, and the action would follow. But such had not been the case in human history; knowledge had accumulated for centuries with no commensurate changes in conduct. In her judgment, this "bridgeless gulf" between knowledge and action was the most conspicuous and injurious deformity of the human brain.[52]

To correct this malfunction of the brain, said Gilman, one must first understand the relation between a person's external and internal environments. Both governed human conduct, but the latter exerted greater influence. She explained:

> There is a world about us, but the world we really live in and act from is the sum of stored impressions

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[52] CPG, "Life Force," p. 6, Folder 181-2, CPG Collection; Forerunner 3(October 1912):275.

> in the brain. What we know or think we know, or believe, constitutes our inner world, and under its influences we act; even "in the face of nature."

Although one lived in a world of facts, then, his mental image of those facts determined his behavior. "What we think is" registered greater impact than "what is."[53]

Given the power of mental images to shape conduct, a clear goal emerged in devising mental calisthenics for the faculty of transmission: to square one's inner world with the outer world. Gilman recommended two exercises to achieve this goal. The first involved a continual check of one's ideas against external reality to assure their validity. Natural law formed the basis of external reality and hence provided a plumb line for keeping ideas in touch with facts. The exercise must be an ongoing endeavor, even with concepts already tested, because "untended ideas" evolved a life of their own. A living organ, the brain "grows . . . changes, and has its effect upon its contents." Gilman used two examples to illustrate:

> Put any simple story or statement . . . into the human mind and leave it untouched for years. Then ask to see it again and you will find it altered . . . . Again . . . let it be in unbridled use . . . [and]

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[53]Forerunner 3(March 1912):80-81; ibid. (July 1912):191.

> it changes more than if left alone . . . putting forth new developments until quite unrecognizable.

Ideas not measured against present experience could not be trusted.[54]

The second exercise designed to square inner and outer realities concerned the use of language. Gilman observed that ideas make words, but words remake ideas. A word being an outward form of an inward thought, it--like other forms--reacted on the spirit within it. "This process inclines us to believe a thing is what we call it." Thus, one must continually keep his language in line with perceived reality.[55]

The "bridgeless gulf" separating knowing and doing could be lessened by reconciling internal and external environments, but its eradication depended on a more formidable tack: the determination to be one's own authority. "_Not_ to do as others do. _Not_ to do as told. But _do_ as we ourselves see to be right." Autonomy--the power to govern one's own action--furnished the key to connecting impression and expression.[56]

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[54]Ibid., (April 1912):104-5.

[55]Ibid. 4(January 1913):16.

[56]CPG, "Independence and Children," p. 1, Folder 270, CPG Collection.

Gilman prescribed the following exercise to strengthen autonomous power: in all matters think and decide for one's self; then act accordingly. Every action based on one's reasoning "develops an 'autonomous person.'" This exercise did not preclude utilizing the judgment of other authorities. (As in the case of a New England farmer whom Gilman quoted as saying: "I'm not going to be put down for my spelling because I differ from Noah Webster.") Indeed, recognition of valid authority was a part of being one's own authority because it involved personal judgment. Gilman outlined a hypothetical example:

> You believe whatever expert or authority gives you special instruction, unless what he says runs counter to something you already know, and there you draw the line. He explains to you that what you "knew" was incorrect, proves it, and repeats his assertion. You are somewhat jarred and unwilling, but may now believe him.

Valid authority had its source in competence, not power; its acceptance depended upon choice, not coercion.[57]

The exercise of autonomous power was exceedingly difficult, Gilman warned; for despite the modern world's democratic advances, most conduct was still based on submission to authority, the antithesis of autonomy.

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[57] Forerunner 5(December 1914):323; ibid. 6(October 1915):279; ibid. 3(July 1912):190.

"Democracy is young," she said, "and our ideas and emotions are still adapted to autocracy." "The mind behind us--accustomed to authoritarianism--keeps us uncritically submissive even in our democracy." Retrained in submission generation after generation, "we do not use the power of freedom." Even now, Gilman maintained, obedience--the expression of submission--ranked as a virtue in the modern institutions of home and school. And for women, "who lived in an inner circle of patriarchical government," submission to male authority singularly marked the feminine role. Autonomy, then, was not only a remote power but a suspect value.[58]

Of all the mental calisthenics Gilman prescribed to stretch the mind--whether for perception, retention, correlation, or transmission--she considered none so important as the exercise of autonomy. To combat the forces prevailing against it, she analyzed the paradox of submissiveness existing within a democracy. In an earlier authoritarian world controlled by Church and Crown, submission had been vital to survival and thus understandable; but why did Americans continue to value submission in the face of

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[58]CPG, "The Mind Behind Us," pp. 7-10, Folder 180-2, CPG Collection; CPG, "Fashion and Democracy," p. 10, Folder 181, CPG Collection; Forerunner 6(January 1915):3; ibid. 3(January 1912):6.

hard-won religious and political freedom? The answer was simple. At home and school the child was taught to be submissive; the training "took," and the adult remained submissive.

Gilman elaborated first on the home. The child's mind, less conditioned than the adult's and thus more normal, tended to act promptly and instantaneously in the discharge of action. Traditional parental practices interrupted this natural process by arbitrarily stopping the child's action. "As his reactions are usually inconvenient and destructive to our household goods, the major educative influence which he meets from earliest infancy is the incessant 'check' . . . . 'Don't do that!' 'Stop that!' 'You must not do that!'" In this manner parents inserted an arbitrary force between impression and expression, thus crossing the normal current of discharge. The result upon the child of such short-circuiting was "a gradual discontinuance of effort, amounting to permanent disability." Ethical concepts reinforced this tendency toward submissive inaction: "The good child is the one who is not doing anything."[59]

Not content with checking motor action, parents further impeded the natural process of energy discharge by giving

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[59] Forerunner 3(October 1912):274-76.

the child arbitrary commands to do something. This interfered with the brain's demand for logical cause and effect relationships. "Action to be normal, must be preceded by thought, desire, reason; it must be related to the contents of the brain." In its normal state, a child's brain tried to grasp the reason for a specific command. When the child asked, "Why?" parents too often refused to give a reason, citing their authority instead: "Because I tell you to!" Or they gave some arbitrary cause instead of the real one, such as: "It would look so if you didn't." In either case the command had to be fulfilled by the child without the sanction of his brain; and in time, the young mind ceased to ask, "Why?"[60]

Gilman summarized the damaging results of misguided parental authority which in turn checked and compelled a child's actions arbitrarily. In the first instance, parents "very largely disconnect[ed] the normal association of idea with action, so . . . there remain[ed] the habit of reasoning without acting." In the second instance, they accustomed the child to behave under compusion, so "there remain[ed] the habit of acting without reasoning." Gilman asserted that when parents forced a child to behave according to

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[60]Ibid.

their judgment, with no reference to his, they fostered the growth of an automaton, "a mere conductor of the thoughts and desires of other people." She concluded that this childhood training in "unreasoning submission to other wills . . . leaves the race-mind unreasoningly submissive to other wills in adult life."[61]

To break this self-perpetuating cycle, parents should start answering their child's "Whys?" This would help him develop cause and effect thinking essential to autonomy. To those protesting that one cannot explain everything to children--"they must be taught to mind"--Gilman replied, "True, but there is no development of intelligence in minding." Children should be trained in autonomy, not obedience. To do otherwise perpetuated the habit of non-thinking, a sure encouragement of authoritarianism. Gilman warned, "People unable to think for themselves must have someone to obey."[62]

One would think that when children left the authoritarian home environment to go to school, their intellects would revive. Not so, claimed Gilman. The gulf between impression

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[61]Ibid., pp. 275-6.

[62]CPG, "Why," pp. 1-2, 7, 10; Forerunner 3(October 1912):276.

and expression widened in the school room, for traditional educational methods discouraged independent thought and action. In her view:

> What we have called "education" has been . . . strangely ignorant of the nature and processes of the brain . . . training for the most part but one faculty, that of memory; making small use of the reasoning powers; and almost none of the most important brain process--that which urges and modifies conduct.

In effect, the student learned facts, but not the meaning of facts. This "dulling" process occurred within an authoritarian structure in which students were forced "under various penalties to 'pay attention' and receive information for which they had no desire," then "regurgitate" what they had been force-fed by "that incredible use of the stomach pump--the examination." These procedures made of the brain "a mere bag, to be stuffed and turned inside out at pleasure." But worse, the process made learning "a prison sentence," to be ended upon one's escape into adulthood, rather than a life-long joy as it should be.[63]

Gilman attributed the "gross evils" of education to its androcentric character: "Our whole governing process of education is that of combat rather than growth." According to the "combat theory," life was a struggle, and for

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[63] *Forerunner* 3(August 1912):219-21.

survival one must learn to compete, fight, suffer, and overcome. Androcentric educators incorporated this outlook in two ways. First, through valuing classroom discipline as an end in itself--the idea being, "It is good for children to have a hard time there" as a preparation for life. Gilman referred to this equation of virtue and suffering as the "pain philosophy." The second manifestation of the combat theory was an emphasis on competition as a means of learning. Grades to register success or failure made a travesty of learning, in Gilman's view. This system of rewards pitted one student against another and made learning not a matter of growth but a fight to get ahead of one's fellows. Nothing could be more foreign to "real brain culture" than this competitive system which rewarded the few and marked the rest with failure. "As well might we set children to compete in eating as to compete in learning. Brains differ. In their difference lies their social value." Gilman maintained that the real business of the educator "is to teach each and all as much as possible, not to find out the exact degree of difference between their attainments."[64]

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[64] Ibid. 7(September 1916):248, 50; ibid. 3(August 1912):221.

For a more human system of education, Gilman suggested an infusion of maternal traits which emphasized growth instead of combat. Education had originated with the mother teaching her young, and this process contained principles worth emulating:

> The mother does not rear her children by a system of prizes . . . nor does she set them to compete with one another, giving the conquering child what he needs, and to the vanquished, blame and deprivation . . . . Motherhood gives to each child what is most needed, to teach all to their human capacity, to affectionately and efficiently develop the whole of them.

Androcentric prejudice would make a return to these educational principles difficult. As long as men assumed their influence to be human and that of women to be wholly a matter of sex--and as such, inferior--then "bursts of alarm" over the "feminization" of schools would accompany the advance of women in education, whether as students or educators.[65]

Gilman encouraged women's advance in formal education; but true to her pattern of seeing autonomous solutions to women's problems, she gave far greater emphasis to personal intellectual growth. Women could develop athletic minds--"clearseeing, fair judging . . . able and willing to do

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[65] CPG, The Man-Made World (1911; reprint ed., New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), pp. 143-52.

things"--through their own efforts: by accepting their intellectual potential; by learning proper mental mechanics; and by stretching their minds with mental calisthenics. Through this course of action they could progress beyond the stage of credulity and submission to autonomy--the highest goal of humanity.

Having for centuries been isolated houseservants, women would require time to catch up in intellectual activity. But Gilman had confidence it could be done. "We are, it is true, _ignorant_, but only as _beginners_, not as _idiots_. We have merely to _use our minds_." Once able to think for herself, a woman could become her own authority--and thus free. The way to woman's independence, then, lay not through law but through the use of her intellect. And what of men? Would they not be threatened by autonomous, free-thinking women? Needlessly so, said Gilman, applying to women the statement of Shakespeare:

> To thine own self be true,
> And it shall follow as day the night
> That thou cans't not be false to any man.[66]

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[66] _Forerunner_ 3(June 1912):147.

CHAPTER VIII

"RATIONAL RELIGION"

Consistent with her humanist philosophy, Gilman argued that religion should involve the full use of one's powers, especially that of intellect. "We are told to make the body a 'temple for the living God'," she said; "it is time we were taught to make the brain a vehicle for such a Deity." Because the ability to think distinguished human beings from other animals and enabled them to comprehend spiritual reality, it seemed logical to Gilman that use of the mind was essential to religious experience. She therefore advocated a rational religion, one based on the "full use of our best intelligence--no surrender of the will, but the fullest exercise of that power."[1]

Gilman defined religion as a phenomenon encompassing three facets: a "theory of life," reflected in doctrine; an "attitude of mind," involving emotion; and a "code of conduct," expressed in behavior. Thought, feeling, and action thus were interrelated components of religious experience, each serving a necessary function. She contended

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[1] *Forerunner* 3(December 1912):329; ibid. 2(June 1911):154.

that religion was needed by society in order to provide a clear explanation of life, to channel feelings constructively, and to guide behavior. Convinced that only a rational religion could meet these needs to society's highest advantage, Gilman set forth her concept of such a religion. It included a theology based on demonstrable fact; a form of practical worship; and a system of ethics derived from natural law.[2]

Gilman recognized the difficulty of advancing a rational religion. The greatest obstacle was "the artificial maintenance of the religion of our remote ancestors," for traditional religion rested upon authority--specifically male authority--rather than reason. She observed that, "Each ancient religion [had] its form of established church, its priesthood or clergy, its temples and system of ceremonies," and its sacred literature. Through such trappings these religions asserted authority "which it was a sin to doubt, an indiscretion even to consider."[3]

According to Gilman, the insistence by ancient religious authorities upon unquestioning belief in unprovable assumptions

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[2]CPG, The Man-Made World (1911; reprint ed., New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), p. 137; Forerunner 3(July 1912):194; ibid. 1(April 1911):9.

[3]CPG, His Religion and Hers (New York and London: Century Co., 1923), p. 231.

(arrived at through "revelation") bequeathed to the modern mind "an artificial capacity for unreasonableness" in religious matters. Faith, the essence of unquestioning belief, and obedience, the act of following orders, became the twin hall-mark of religions based on authority. Gilman contended that faith and obedience, while of limited value in some circumstances, did untold harm as primal religious virtues because they precluded critical thought. In fact, she claimed, "The infantile virtues of faith and obedience--enforced with the authority of religion--have kept us children, unable to exercise our best powers."[4]

The factor of male authority in religion proved especially detrimental to humanity. Gilman argued that "the religions of the world have come down to us through the minds of men," and that, consequently, masculine tendencies toward desire, combat, and display diverted religion from its true "life-promoting" purpose. The masculine mind, said Gilman, "staged the universe as a conflict": from Zoroastrianism's view of good and evil to Christianity's belief in god and devil, dualism characterized androcentric religions. Within this man-made religious

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[4]Ibid., p. 224; CPG, "Social Ethics," pp. 100-1, Folder 228-2, CPG Collection.

arena the male traits of desire, combat, and display were expressed respectively in a system of reward and punishment, by a struggle for salvation, and through religious pagentry and pride.[5]

Androcentric religion further injured humanity through its view of subordinate womanhood. Gilman asserted that the "scorn of women," expressed in the demand for female submission and service, pervaded most religions. Citing the ancient Assyrian legend that woman was made from Adam's rib "for his personal accommodation"; the ancient Hebrew story of Eve's creation, sin, and punishment; and the Christian doctrine of female submission, Gilman charged that "One religion after another has accepted and perpetuated man's original mistake in making a private servant of the mother of the race." Interpreting woman's creation as being for man's "use and convenience," androcentric religions assumed women to be inferior to men and sanctioned their subjection as God's will.[6]

Gilman maintained that although androcentric religious authority based on revelation continued to prevail in the

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[5]CPG, Religion, pp. 13, 42, 44, 220. Gilman acknowledged evidence of mother goddesses in some primitive religions; but she observed that these eventually became sex goddesses, a sign of androcentric influence.

[6]Ibid., pp. 43, 216-17.

modern world, it registered little success in improving society. "In all the pious centuries," she claimed, religion had "not given us a world to be proud of." She attributed the failure of traditional religions to their static, pessimistic world-view. They emphasized the unhappiness of life in a hopeless world and then declared that divine curses accounted for it, divine blessings allayed it, and a future life recompensed for it--"if we are good." Ignoring the possibility of growth and improvement in this life, these religions' best offer seemed to be personal happiness after death. Gilman acknowledged that there had been some religious contributions to race-improvement, "but not enough . . . . So here sits the world in the twentieth century of the Christian faith, still dissatisfied with its citizens. We are a poor lot compared to our possibilities." She said, "If we accept the assumption that our life here is for the purpose of race-improvement, then we question any religion that does not improve the race." Using this criterion, she rejected the validity of "revealed religions" (those based on revelatory knowledge).[7]

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[7]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 242; CPG, Human Work (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1904), p. 8; CPG, "Race Improvement," Independent 66(March 1909):630; CPG, Religion, p. 10.

Despite the tenaciousness of static religious views, Gilman was optimistic about introducing new ideas about religion. "Now," she contended, "we're recognizing that human nature is not fixed, but grows and changes--and improves." With mankind's new awareness of evolutionary progress, the time seemed propitious to "rationally work on a new problem: 'How to Make Better People,'" leaving behind the unproductive task of "saving" people for an unknown beyond.[8]

Although Gilman felt confident of humanity's readiness for a religion based on reason, she predicated its reception on open minds, cleared of revealed religions' ineffectual debris. Using a New Testament metaphor, she warned that old wineskins poison new wine: "When we put the new wine of scientific discovery into the old bottles long used to receive religious revelation . . . the method of thought, the attitude of mind so long maintained, react on the new truth and change it to its harm." Thus, to protect the "strong new wine" of rational religion and to facilitate its acceptance, Gilman first analyzed the development of traditional religion. She hoped that by showing the man-made nature of "divine revelation," the historic predilection

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[8]CPG, Human Work, p. 10; CPG, "Race Improvement," p. 631.

for religious authority would give way to a more reasonable approach.[9]

Gilman claimed that religious authority originated with the rise of a priestly class in primitive times, a development she traced as follows:

> We see the early thinker using his brain with passionate eagerness, devising theories of superb range and daring, coming to towering conclusions . . . and promulgating them with none to contradict--except indeed those in other lands who had erected other theories.

Once the primitive thinker began to see logical connections between his "childlike assumptions," he attributed his percepts to an inner voice, an oracle. He announced new ideas "with the solemn prefix, 'And God said unto me,'--whatever god he worshipped." And as that "quite natural persuasion grew into accepted inspiration," there came into being the belief in divine revelation. A professional priesthood emerged as the more active thinkers in primitive life (many of whom gained preliminary authority as dream interpreters and medicine men) capitalized on the "conscious use of revelation," making it "the strongest engine in maintaining mastery."[10]

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[9] CPG, "Right People," p. 5, Folder 182-2, CPG Collection.

[10] CPG, <u>Religion</u>, pp. 107-8.

Gilman alleged that although the early priests abused their position of authority, they indirectly benefited society in two ways, intellectually and ethically. Utilizing sacrificial animals offered to the gods for their own physical subsistence, the priests did not have to work for a living. They evolved into mankind's first leisured class and thus had time to think. Freed from military as well as economic duties (which were met by society's soldier and worker) this group alone could cultivate the mind. The two remaining classes, soldiers and workers, were not encouraged to think, Gilman said, for they had to obey: "The soldiers with their dangerous power, the peasantry with their indispensable services must be subordinate." She concluded that, "Through [the priests'] protected brains came most of our early progress in science and art." The priesthood benefited society ethically as their concern with conduct broadened from petty rituals and rules to the beginnings of civil and criminal law.[11]

Gilman theorized that even as the early priest rose to power by claiming access to divine revelation, so he could hold power only by maintaining exclusive control of knowledge.

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[11]Ibid., pp. 108, 10; CPG, "Social Ethics," pp. 96-97.

Therefore, he sought to "protect his patents" with the intertwining veils of mystery and sanctity. According to Gilman, "a mystery . . . is a thing you do not know"; and "[sanctity] makes it a thing you must not know, [a thing] wrong to think about." She believed that the priesthood seized upon the notion of "sacred mystery" as "a wonderful protection for their imperfect thought" and as a means of maintaining their authority. When priests devised a religious doctrine too absurd to be accepted, they had merely to assert: "Here is something more important than anything else: it must be believed."[12]

The first perversion of religion, then, involved the substitution of belief for thought. And, Gilman contended, this perversion continued throughout the centuries, plaguing even modern theology. She observed: "The first thing to do with a religion is to believe it. Later on one is required to feel it, lastly to practice it, but believing is the absolute necessity." Undergirding the requirement to believe was the use of fear. The commandment, "Believe or die!" ranked first in most religions--including that of the Moslem who spread his faith at sword-point and the Christian who won converts by warning of eternal punishment. As belief

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[12] Forerunner 5(March 1914):81; CPG, Religion, pp. 110-11.

became a saving virtue, few could resist its imperative. Gilman described the mindless capacity for credulity which developed: "We have Believed with might and main, first this, then that, and then something else; each new Belief starting with some mind the intensity of whose percepts was taken as a revelation." The pity was, she added, that the habit of believing had little to do with the truth or falsity of the thing believed.[13]

Gilman argued that because preoccupation with belief resulted in neglect of thought, irrational inconsistencies developed in theology, causing a gradual separation of religion from life. She analyzed traditional doctrines of God, evil, human nature, and immortality--showing their fallacious aspects and in turn offering views she considered more reasonable.

According to Gilman, the concept of "God" represented the most significant idea mankind had been able to form. The idea emanated from an organic requirement of the human brain. The brain's demand for logic caused human beings to seek "root thoughts" to connect and unify discrete aspects of their experience. This tendency urged mankind toward "the acceptance of deeper and deeper principles, and

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[13] Forerunner 5(March 1914):77-79.

the thought of God is the most central, most basic, most satisfying of ideas." Gilman deemed the "need of God" not only valid but the mark of a rational mind:

> The need of some satisfying explanation of "the puzzle of life" is strong in all clear minds . . . . No active, healthy mind, even in childhood, can see a complex performance going on, and not wish to know what it is all about; or can see pain and pleasure, success and failure, without longing to know why they come and how to avoid or gain them.[14]

The idea of God, then, provided a basic and necessary explanation of life and, to some degree, an understanding of the universe. Unfortunately, the earliest perceptions of God were made by the human mind in its most primitive state, and these ideas underwent little change through the centuries. Gilman explained that the law of inertia precluded "a moving faith" which would have allowed the growing mind to form new concepts of God in accord with increased knowledge. Revealed religions, presuming that they possessed final truths, dogmatized their doctrines of God by writing them and sanctifying their manuscripts. Protected as holy writ, their primitive views of God endured; and, Gilman complained, "the rest of the world for all time is 'referred back' to their account as the only authentic one.[15]

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[14]Ibid. (January 1914):5; ibid. 3(September 1912):258.

[15]Ibid. 5(January 1914):5; ibid. 3(September 1912):258.

She deplored the idea of being "referred back" three or four thousand years for information concerning God. The modern mind could not reverence the archaic deities described by ancient religious authorities. She elaborated:

> The mind of today . . . is presented with concepts of Divinity made by Oriental minds of the dim past, minds . . . already stuffed with the antecedent culture of still earlier civilizations. The Chaldean legends loom behind the Hebrew, and long centuries of absolute despotism had hammered those Chaldean minds in the shape which so strongly influenced their social descendents. Ancient Egypt worked upon them too, and though the Hebrew brain slowly worked up to the Unity of God, it was never able to form a . . . creditable concept of that divinity.

Through centuries of western thought the Hebraic anthropomorphic God emerged triumphant, said Gilman; and twentieth century Hebraic-Christian thought still conceived of God as portrayed in the Old Testament--an irrascible, vengeful, despotic monarch.[16]

Gilman took issue with the Hebraic-Christian concept of a personal God, pointing out the primitive nature of personification. An anthropomorphic view of life characterized the savage, to whom all objects and beings were personified.

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[16] Ibid. 5(January 1914):5. Gilman questioned the use of Biblical texts in sermons: "Why does a modern sermon to modern people have to be based on and buttressed by the writings or events of an ancient people? Sermons should be clear strong explanations of life. Why belabor parallels with ancient people?" Ibid. 1(November 1910):6.

Modern man had progressed beyond this stage for the most part. He no longer looked upon stars, sun, moon, rivers, mountains, beasts, and birds as persons. He even developed the capacity to conceptionalize diety as an abstraction, an "inner power." Yet despite intellectual progress in viewing God as "Spirit," modern man retained the primitive notion of God as a personality--and a masculine one at that.[17]

The concept of God as male mirrored the androcentric mind that shaped him. According to Gilman, "When the Patriarchal cult was at its height, under the influence of family ideals, we called God 'Father.'" She speculated that the patriarchal father deified his own traits--arbiter, ruler, dispenser of benefits--and then worshipped them. To have called God "'Mother,'" she said, "would . . . have seemed a profanation. Yet why is the name of either party in a distinctly physical relation honorable to God? If 'Father' is a fitting term for Deity, why not 'Grandfather' . . . 'Uncle' or 'Great-uncle'?"[18]

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[17]Ibid. 2(July 1911):204.

[18]Ibid. Because Gilman rejected the idea of a personal God, she did not follow the practice of some feminists (such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton) who referred to God as "Our Mother-Father." But in the interest of clarity, she did observe the convention of referring to God with masculine pronouns.

Gilman argued that personality was limiting, and thus it discredited God: "Personality is a part--an infinitesimal fractional part of things. God is the whole." God as a "spiritual personality" implied a contradiction in terms. She advised: "Take the idea of Spirit for good and all, and drop the idea of a body to it. You cannot hold both and keep the power to reason." She illustrated the irrationality in viewing God as both spirit and person:

> "God is love," we say; but in the picture he is an old man with a beard. Does Love have a beard? "God is a spirit"! we insist . . . . "He is everywhere." Yet we do not frankly face in our own minds the difference between a Pervasive Spirit and an Elderly Gentleman on a Cloud.

In short, she concluded, "We do not do justice to God." Therefore, only gain would result in relinquishing traditional ideas of a personal God. By shedding childish imagery, one could progress to "real thought" about the "Central Fact" of the universe. By trying to understand the true nature of God and mankind's relation to him, a fresh, vital, rational religion could develop.[19]

Gilman asserted that God was a fact to be known, not a person in whom to believe. Knowledge of God did not depend on the authenticity of the Bible, "that arbitrary

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[19] Ibid. 2(July 1911):204-5.

collection of ancient literature." By studying the "book of Life about us," one could discover God from factual rather than hearsay evidence:

> In our own little earth--and that but a speck in a teeming universe--we can follow the course of development roughly but clearly. It has followed one large general scheme of progress; it has come up; it has grown. There was no life upon it--and then there was, and life has grown. There were no people upon it, and then there were--and people have grown. There was no civilization, no humanness, and now there is--and humanness has grown.

Gilman generalized from these observations that some "Power" worked within the universe, and because "the Power works upward--it is Good." She concluded that the laws governing life centered and combined in the most basic law of all, the "Great First Cause"--God.[20]

In Gilman's view, then, God was the "Working Force" in the universe, an observable power moving the world toward growth--and therefore goodness. Thus, God was love, for she defined love as a force for good. The fact of love in the world gave proof of God's existence. Just as "we have felt love, seen it at work, so we may know God is . . . just as we know other facts." One could relate to God by actualizing the force of love within one's self. Gilman reasoned: "God is love. Love is force. God is the force by which you

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[20]Ibid. 5(January 1914):6.

live; and when we want him we can find him in his Kingdom. The kingdom of Heaven is within you." The idea of a personal relationship with God had no meaning; to know God was to "do God." She summarized in verse form:

> God is a force to give way to!
> God is a thing you have to do![21]

Gilman considered it of immense advantage to perceive God in this way--as a spirit "within us, to be expressed" rather than a Supreme Being "above us, to be worshipped." Secure in this larger meaning of deity, one no longer need "worry" about God. As she described, "God is <u>there</u> working all the time, not angry or jealous or any of those things the limited intelligence of the Hebrews discredited Him with, but a steady lifting force, always to be relied on, bearing no grudge against the last and highest form of his creation--Humanity." And surely society could perceive this more reasonable view of God. Gilman asked, "If we could 'worship' Baal and Peor, Pasht and Isis, Krishna and Kali, a jealous and bloodthirsty Jehovah, or a misty trinity--can we not recognize . . . the one Acting Force that carries on all the processes about us?" To have discerned even a trace of God in the pride, cruelty, ignorance, and falsehood of ancient

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[21] Ibid. 5(January 1914):6; CPG, "The New Hope," p. 37, Folder 172-2, CPG Collection; CPG, <u>Religion</u>, p. 292.

religions would indicate the ability to understand the "Great Power" now apparent as the "root thought" of a rational religion.[22]

Having analyzed the idea of God, Gilman next addressed the traditional religious doctrines of evil, human depravity, and eternal retribution. She argued that these doctrines had no basis in fact. They stemmed from one of the most destructive errors in human thought: "the ancient race-concept of 'Sin.'" Defining "sin" as disobedience to arbitrary commands, she attributed this "oldest idea of all" to an androcentric emphasis on authority--first human authority, then divine:

> As the mother-culture gave way to masculine specialization, we find the primitive medicine man giving orders and punishing disobedience; and very early . . . his practical mind developed the basic concept that the wickedest thing of all was not to do what he said.
>
> This attitude was imputed to the dieties as soon as they became strongly visualized.

In a long line of "psychological and theological heredity," successive religions--Chaldean, Assyrian, Hebrew, and Christian--perpetuated the idea of sin as disobedience to their respective deities' precepts. As for an explanation of sin's origin, the androcentric mind had a ready answer: woman introduced sin into the world.[23]

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[22] CPG, Religion, p. 300; Forerunner 7(December 1916):326.

[23] Forerunner 5(May 1914):130.

Having projected an anthropomorphic God, the primitive mind made the same error about evil by conceiving and deifying a "Devil" as the personification of evil. The androcentric combat philosophy prevailed as this creation was cast as God's adversary. Life was seen as an eternal struggle between good and evil, with human beings the focus of conflict between God and Devil. The primitive mind postulated man as a "Soul," born "from God-Knows-Where, and lodged in flesh on this confused and sorrowful planet." Morally depraved but subject to redemption, man became a helpless pawn in the cosmic competition for his soul. And toward what end? Gilman answered succinctly: "If the Devil gets it, for endless torment. If God gets it, for endless bliss."[24]

In contrast to the dualistic omnipotence of God and Devil, humanity was impotent. According to Gilman, primitive theology held that, "man could do nothing for his own betterment . . . and his only serious religious concern was to square himself with God in order to ensure . . . his . . . future welfare." Consequently, the salvation of one's soul emerged as life's chief purpose, although methods of salvation varied according to different religions. Under

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[24]Ibid. 5(August 1914):218-19; ibid. (December 1914):328.

these circumstances, mankind developed an inordinate faith in life after death. Preoccupation with "the great beyond" obscured interest in this life, except as a way station toward the spiritual realm of heaven or hell.[25]

Gilman argued that the idea of eternal retribution bore the mark of androcentric attitudes. Heaven and hell represented a post-mortem extension of the masculine desire for just deserts in combat. Victor and vanquished would be eternally memorialized in their appropriate place in the "after-life." Most ancient religions emphasized the fate of the former. They had elaborate visions of a paradise to reward the faithful, the details varying according to the beholders' projections of bliss. The Teutonic vision of Valhalla flowed with beer and bloodshed. Moslems pictured "an eternity of feasting and dalliance with beautiful women." American Indians viewed heaven as a Happy Hunting Ground. Mormons entertained the most prodigious vision of heaven in their belief that the perfected Mormon man achieved godhood. (Gilman noted a "delicious Americanism" in the Mormon view: "Not only may any little boy be President, but he may be God.")[26]

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[25]Ibid. 6(February 1915):34; CPG, _Religion_, p. 17.

[26]CPG, _Religion_, p. 19.

Underscoring the androcentric nature of the various concepts of heaven, Gilman remarked: "The conspicuous point in all these joy-promising futures is their naive masculinity. Not a feminine paradise among them . . . no handsome men for pious lady Moslems. No female Mormon soars to divinity." In these man-made heavens, as on earth, women occupied a subordinate position--if any at all. According to Gilman, no provision for women's pleasure existed in heaven because of widespread doubt that they had a soul.[27]

Christianity provided a singular exception to the plethora of masculine heavens. The Christian paradise--with its golden streets and pearly gates, its choir of angels, and its passive tranquility--appealed to women. In fact, said Gilman, these features so "feminized" heaven that it had little attraction for men: "Men do not rush to death in battle as much stimulated by the hope of a harp as of a houri." Gilman theorized that since the enticement of heaven was insufficient to affect desired behavior, the Christian Church relied on the fear of hell, "the most frightful concept ever produced by the logical action of a misinformed mind . . . . And this product of a diseased

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[27]Ibid., pp. 20, 43.

imagination they attributed to God--!" She charged that no other religion had produced anything so sadistic as the Christian hell.[28]

In Gilman's view, primitive man's ideas concerning the origin of evil, the nature of man, and the immortality of the soul became entrenched in various religions and wreaked havoc on the human race. She reckoned that there had been "no greater horror in the whole period of human consciousness than in our theories of Sin, Punishment, and Eternal Damnation, and . . . no greater meanness . . . than the [blaming] of the whole world's evil upon woman." Confident that in the light of reason the destructive theology of the past would be discarded, she offered an interpretation of evil, human nature, and immortality based on observable fact.[29]

Gilman defined evil as any action destructive to humanity. She did not deny the existence of evil, pointing to examples visible at every hand--lying, extortion, sexual abuse, slavery, murder, and war. But unlike traditional theologians who attributed evil to metaphysical phenomena such as generic sinfulness or a devil incarnate, she ascribed

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[28]Ibid., p. 21; CPG, "The Two Beyonds," p. 3, Folder 177, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 5(May 1914):131; CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 123.

[29]_Forerunner_ 5(May 1914):136.

evil to natural causes emanating from environmental conditions and perpetuated through education. As an example of environmental causation she cited the crime of murder: "Murder does not suddenly burst forth from a blameless life. Back of that actual murder were a thousand hates, a thousand ferocious impulses. What made them?" In what conditions of lodging, food, clothing, and work did a person live so as to engender feelings leading to murder? What injustice, insult, and cruelty did he experience and then internalize? Gilman contended that in adverse physical, economic, and psychological conditions could be found the origin of evil.[30]

Education fostered evil when ideas derived in ignorance or malice were transmitted as truths. Gilman referred to women's subordination as an example. The false assumption of female inferiority was transmitted through the ages by word of mouth and in literature until society became conditioned to accept it as fact. Education also fostered evil through the teaching of "misuse of function." For instance, sexual activity proved a beneficial function when used for its two-fold purpose, reproduction and the expression of mutual love. But, said Gilman, "quite beyond these [uses]

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[30]Ibid. (October 1914):276; ibid. (April 1914):104-5.

has arisen a very general error, maintained by half the world, and religiously taught to the other half, that this function exists mainly for the pleasure and well-being of the male sex." The teaching of this idea resulted in twin evils of male indulgence: the sexual servitude of wifehood and the "sordid horrors" of prostitution. Furthermore, the teaching of sexual misuse made it difficult to view sex naturally: "We do not call [sex] 'evil' in the animals. Neither do we call it "Love' and made a god of it. In ourselves we do both. We deify and damn the same instinct--according to our views." Either extreme distorted sex, robbing humanity of the pleasure derived from fulfillment of function.[31]

If evil issued from natural causes, how then did one rectify evil conduct? Through punishment? No, said Gilman; punishment was coercive not remedial. Rather, evil must be eradicated by studying the causes for harmful behavior and then removing them. She illustrated with the matter of drunkenness, a form of indulgence which she alleged caused untold injury through loss of money, health, happiness, and life. Attempts to curb drunkenness by punishing the drunkard or by removing "the Demon Rum" proved ineffectual.

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[31] Ibid. (May 1914):106-7.

Drunkenness would be stopped only when society attacked the conditions tending to make people drink. Gilman emphasized that of all the conditions fostering evil conduct, one ranked supreme: "the self-destructive falsehood that life is Combat." By replacing that pervasive philosophy with the "working principle" of the universe that "life is Growth," the task of social improvement would become easier.[32]

Gilman insisted that human nature was intrinsically good. She reasoned that all creatures living in social relation tended to develop behavior patterns beneficial to that relation. Thus, it was "natural for human beings to 'be good'--that is to be mutually helpful, patient and kind," for it was to their collective benefit. Indeed, goodness--the "conscious, self-directed conduct to our highest advantage"--was a pre-eminent human distinction; no other animal had the capability of goodness in this sense. Gilman considered it vital to recognize that "'goodness' is the normal condition of the human race; a healthy level of life, not a precarious pinnacle to be reached with difficulty and held most uncertainly." The ominous sense of one's natural depravity was a paralyzing burden, albeit a false one, for it discouraged attempts at self-improvement and growth.

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[32]Ibid., p. 135; ibid. (August 1914):220.

"We have to learn that ultimate forgiveness which forgives ourselves," she said. And then, rid of the sense of sin, a person could rationally evaluate his life--stopping his wrong conduct and, more importantly, seeking its cause and stopping that.[33]

Gilman did not deny the possibility of personal immortality, there being no proof against it. But she took issue with the disproportionate interest in the "spiritual beyond" to the neglect of humanity's future life on earth. The struggle for spiritual security had obliterated earthly duties. In her analysis, "Ever since we began to conceive of God we have forgotten man--since we learned there was a spiritual world we have abjured the material. We religious persons . . . [have] spent all our energies in fitting ourselves for heaven before we were fit for earth." Whatever God intended for human beings after death, it seemed clear to Gilman that they were set on earth for the present, to live and improve life here. "Though seven heavens stretch before us after death," she said, "our duty, while we are alive, is to carry out on earth the divine purpose, the upbuilding of a noble humanity."[34]

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[33]Ibid., (April 1914):102; CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 45; Forerunner 5(August 1914):220; ibid. (May 1914):135-36.

[34]CPG, Religion, pp. 7, 11-12; CPG, "The Relation of Economics to Moral Reform," p. 14, Folder 168, CPG Collection.

What could explain humanity's tendency to value the "spiritual beyond" over the "earthly beyond?" What could account for "this peculiar trend of mind which turns it from all the vivid actualities of this world to the glittering or terrifying possibilities of another?" Gilman contended that this death-oriented emphasis stemmed from androcentric influence in religion. She reasoned as follows: "Thought was aroused in the primitive mind by the crises in life rather than by recurring events"; and in the life of primitive men, death was the principal crisis. As hunters and fighters they engaged in the pursuit, combat, and killing of animals and of other men. Climaxing intense activity, death provoked the philosophical question, "What had happened to the life now gone?" The next logical question, "What is going to happen to me after I am dead?" became the main concern of androcentric religions. This "posthumus egotism" fostered a continuing preoccupation with hopes and fears of future life, blinding society to the possibilities of heaven on earth.[35]

Gilman speculated that had women developed religion it would have been life-oriented, with an emphasis on heaven in the here and now. Birth formed the principle crisis in

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[35] CPG, Religion, pp. 36-38, 46.

the life of primitive women; their work consisted of giving life, not taking it. In a birth-based religion the main question would have been, "What must be done for the child that is born?" In place of a "posthumus egotism" an "immediate altruism" would have prevailed, the chief preoccupation being to maintain and improve present life. Whereas masculine religion was "something to be believed," feminine religion would have been "something to be done."[36]

Gilman believed in "Heaven here." If indeed the Kingdom of God lay within one, then it was at hand; "and death [was] not required to reach it." Since the continuation of life on earth was the only "beyond" of certainty, logic indicated a greater concern for "future earthly life after we're gone" than for after-life. Comparatively speaking, the fate of a single dead soul was a smaller affair than that of the living world. "We do not need to be saved," she explained; "we need to be used." A "hand-built heaven" could be created in this life by eradicating evil-conducing conditions and ensuring the means for every person to be "well-born, well bred, well nourished, and well used."[37]

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[36]Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[37]CPG, "Beyonds," p. 1; Forerunner 5(April 1914):103; ibid. 2(June 1911):62; ibid. 7(December 1916):333; ibid. 3(March 1912):64; CPG, "Christianity and Humanity," p. 7, Folder 182, CPG Collection.

Summarizing her refutation of traditional theology based on revelation and her affirmation of a rational theology based on fact, Gilman spoke emphatically:

> We have not Sinned.
> We are not Damned.
> We do not need to be Saved.
> Our business is To Learn and To Grow.
> We have the Power of God lifting always within and the Light of Reason to walk by.

Turning from matters of doctrine, the area of thought, she next directed attention to the second facet of religion: the attitude of mind, the area of emotions.[38]

How did one express feelings about God? Through worship, said Gilman. Worship, the honoring of God, served as a medium for expressing religious emotions; but its form varied according to different concepts of God. She felt it imperative that rational religious feelings be expressed through a form of worship commensurate with factual theology. In her view, this meant worship based on practicality rather than reverence. Reverential worship reflected an anthropomorphic, monarchical view of God. Primitive in origin, this form of worship characterized contemporary religions as well, to the detriment of all concerned. To

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[38] Forerunner 5(May 1914):136.

dispel the mystique of reverential worship, Gilman analyzed its three components: placation, propitiation, and praise.[39]

Placation, the appeasement of God, represented worship motivated by fear; it was the oldest kind of religious expression. Primitive peoples interpreted catastrophes such as pestilence, famine, illness, and death as signs of divine rage. The ensuing pain or danger drove them to worship in order to pacify their ill-tempered deities. Gilman judged the sense of fear less effective in inducing modern worship; yet placation could still be observed in "submissive, fatalistic, ignorant peoples" who were motivated to worship in times of catastrophe.[40]

Propitiation, the habit of sacrifice for conciliatory purposes, comprised a major part of ancient worship. The early priesthood demanded "'firstlings of the flock' without spot or blemish." Ostensibly a sacrifice to God, the animals provided food for God's agents. Increasingly, priests extolled the efficacy of "giving up" and "going without." Although animal sacrifice became an obsolete requirement in modern times, vestiges of propitiation survived in

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[39]Ibid. (March 1914):80.

[40]Ibid. 2(October 1911):298-99.

contemporary religions' emphasis on "virtuous renunciation"--and specifically in the practice of monetary tithes.[41]

Praise was a more recent aspect of worship. To primitive worshipers, the fearsome deities were to be pacified if possible, "but no one was blind enough to praise them." Gilman guessed that the inclusion of adulation began with the patriarchate and peaked during the ages of despotism in Chaldea, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, India, and China--countries wherein the "great ancient religions" developed. Rulers of these countries held absolute power; yet, being human, they craved flattery and attention. Their subjects learned the art of pleasing them through praise, a practice necessary to life in those times. In light of the long despotic era in the lands of ancient religions, Gilman speculated, "Is it any wonder that the human mind, so long accustomed to bow and kneel and beg and petition, buttering every prayer with the most extravagant flattery and abject submission, should acquire an instinct for that sort of thing?"--and then transfer that expression of worship from an earthly ruler to a monarchical God?[42]

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[41]Ibid., p. 299.

[42]Ibid., pp. 299-300.

In Gilman's view, the "cult of reverence" incorporating placation, propitiation, and praise fell short of the true purpose of worship: the honoring of God. Reverential worship in fact dishonored God. It implied a capricious deity subject to cajolery and flattery; and it debased human beings, God's highest creation. This form of worship was an anachronism reflecting primitive views of deity. It had no meaning when one became aware of God as a universal force. Gilman observed: "A Force does not require reverence; has no use for it. One may heartily respect the power of electricity or the power of steam; but this respect leads to earnest study and wise use--not to the swinging of censers and the singing of hymns."[43]

Recognizing God's nature to be spiritual force, how did one express feelings about God? How did one honor God? Through use of that universal force, said Gilman. Worship in a rational religion would take practical form: the expression of love--the force of God--through service to mankind. One honored God by "doing God." This involved two tasks: to grow and to help others grow. "The only possible

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[43] Ibid., p. 300.

attitude of honorable humanhood," Gilman claimed, "is to . . . think, 'What must I do'" to improve myself and the world?[44]

She illustrated the idea of honoring a spiritual force by using the analogy of physical force? "Consider the sun, the visible Fountain of well-being for our particular patch of universe. As we bask in its . . . warmth, as we think how our lives depend on it," how should we express our appreciation? Reverential worship would do the sun no good--nor us. Use of the sun would best honor it: "If a tree or a flower or a frisking kid did feel love and gratitude to that unfailing warmth and light, what should it do to express that feeling? Blossom, Grow, Live, of course; do what the sun makes it do. Honor the power with glad fulfillment." In this same sense, Gilman said, we honor God by fulfillment of function--that is, by being fully human and thereby creating a fully human world.[45]

Gilman equated "doing God" with "doing God's will." She agreed with traditional theologians that one should submit one's will to God as as aspect of worship. But

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[44]Ibid. (October 1911):300; CPG, "The Human Will," p. 2, Folder 167-2, CPG Collection.

[45]Forerunner 2(July 1911):204-5.

unlike their interpretation, she did not perceive submission to God's will as either a soul-searching process or a matter of abnegation. God's will for growth and improvement was self-evident. One had no need to ponder it, only to act in accord with it. Gilman suggested, "It is not God's will that need trouble us, but ours." The great need was to strengthen one's own will; for how could a person submit his will to God if he had none to submit? Gilman reasoned that "God gave us a will so that we might govern our own action--so that we might be independent." This purpose could not be served if one were governed by the will of another--even that of God. Resorting to an anthropomorphic metaphor, she claimed: "There is no credit in being an eternal baby just because God is your father. Children can grow up." In effect, it was God's will that man exercise his own will. Practical worship, then, involved the use of free will, the ultimate act of honoring God.[46]

Gilman emphasized that practical worship incorporated none of the elements of reverential worship. Placation was unnecessary, for "it makes no difference to God what you do--only to you." Propitiation was out of place, sacrifice being "forced surrender with personal hope as the

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[46]CPG, "Will," pp. 20-23.

reason" and therefore not an act of giving. Praise was an empty exercise; a force did not need adulation. Prayer, a medium of worship Gilman accepted but redefined, did not involve praise. It consisted of absorbing God's power by drawing aside to gain perspective of humanity's progress and one's part in it. The most important difference between practical worship and reverential worship was that the former did not require man's abasement. Worshipping through love and service to humanity, one became a co-worker with God, a position testifying to the worth of both God and man.[47]

Of the three facets of religion--doctrine, attitude, and behavior--Gilman considered behavior the most important. The first two were essential, yet ineffective without the third. Thinking led to knowledge, but merely knowing truth accomplished little. Feeling furnished motivation, but alone it was not enough. "Love is a feeling," Gilman said, "but if those who love you only feel and neither think nor do--you are not much richer for their adoration." Religion was not complete until "knowing truly and feeling rightly" resulted in "doing wisely."[48]

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[47] Forerunner 7(December 1916):326; ibid. 1(December 1910):6; ibid. 3(July 1912):203-4; CPG, "Will," pp. 2, 20.

[48] CPG, "Moral Reform," pp. 1-2; Forerunner 3(July 1912):194; ibid. 2(September 1911):233.

"We must do the truth we feel and think," Gilman stressed. But in this regard the human race had a poor record. Citing the prevalence of poverty, injustice, crime, and war--she asserted that "we felt and thought truth--but went on acting as before." She attributed this discrepancy to codes of conduct based on moral and religious dictates, to the neglect of autonomous judgment. As a solution to making actions commensurate with thought and emotion, she proposed a system of ethics based on natural law, its validity based on reason rather than authority. She called this system "social ethics." To place social ethics in perspective, she first gave a brief sketch of behavioral evolution.[49]

Gilman speculated that some form of conduct regulation had existed since man first began relating consequences to actions. Instincts such as eating, mating, and self-preservation constituted the basic level of human behavior. With man's widening consciousness, tribal mores began to modify instincts. As an example, Gilman cited the custom of tribal women being forced to curb their hunger until after the men had eaten. As mores became habitual, they were thought of as natural. Gilman noted that many contemporary

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[49] CPG, "Moral Reform," p. 16; Forerunner 5(December 1914):327.

behavior patterns considered natural might actually stem from ancient tribal habits.[50]

Morals, the outgrowth of mores, rested on customs arising from past needs. Those needs might or might not have been valid at the time; but in either case the moral values they spawned were perpetuated by long repetition, enforced by tribal and later societal authority rather than by consideration of their continued necessity. Because many tribal mores concerned sexual taboos, the connotation of "morality" became a narrow one, relating primarily to sexual conduct.[51]

The next stage of behavioral regulation occurred when man's growing power of abstract thought produced ideals of conduct. He learned to generalize as to "right" and "wrong" and applied these terms to behavior, "with assurance if not with accuracy." Gilman called this new conduct-modifying force "irrational, subject to no natural law; for these early ethicists knew no true base for their assumptions, and attributed what should be a provable rule of conduct merely to revelation." She alleged that the priesthood of various religions weighted the terms "right" and "wrong"

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[50] _Forerunner_ 3(June 1912):146.

[51] Ibid.; ibid. 5(February 1914):51-52.

with spiritual significance and promulgated an array of religious mandates based upon them. Some were destructive, such as infanticide and certain ascetic rules; some were constructive, such as the Ten Commandments. All, however, were arbitrary.[52]

Gilman argued that throughout history religion had been the most powerful modifier of conduct--"stronger than custom, law, economics, than all our emotions and impulses." Its force could be measured by the fact that fasting, celibacy, and martyrdom thwarted man's three strongest instincts. Its influence could be demonstrated by the fact that "ethical values today . . . in most people's minds . . . are confined exclusively to religious requirements and prohibitions." But, she observed, the modifying force of religion operated primarily at the level of individual behavior. It had shown little success in affecting relational conduct such as that prescribed in the Old Testament dictum, "do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God"--or in the New Testament injunction, "Love thy neighbor." In Gilman's view, the war-plagued history of Judaic-Christian nations substantiated the failure of religious ethics in social relations.[53]

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[52]Ibid. 3(June 1912):146; ibid. 5(February 1914):53.

[53]Ibid. 5(March 1914):77; ibid. 5(February 1914):53; CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 93; CPG, "Race Improvement," p. 630.

Gilman concluded that despite some valid standards of conduct found in moral and religious codes, the human race had never developed a "workable" system of ethics, one leading to humanity's highest development. Instead, it had succumbed to a confusing "mixture of tendencies: instincts, morals, and revelatory ethics," all of which made society vulnerable to authoritarianism. Herein she justified the need for a new ethical system based on natural law rather than arbitrary authority. Equating natural law with God's law, she argued that nature was not "a separate institution from God"; it was an expression of God's work in the universe. Therefore, natural law superceded moral law and religious law as a basis for ethics.[54]

Gilman explained that religious ethics rested upon "What God Had Said," according to human interpreters, and focused on individual conduct. In contrast, ethics based on natural law rested upon what God had done, and continued to do, and focused on societal relations. She described the latter as a human system of ethics, based on the following rationale: "Humans have the ability to modify conduct consciously--by intelligent recognition of the advantages

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[54] Forerunner 3(June 1912):147; ibid. 5(December 1914):327; CPG, "Moral Reform," p. 7.

needed, and by the ability to restrain and promote our actions to that advantage." Mankind had within itself the capacity and the will for rational conduct; it needed only to exercise that capacity. She attempted to assist this process by exploring the parameters of a rational system of ethics.[55]

Gilman defined ethics as the science of social relations. It involved the study of how people conduct themselves in relation to other people. Thus far, ethics had been classed with logic and metaphysics as an abstract science, "suitable for mature students . . . and by no means popular." Nonsense, said Gilman. Ethics, the study of human behavior, was the simplest, most practical of sciences. It should be taught to young children at home, and it should be a required course of study every year of their school career. Nothing was a more important requisite than learning how to act according to the science of social relations.[56]

Gilman elucidated her use of the term science in regard to ethics: "In our intricate co-relation there is so wide a field of inter-relative behavior that its working principles

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[55]Forerunner 5(June 1914):190; CPG, "Right People," p. 5.

[56]CPG, Concerning Children (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1900), p. 105; Forerunner 5(January 1914):20-21.

and laws form a science." These laws could be learned and utilized to benefit society. Using an example from physical science, she explained that just as hygiene was based on knowledge of the nature and function of the body, so should ethics be based on a clear understanding of the nature and function of society. It followed that just as "we may learn how to be well from such knowledge [of physiology], so should we learn how to 'be good' from a general knowledge of ethics."[57]

Where to begin? The study of ethics demanded a clear, active mind, Gilman believed. As faith in some previous ethical theory could hinder thought, she suggested tracing ideas of "good and bad" or "right and wrong" to their earliest possibilities. "Dropping down" the scale of evolution to the stage before life existed, she showed how right action and wrong action were predicated on observable phenomena:

> As soon as we are able to perceive "a law"--i.e., "an observable sequence of phenomena"--as soon as it is apparent . . . that this crystal is square, this triangular, and this duodecahedral, then if we find one varying, one pinched, one irregular, disproportionate, we say: "this one is wrong," or "this is a bad one."

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[57] CPG, Concerning Children, p. 105; Forerunner 5(January 1914):20.

> Where we find any process going on, with observable sequence of cause and effect, we can . . . call its regular fulfillment "right" and any error or failure "wrong."[58]

Deductions made from observing this level of non-life, being free of emotions, involved no praise or blame. Even less did they involve the idea of virtue or sin. Gilman contended that the same objectivity was possible, and necessary, in evaluating human behavior. Further, the standard of judging right and wrong processes in inanimate objects held true on the human level. She generalized that standard as follows: "That is right for a given organism, which leads to its best development." She called this generalization the first law in the science of ethics. It was in accordance with natural law, Gilman said, because "Growth is natural law."[59]

The next step in the study of ethics involved assessments of society's nature and function. Gilman asserted that society was a structure of interrelated individuals; therefore, it was social in nature. She conceded that humanity did consist of separate persons who had individual

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[58]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 101; _Forerunner_ 5(January 1914):21.

[59]_Forerunner_ 5(January 1914):21; CPG, _Religion_, p. 243.

interests. But, she said, "so do the constituent cells of our own bodies . . . . The crucial test is that those body-cells do not exist save in bodies, and that individuals do not exist save in societies." If society were social in nature, then its function was to develop in organic relation. Gilman interpreted this to mean that since we were part of a whole, our individual actions should foster the well-being of the whole:

> We do not live alone, acting on lines of conduct of a wholly separate character. We are braided and woven together, a living tissue; and what one does is modified, inevitably, by what the others do.
>
> Ethical problems are not on lines of "What must I do to be saved?" Merely to be saved--if the others are not--is unethical. The problems of ethics deal with collective conduct for the collective benefit.[60]

In Gilman's view, all previous ethical systems had failed because they misjudged the nature of society and therefore its function. The general consensus had been that society consisted of individuals, not groups; that people lived and grew individually, not socially; and that ethics should be predicated on individual conduct, not group conduct. Social ethics followed two stages of individualism in ethical evolution: personal ethics and family ethics.

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[60] Forerunner 5(April 1914):103-4. Gilman differentiated her concept of function from the utilitarian view, "the greatest good for the greatest number," saying, the "greatest number" referred to individuals and not a collective body.

She analyzed each of them to show their deficiencies relative to the larger range of an organic society.[61]

In personal ethics one measured conduct in relation to his own advantage. Gilman called this a simple ethic; its fulfillment could be left to instinct, as "the natural desires of a healthy being tend to his own good conduct." Unless one lived in isolation, however, this proved an inadequate ethic. In social relations conflicts arose between one's own good and that of others, and a personal ethic provided no basis for decision in these conflicts.[62]

In family ethics, the next stage upward in social complexity, conflict occurred between the good of the individual and the good of the family. And, Gilman said, "As the family ethics is higher it must triumph." Despite the advantage of the family to the individual, family life operated at considerable expense to individual comfort and freedom. In fact, it would seem almost as if the family felt no obligation to respect individual rights. Gilman observed that in America especially, where family ethics "stands rampant," the mother was expected to sacrifice personal desires to

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[61]Ibid. (January 1914):22.

[62]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

those of husband and children, while the father was expected to be chiefly "a good provider" and "a good family man." And children had virtually no personal rights. Individualism prevailed in family ethics in the sense that conduct was measured against the family's immediate personal needs, to the neglect of broader social concerns.[63]

Gilman compared personal and family ethics to the first two laws of life, maintenance and reproduction; they enabled society to "be" and to "re-be." But the individualism of these ethical systems precluded the third and distinctively human law: evolution, the imperative to grow and "be better." In doing so these systems ignored the essence of human life:

> Individual existence with its instincts and desires we share with the whole creation; family existence with its instincts and desires we share with all the higher creatures; but social existence in our exquisitely specialized and highly organized form, is our great human prerogative.

Gilman called the development of higher forms of social relationships "_the_ human process. It is what we are here for." This purpose could be accomplished only by developing social ethics--the ethics of humanity.[64]

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[63]Ibid., p. 24.

[64]Ibid.

Understanding the nature of society to be social and the function of society to be organic development, how did one construct a system of social ethics? By establishing a human standard of conduct, Gilman declared. This meant judging actions on the basis of their effect on humanity. Applying the first law of ethics, she offered the following guideline: "That is right for a given society which tends to its best development." "Wrong is merely not right." By using this standard for determining right and wrong behavior, social ethics would provide "the only satisfying base for conduct--the reason why it is right or wrong." Henceforth, "no authoritative utterance of a priesthood" would be necessary. By observing the consequences of an act one could make autonomous ethical decisions. Gilman called this process one "a bright child can understand and a practical man respect."[65]

In constructing a system of social ethics one must next establish a basis for ethical valuation. Gilman felt it imperative to recognize that "right and wrong," "good and bad," "virtue and vice," were relative terms, wholly dependent on the needs of a given society in a given age. She explained: "All virtues are made of necessity. Without

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[65] CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 30; CPG, "Right People," p. 7; Forerunner 3(June 1912):146; ibid. 1(June 1910):8.

necessity they would never have arisen; when the necessity ceases, they cease to be virtues." She generalized this fact into a second law of ethics: "Good and bad are relative terms, dependent on conditions."[66]

Gilman chose two non-emotional virtues, hospitality and thrift to illustrate the relativity of behavioral valuation. "Hospitality," she said, "is a virtue in proportion to the scarcity of population, and the distance, difficulty, and danger in traveling." Thus, in America's rural and frontier sections hospitality rated highly as a virtue, while in crowded urban areas it was devalued. In regard to thrift, she observed: "The fruit-fed native of a tropic land has no occasion for economy. Having no occasion . . . he does not develop it . . . . If he did, it would not be a virtue." On the other hand, with men starving on short rations, "the extreme of miserliness becomes a virtue, being a necessity." Gilman pointed out that there existed no "innate, inherent good or bad" in the qualities of hospitality or thrift, nor in any other specific act.[67]

Failing to recognize the law of ethical relativity, society had maintained static valuations in the face of an

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[66]Forerunner 5(February 1914):51.

[67]Ibid.

evolutionary world; and, consequently, it had reaped irrelevant systems of ethics. In contrast, social ethics reflected the natural law of change. It embraced dynamic valuations relative to an act's social advantage in varying times, places, and situations.[68]

Gilman emphasized that although ethical values varied with circumstances, no human act was devoid of ethical implications. Thus, social ethics covered all conduct. In contrast to religious ethics which defined rules for a "selected field of action . . . leaving the whole remainder of life outside," social ethics concerned mundane as well as spiritual activity. It was universal in application.[69]

But, Gilman said, within the inclusive framework of social ethics there did exist priorities. Some virtues were more beneficial to society than others; some vices were more detrimental than others. How should ethical priorities be determined? She suggested that to rate qualities on the scale of social ethics, it was necessary to establish the essential qualities of social relation and then compare "the highest humanity we know with the lowest

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[68]Ibid., pp. 51, 53.

[69]Ibid., p. 53.

humanity we know." She offered her own version of ethical priorities along with reasons for them.[70]

Gilman ranked love as the highest virtue on the scale of social ethics. God's natural law, it was "the main condition of life." She reasoned that "this human race of ours obviously lives in large numbers, held together by the interchange of services." Love, the "Social Spirit," performed this function by recognizing and serving common social needs. Gilman viewed love essentially as service; it might or might not include affection. As a concrete expression of love she introduced a derivative virtue, "integrity of function." This meant "doing the special work one is meant to do in the world" and performing it well. Specialization along the line of one's interest and ability constituted one's best in human service. Moreover, such action produced personal satisfaction and joy. The apt expression of one's powers was the essence of happiness and thus a pre-eminent virtue.[71]

Truth followed love as a ranking virtue. Gilman reasoned that the common consciousness distinctive of humanity

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[70]Ibid. (June 1914):163.

[71]Ibid. 1(June 1910):9; ibid. 5(June 1914):189; ibid. (June 1914):163.

depended on the interchange of thought, feelings, and spirit. If honesty did not mark this communication, the "natural medium of human existence" suffered. Truth, like love, was an "absolute condition of advantage" and thus fulfilled natural law in human relations. In connection with truth, Gilman proposed an auxilliary virtue, thus far unheeded in terms of ethics: the quality of "openmindedness," which she described as the willingness "to see farther." Intellectual honesty, the mark of an open mind, led one to examine new ideas regardless of their outcome. Like William James, Gilman contended that there were no fixed truths. She deduced from observing the natural law of evolution that truth was never finished; it always called for further inquiry. Only in pursuing truth, not preserving it, did one follow natural law.[72]

Close behind love and truth, Gilman listed justice, courage, and honor as qualities essential to human life. There followed a second category of virtues, useful but less important. It included: temperance, prudence, industry, chastity, generosity, kindness, cheerfulness, courtesy,

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[72]Ibid. 5(June 1914):163-64; ibid. 7(August 1916):222; ibid. 5(July 1914):189; CPG, Religion, pp. 175, 233. Gilman gave passing mention to William James as a pragmatic philosopher, indicating some familiarity with his work; but she never referred directly to James' ideas. CPG, Religion, p. 156.

self-control, hospitality, modesty, and gratitude. Then came a third category of conditional virtues, useful when needed; they included thrift, punctuality, and perseverance. A fourth category consisted of questionable virtues, qualities necessary up to a point but detrimental if pressed too far. Here Gilman listed faith and obedience, remarking that these questionable virtues ranked as essential virtues in religious ethics, being vital to the preservation of revealed religions.[73]

And what of vices on the scale of social ethics? Gilman gave top priority to a false belief in the virtue of pain and suffering. This "pain philosophy"--the idea that hardship was "good" because it developed character--prevailed in religious ethics, receiving Biblical sanction from the scripture, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." Nothing could be more false, said Gilman. There existed no virtue in suffering. Pain must sometimes be born for a greater good, but that did not make the pain good. Pain functioned as a good only by warning of trouble. Gilman judged the pain philosophy harmful to society in three ways: it encouraged fatalism, a debilitating state of mind; it deterred social service, for under the impression that obstacles aided progress, people had little incentive to remove them;

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[73]Forerunner 5(June 1914):163-64.

and, finally, it discredited happiness as man's optimum state of being. Gilman considered the last as the most inhumane effect of the pain philosophy, the desire for happiness being as natural and right as the desire for food and sex. Happiness, man's most human state, was a quality to be sought in full accord with natural law. The unnatural results of the pain philosophy could most clearly be seen when one felt guilt in being happy.[74]

Gilman ranked other vices in relation to their counterparts on the scale of social ethics. Among the most detrimental qualities was hate--expressed both directly through cruelty and indirectly through the withholding of social service. Then followed falsehood, injustice, cowardice, and pessimism. Next appeared minor vices, and so on down the scale.[75]

Reflecting on the laws of ethics and the logic involved in following them, Gilman mused, "If ethics is as simple a science as here stated, it seems remarkable indeed that our behavior is so blindly evil." Why should that be? It was a natural social instinct, she said, "to hunger and thirst

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[74]CPG, Religion, pp. 68-69, 158; CPG, "Christianity and Humanity," p. 9, Folder 182, CPG Collection.

[75]CPG, Religion, p. 153; Forerunner 5(September 1914):272.

after righteousness"--righteousness being "the best way for humanity to live." What then hindered society's advance toward a rational, workable system of ethics based on natural law? Gilman explained that ethical values could only be discerned by free, strong minds capable of appreciating society's organic nature. Such minds could not prevail as long as society maintained that "perverted relationship of the sexes," the subjugation of women. She explained:

> The dependent position of women keeps down the growth of independent thought. No servant class can develop freely. At the same time man's position of mastery keeps strong in him ancient habits of irresponsible dominance. Neither attitude is favorable to progress in thought and without progress in thought we can make none in ethics.[76]

The subjection of women to the service of men adversely affected the ethical sensitivities of both sexes. Man, believing that he must be master of woman, suffered "universal self-indulgence from being too much served." Being the object of submission, even if by only one woman, man became vulnerable to all the vices of a master class: selfishness, pride, laziness, cruelty, and sensuality. Thus, Gilman took issue with Saint Paul's exhortation "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord"; for being "as the Lord" had done little for man's character. Indeed,

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[76] Forerunner 5(July 1914):187, 191-92.

she said, "This cheerful putting himself into the place of God in regard to the woman he married" was as good example as any of the false ethical notions arising from the subjection of women. As a matter of fact, Gilman continued, there was not anything in man's behavior to warrant the assumption that he was more Godlike than woman. But, "he has assumed it, for thousands . . . of years; and that one piece of incredible injustice is enough to unbalance our powers of ethical perception."[77]

Woman's ethical sense showed even greater limitation than man's, since, according to Gilman, the position of a subordinate tended to develop "general feebleness of character." Virtues associated with womanhood fell within the lower categories of the ethical scale: minor virtues such as temperance, chastity, modesty, kindness, industry, and thrift--and questionable virtues such as faith, obedience, devotion, meekness, patience, and loyalty. Vices associated with womanhood were of the most despicable kind: deceitfulness, lying, greed, self-centeredness, and an utter lack of any sense of honor. All the womanly attributes, virtues and vices alike, reflected the responses of a servant class.

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[77]Ibid., pp. 191-92; ibid. (September 1914):244.

They stemmed, Gilman said, from woman's position as one who must serve and please man for her livelihood.[78]

Gilman advanced the thesis that only those in the position of power could express the essential virtues, those qualities highest on the scale of social ethics: love, truth, courage, justice, and honor. Power was predicated on freedom; consequently, the servile woman had little chance to develop these virtues. And worse, society did not expect them of her. Gilman amplified her point by analyzing woman's relation to each of the essential virtues.

Woman's relation to the virtue of love was the most ambiguous. Ostensibly, she excelled in this area; but in reality, she failed to grasp the wide implications of love and thus distorted it. Love originated with woman-service to the child. Ideally, as primitive woman became more human, the focus of mother-love would have grown beyond personal dimensions. Gilman argued that human love was "extra-domestic," embracing neighbor and even stranger. Both Christianity and social evolution called for this wide-ranging love. But the "home-bound" woman, "still expressing her love for family in direct personal service, misses all

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[78]Ibid.; ibid. (July 1914):188; CPG Religion, p. 134.

that." According to Gilman, "The woman of today, doing only her family duty, leaves undone all the duties of city, state, and nation." Her limited expression of love could at best be called "unselfishness, that colorless negative name for the great social virtue of mutual love."[79]

As to truth, this virtue related directly to power and freedom. Gilman illustrated succinctly: "The slave lies--and the courier; the king does not lie--he does not need to." She then amplified:

> The most truthful nations are the most powerful. The most truthful class is the most powerful. The more truthful sex is the more powerful. Weakness, helplessness, ignorance, dependence, these breed falsehood and evasion.

Was it any wonder, she asked, that women were not even expected to be truthful?[80]

Justice was a virtue found only among equals. Gilman claimed that to apprehend justice at all, "the mind must first perceive the equal, and then resent the unequal." Men had demanded justice throughout history, not always receiving it. But women were never even candidates for justice because they lacked equality with the ruling sex.

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[79]CPG, The Home (1903; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), pp. 165-67; Forerunner 5(July 1914):190; ibid. (June 1914):164.

[80]CPG, Home, p. 168.

Domesticity impaired woman's sense of justice since, according to Gilman, neither freedom nor equality existed in the home: "There is personal ownership throughout; the dominant father, the more or less submissive mother, the utterly dependent child." Other virtues might exist in the home--love, forgiveness, kindness--but justice was not possible because family subordinates had no court of appeal.[81]

Courage developed along two main lines, said Gilman: "by exposure to danger and by increase of strength." Protected and sheltered in the home, women rarely experienced either. Timidity was expected of women, and even desired, since boldness threatened insubordination. In fact, without a trace of shame, women confessed cowardice because it attested to their femininity.[82]

As to honor, "that delicate . . . instinctive ethical sense," none was required of women except in regard to chastity. Society expected nothing more of her "home-bred sense of honor." Indeed, femininity connoted dishonorable acts, such as: breaking one's word, breaking appointments, gossiping, invading others' privacy, and slipping in front

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[81]Ibid., pp. 170-73.

[82]Ibid., pp. 168-69.

of others in a line. Gilman alleged that these acts were "frequently done by women with a high standard of chastity; but no other sense of honour whatever."[83]

Society had long felt the brunt of women's limited sense of ethics. But the problem had been "glossed over" by inordinate attention given through the centuries to their singular virtue, chastity. Gilman judged women's predominance in upholding chastity the reason for their being called "the more moral sex" by nineteenth century Victorians. Purity of soul became the one area of female superiority in advanced androcentric civilization. According to Gilman: "We were not restricted nor interfered with here. There was room at the top, and in the straight and narrow path we were free to climb." But she saw only irony in Victorian adulation of the female soul:

> Do you imagine that our wise God has so illjudged creation as to put into a distorted body and a weak, abnormal brain a great pure perfect soul? Even we know better . . . . If we were really "angels" we would have regenerated the world.[84]

Instead, women had been "content to make footstools of their souls for the men [they] loved." Gilman described the results:

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[83]Ibid., pp. 182-83.

[84]Forerunner 5(August 1914):216; CPG, "The Real Woman," pp. 27-28, Folder 165-2, CPG Collection.

> The [subordinate] woman's conscience runs narrow and deep: she is loyal to her husband even when it means treason to her children, and devoted to her children with complete indifference to the children of the world. She does not yet recognize that her loyalty is due first to the human race, then to the child of her body, and then to her husband.

In truth, she said, women to date possessed only a "female soul"; "the human soul was too large to be confined within four walls."[85]

Gilman maintained that although neither male ethics nor female ethics had reached the level of human ethics, the former proved superior to the latter. Men, being the dominant sex, were free to uphold the virtues essential to human society. Not always choosing to express love, truth, justice, courage, and honor--men nevertheless had greater option to do so than women. Hence, the essential human virtues were thought of as masculine virtues. Gilman called the double code of ethics for members of the same race an absurdity which flaunted natural law and retarded progress. A system of social ethics based on natural law was predicated on sexual equality. Only when women ceased to be subordinate could society advance to a human system of ethics.

Having expounded her ideas concerning theology, worship, and ethics--what form did Gilman propose for a rational

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[85]CPG, Religion, p. 55.

religion? She claimed allegiance to no religious organization saying, "I belong to none; they all belong to me." She explained that,

> The psychology of a highly organized, long-established religion tends to encourage and maintain minds fitted to accept that religion; and as every such religion dates back to a much earlier period of mental power, this tends to check social progress.

Gilman believed that religion must be based on natural law and that the essence of natural law was evolution--that is, growth and change. Therefore, the foundation of a valid religion rested upon its commitment to the evolutionary nature of truth. Truth must be perceived as "something growing and continually sought." In light of this view, she proposed no form for the new rational religion she advocated. To keep pace with the evolutionary process of the universe, religion must be free of confining forms. But while rejecting an organized form for rational religion, she gave considerable attention to identifying it with Christianity, whose core of precepts agreed, she felt, with natural law.[86]

Gilman judged the teachings of Christ to be the epitome of rational religion because they emanated from the basic truth of nature: the organic unity of human life. Jesus,

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[86]Newsclipping, Chicago Times Herald, n.d., Folder 266-2, CPG Collection; CPG, Religion, pp. 175, 193.

recognizing that man was by nature a collective creature living in social relation, proclaimed as his central message the oneness of humanity: "For ye are all members of one body and members of one another"; and again, "No man liveth unto himself or dieth unto himself." Further, Jesus attested to the unity of man and God. He taught that God--the spirit of love--was in man, working through him for the collective good of humanity. Since God and man were one, loving God meant loving man. This idea seemed clear to Gilman in Jesus' statement, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ye have done it unto me."[87]

Jesus derived an ethic of love from the truth of mankind's unity. According to Gilman, he recognized love to be more than a virtue; he viewed it as the essential condition of life. Christian ethics, therefore, evolved as simply an amplification of love. The Christian attitude, as Gilman described it, was "to love and serve, to be patient, gentle, forgiving." And, she added, "the revelation of Jesus was that all this love must cease to be merely personal, confined to one's own family; [it] must take in--Humanity."[88]

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[87]Forerunner 3(April 1912):117; ibid. 7(May 1916):134.

[88]Ibid. 7(May 1916):134-35.

Gilman considered Christ's doctrine of unity and his ethic of love as the distinctive truths of Christianity. She also deemed these principles scientific, in that their validity and value could be proved. The doctrine of unity was in accordance with social evolution, that is, the progress of mankind from individual to social relations; the ethic of love improved social relations, enabling them to grow, and thus agreed with natural law. Gilman concluded that Christ's religion, or "true Christianity," was the natural expression of humanity.[89]

Unfortunately, the "race-mind" was not sufficiently developed to grasp Christ's principles. "To love one's neighbor as thyself means also to love the _social_ unity," Gilman said; but "because we persist in trying to interpret humanity in terms of the _individual_," the social nature of humanity proved elusive. She suggested that since mankind's unity was a truth "so large, so new, so great" that it was difficult to see, one must be "born again" to see it. Christian conversion meant to her a change from self-interest to social interest. Man's fate did not involve a cosmic conflict between deity and devil but rather an internal choice of consciousness. Becoming Christian meant to

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[89] CPG, "Christianity," pp. 1, 3; CPG, _Human Work_, p. 76.

"outgrow self and become more and more conscious of our own large life--the social." Gilman asserted that in this widened consciousness lay immortality; for Jesus said, "Whoso seeketh his life shall lose it, and whoso loseth his life for my sake shall find it."[90]

Jesus' claim that "we are all members of one body" included women. He regarded them as human beings, Gilman said; thus, Christianity became the first religion to acknowledge that women had souls worth saving. Women eagerly accepted and supported Christianity. And no wonder; in addition to its affirmation of women as persons, its fulfillment called for the essentially female attributes of love and service. Yet women did not compose "the Church." Patriarchal traditions confounded Jesus' feminism, and Christian leadership became a male province. The Christian religion, like all its androcentric predecessors, "was for man to preach and woman to practice." Devout and pious, Christian women nevertheless exerted no influence on church policy or creed.[91]

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[90]CPG, "Christianity," pp. 3, 7; Forerunner 7(April 1916):118; CPG, "Work and Ethics," p. 1, Folder 16, CPG Collection.

[91]CPG, "The Way Up," p. 9, Folder 166, CPG Collection; CPG, Home, p. 214.

According to Gilman, the absence of a feminine point of view proved disasterous to Christianity. Neither Christ's theory of the unity of life not his advocacy of love as a method of action survived the masculine influence dominating it for two thousand years. The male tendencies of desire, combat, and pride perverted Christianity from a religion serving humanity through love to a means of personal aggrandizement through salvation. Ignoring Christ's life, and thus his teachings, masculine theology focused upon his death. It formulated an "abysmal Sacrifice Theory" of an "omnipotent Diety, whose world had all gone wrong, and who could think of no better way of saving it from his own vengeance than by sacrificing His own Son to Himself." Under this theory one had only to believe in Jesus to be saved; and the "belief was in Jesus as an article of faith, not in his teachings as a way of life."[92]

Gilman alleged that the attempt to profit by Jesus' suffering and death, instead of doing as he taught, had made of Christianity "a sort of eternal selfishness." What could be more exploitive than trying to get to heaven on Jesus' virtues, all the while ignoring the cultivation of one's own. She insisted that people were in this world

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[92] Forerunner 6(February 1915):34; ibid. 5(April 1914):103.

to make it a better place. Using Jesus as a short cut to heaven in no way furthered that purpose.[93]

What then of Jesus? Was he the Son of God? Gilman called him "Seer . . . Teacher . . . Sent of God as all the Lifters and Servers are sent by the force that lifts the world." But was he divine? A matter of no consequence, Gilman said, quoting Jesus' own words: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord and do not the things I say?" Suffice to say, according to Gilman, that Jesus was a "Social Prophet," teaching "the Unity of Human Life and Our duty in it."[94]

Despite her affirmation of Christianity's principles, Gilman saw no need of identifying a new, rational religion with the Christian Church. Jesus taught universal principles which were espoused but not contained by Christianity. They could be apprehended through knowledge and thought. Rationality, not revelation, provided the key to understanding universal truth. One could discern Christ's truth one's self "without having to go to Christianity for it," because Christ's law was identical with natural law. Rational religion depended ultimately upon the use of one's intellect.[95]

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[93]Ibid. 5(April 1914):103.

[94]Ibid. 7(April 1916):118-19.

[95]Ibid., p. 119.

Gilman perceived rational religion not as a given religion with an established creed but as "Religion" itself--a state of mind encompassing all of life. It involved correlating percepts into a value system which agreed with the facts of life; then channeling the emotions engendered from those percepts into "Social Passion," that is, into service for mankind; and then expressing the use and value of those percepts in human conduct. In short, "Religion" involved acting out a value system based on knowledge. This process operated continually at other levels, Gilman said--as when a person "makes a religion" of business or housekeeping or any other activity. Why not follow the procedure at its highest level? Why not make a religion of life?[96]

Making a religion of life was a human venture. Hence, it required a feminine point of view to balance the previous masculinization of religion. Woman's mind, if free to be exercised, could "reach the thought of God" because she shared with God a life-giving orientation to the world. The female gender traits of love and service--bred into woman from eons of maternal functioning--were, according to Gilman, "wholly in consonance" with God's natural law of

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[96]Ibid. 5(December 1914):330.

growth. Gilman predicted that when woman "boldly brings to bear" on religion this life-based view, "we may look for large results" in the development of rational religion. "As the thought of God slowly unfolds in the mind of woman," she will apprehend God "as a power promoting endless growth . . . [a] power engaged in improving the world, with ourselves as conscious helpers in the process."[97]

Gilman conceded the present difficulty of envisioning feminine contributions to a rational religion; a subject class was not a thinking class. But as women reclaimed their intellectual birthright, and thus their humanity, their positive influence on religion would become possible. Gilman reiterated her description of the normal, human woman--"She Who Is to Come"--as possessing:

> A mind where Reason ruleth over Duty,
> And Justice reigns with Love;
> A self-poised, royal soul, brave, wise, and tender,
> No longer blind and dumb;

Women could make this prophecy a reality by recognizing themselves "not as the poor second thought created for 'Adams's express company,' but as the main line of evolution," their purpose being "not sex service nor house service, but world service--the carrying on and improvement of the human race."[98]

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[97]CPG, Religion, pp. 51, 247.

[98]CPG, In This Our World (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1898), p. 146; CPG, Religion, pp. 55-56.

Gilman reassured that the feminization of religion would not obliterate, only modify, man's influence. The balance thus achieved would result in a humanized religion. She posited this co-sexual religion as God's intent, quoting the first of Genesis' two creation accounts: "Male and female created he them, and He gave them dominion over the earth, to rule over it."[99]

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[99]CPG, Religion, p. 115; Forerunner 5(April 1914):107.

CHAPTER IX

"SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

The social imperative of human life marked the culminating theme of Gilman's humanist philosophy. She believed that to be fully human, one's physical, intellectual, and spiritual powers must be exercised within a social context. "It is only in social relation that we are human," she explained. "Taken separately and physically, we are all animals, genus homo; taken socially and psychically, we are, in varying degrees human." True, people were individuals; but collectively they were more than an aggregate of separate persons. According to Gilman, "We together constitute another 'I' which is Human Life." By participating in "that common, mutual, social life" through the exchange of emotions, ideas, goods, and services, individuals increasingly transcended their egoism and acquired a sense of mankinds' unity. Gilman defined this awareness "that another's life is part of one's own" as "social consciousness."[1]

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[1]CPG, Human Work (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1904), p. 121; CPG, Man-Made World (1911; reprint ed., New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), p. 17.

A focus upon social consciousness characterized Gilman's humanist approach to feminism. She defined the purpose of feminism in these terms:

> Feminism in its largest sense consists in the development of human qualities and functioning among women; in their entering upon social relationships instead of remaining, as has been most universally the case, restricted to sexual and domestic relations.

If in truth human life were relational, then both the development and the expression of woman's physical, intellectual, and spiritual powers must transpire within community. To be human, women must share in the totality of humanity's common life. The mark of "a full human being," Gilman said, was "a full, true, conscious social relation" that encompassed family, friends, city, nation, and world. To help women widen their social consciousness to these limits, she set forth a theory of "organic social relation" and then applied its principles to the position of women in marriage, motherhood, and public life.[2]

Gilman defined "organic society" as a collective unit of functionally interrelated individuals, its whole being greater than its parts. Organic society represented humanity's "social body." Members of the social body were organically

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[2] CPG, "Feminism," p. 1, Folder 175, CPG Collection; CPG, Human Work, p. 388.

related in the sense that their physical organization functioned similarly to that of living things. Gilman described her concept of organic social relation by comparing the social body to the physical body. Both were life-forms that involved organization, specialization, production, and distribution.[3]

The evolution of each of these two life-forms commenced with the process of organization. In the case of the physical body, individual cells combined to form organs (such as heart, liver, and eye); the organs than grouped to form organisms (such as digestive and circulatory systems); in the fourth and final power of the cell the organisms united to form an organization, the body. An organic whole, the body existed by virtue of its constituent parts functioning in specialized service to produce and distribute those things necessary to the body's life. Each part was distinct, yet interdependent. The heart worked not for itself but for the welfare of the body; and in so doing, it too thrived. In an organic relationship the well-being of each part stemmed from serving the whole.[4]

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[3]CPG, Human Work, p. 87.

[4]Ibid.

The social body developed through the same process of organization. The force motivating each stage of evolvement was economic in nature: the search for nutritive advantage. When primitive individuals (comparable to body cells in Gilman's analogy) found it advantageous to combine in hunting groups, a preliminary form of social life began; these early unions were episodic and transitory. Then, with the advent of cattle-herding man's food supply became more reliable, making possible a higher group form, the family or clan. Although more cohesive and permanent than hunting bands, these cattle-fed groups led a nomadic existence that was not conducive to extra-tribal associations. The agriculture revolution made possible the fourth and final stage of social organization, a collective society. According to Gilman, "The hour came when corn was planted and eaten; and then our human life was indeed established."[5]

Man's advance to an agricultural economy created two situations necessary to organic society: physical proximity and surplus food. The farmer produced food on far less land than either the hunter or herdsman. This fact allowed for a permanent "nearness of people"; acres instead of miles formed the nutritive base, making possible the extension of

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[5] Ibid.

social relations. The farmer produced much more food than his predecessors and in less time. Resultant surpluses in food and time meant an accumulation of energy beyond that "required by each man for each day's living."[6]

Release of energy for activities beyond physical survival created the ultimate condition essential to organic society: freedom to specialize in work of one's choice. The development of human proficiency in separate tasks gave rise to industry, commerce, government, education, art, science--all those collective activities which constitute human life. Implicit in this arrangement was an increasing interdependence, each specialist needing the services of others in order to do his own work. Thus, through the division of labor, society became a collective whole, an organic life-form sustained by the productive functions of its specialized constituents and in turn distributing to them stimuli and nourishment necessary for their existence.[7]

Just as an individual cell or organ atrophied apart from the body, so did an individual or family suffer apart from functional relation to society. Gilman contended that

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[6]Ibid., pp. 87, 209.

[7]Ibid., pp. 209, 227.

activities performed only for one's self or one's kin were not distinctively human. All human abilities, such as language and industry, and all human feelings, such as love and justice, were collective; they required interrelatedness. There could be no such thing as a solitary human creature. The term was self-contradictory. Permanently cut off from society, a person "may continue to live as an animal, but is in process of decay as a human being."[8]

The goal of social evolution, therefore, was the integration of all individuals into organic relation through specialized service. This involved no surrender of personal advantage, Gilman insisted. Rather, it led to one's best advancement, for a common life made possible greater security and higher development than did a separate existence. She discussed two specific advantages of organic relation: a "common sensorium" and an arena for communication.[9]

"Common sensorium" meant the shared feelings of those engaged in common endeavors. The whole being greater than its parts, the effect of a common sensorium was to extend an individual's sensitivities beyond his personal capacity.

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[8]Ibid., pp. 113-14, 128-29.

[9]CPG, "A Study in Ethics," p. 220, Folder 230-3, CPG Collection.

For instance, gratifying one's own needs offered limited pleasure, personal satiety being soon reached; self-gratification, while important, still left one's human needs unsatisfied. On the other hand, fulfilling the needs of others multiplied one's own pleasure many-fold, bringing human satisfaction. Just so with pain (for the common sensorium included all sensations). Gilman said: "To be hungry one's self is one thing--to feel a famine is another. People with the most social consciousness suffered most, so long as social processes were unhealthy." But the feeling of common pain moved people to seek remedies and restore the common good. In turn, by improving conditions they obtained "the larger joy" found always in wider social consciousness. The advantage of a common sensorium, Gilman concluded, was the extension of one's life beyond personal limits. It was in this sense that one became "immortal," the common sensorium being in effect the "social soul" of the social body.[10]

Organic relation provided a second advantage, an arena of communication vital to mental health. The human brain, said Gilman, "cannot perform its functions alone." Communication was a person's life-line to sanity:

> The human brain, for health and usefulness, for its normal life, requires a number of human beings with

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[10] CPG, Human Work, pp. 125, 130-31, 144-45.

> whom to feel, think and act . . . . Set a man in absolute solitude and his brain is affected at once . . . . In proportion to the completeness and duration of the isolation the brain is injured and ultimately ruined . . . . Any human creature who lives alone is injuriously affected in brain action.

Gilman did not mean that periodic solitude harmed the brain. In fact, such withdrawal was necessary for the brain's refreshment and productivity. The point was that consistent contact must be maintained with other brains. Even if a person did his work alone, the product of his labor was meant for others and must reach them if he were to be fulfilled. The poet, scholar, discoverer, and inventor might labor in solitude, but they all worked for humanity. Gilman asserted that they were motivated:

> by a quenchless impulse to transmit their thought to . . . others, to pour out into the common stock the product of their brains. They did this because they must . . . . It is the compelling functional necessity of the brain to discharge into other brains, as well as to seek from them its vast and varied stimulus.[11]

The human compulsion to communicate was not limited to "the great-brained men who thought for the world." Gilman pointed to more commonplace instances of the same impulse:

> the difficulty of "keeping a secret," i.e., of voluntarily retaining stimulus; the necessity of

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[11] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

> "relieving one's mind" . . . the value of the confessional; and, commonest of all, the vivid interest of each human brain in the affairs of others . . . . The most ordinary woman, gossiping with her neighbours, manifests this social necessity for contact and exchange, however low.

Organic society provided an arena of communication in which all human minds--great or small--could establish contact. Here they could "strengthen and stimulate each other, relieve emotion, exchange ideas, [and] offset necessary isolation." The more human a person, the more he valued and sought the communication provided by organic society.[12]

Gilman warned that despite the advantages of organic relation, the "Ego concept" (that is, individualism) was difficult to overcome. She observed that, "The reversionary tendency is strong in us all, the easy backsliding to the physical freedom and independence of the hunter and fisher." Such impulses were understandable, for the supplying of needs by one's own efforts was "a delight to almost all of us." But the tempting "call of the wild" to permanent isolation should be recognized as a siren's call to retreat from humanness. The ego concept was both false and misleading. Man was not a "separate creature." His fulfillment

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[12]Ibid., pp. 93-94; CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 138, Folder 228, CPG Collection.

came through a relational life, functioning as a specialized part of the organic whole.[13]

Granted the desirability and the necessity of organic social relation, what did this involve? What did it mean to be a functioning part of the social body? No mystery existed, said Gilman. The requirements for social life paralleled those of the physical body: nourishment, rest, and exercise. She described each in turn.

Gilman defined social nourishment as "whatever we need that lower animals do not need." The desire to know things, to see people, to travel, and to experience beauty revealed forms of social hunger. Social nourishment came through contact with the world's social products: art, music, literature, education, and means of travel. Each member of society should have free access to these "human supplies," Gilman said; he would then "absorb his preferred nourishment as unerringly as do the cells of the body from the whirling profusion offered by the blood."[14]

Social rest was required by a person in proportion to his humanness: the more specialized and intense a person's involvement in society, the greater his need to "rest from

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[13]CPG, _Human Work_, pp. 103, 147.

[14]Ibid., pp. 108-9.

being social." To "vacation" meant changing pace as a means of renewal. Rest took as many forms as vocations. For the scholar, it might mean physical exercise that required no thinking and for the laborer, mental activity that demanded no physical exertion. In any case, social rest involved temporarily "breaking connections" from the social body in order to return with renewed vigor.[15]

Gilman defined social exercise as "the use of our best and highest faculties to the largest end." In short, this meant doing the work one liked best for the good of society. Referring to social exercise as "life's first law," she said, "Our very life, to say nothing of our improvement rests on our becoming properly related to each other in . . . specialized service." Herein lay the primal duty of a human being: "To assume right functional relation to Society, to one another. Not charity, not philanthropy, not benevolence, not self-immolation or self-sacrifice or _self-anything_; but simply to find and hold our proper place in the Work in which and by which we all live." But social exercise was more than duty. It was the key to happiness. To function according to one's talents in mutual service constituted "an end in itself, a condition of human existence, and the

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[15]Ibid., p. 109.

highest joy." This conviction represented the essence of Gilman's life-view. She capsulized her value system in the following statement: "To find your right place, to do your right work, here is the basis of all virtue, joy, and growth."[16]

Unfortunately, Gilman said, false concepts about work had undermined its true value. The long evolution of labor gave rise to misconceptions ranging from a scorn of work to an acceptance of work for the wrong reasons. Contempt for labor began when women, the first workers, were subjugated by men; from this situation developed the idea that work was done by an inferior class. The evolution of labor reached a second stage when men enslaved other men, who then labored under duress; thereafter work was associated with compulsion. With the development of serfdom there arose what Gilman called the "Pay concept," meaning that one worked to gain reward or to avoid punishment. The more recent stage of wage or contract labor brought with it the "Want concept," the idea that one worked in order to buy things he wanted. Undergirding all these misconceptions loomed the Hebrew idea that work was a curse. (Gilman noted that, work being the distinctive function of humanity, one might "as well call swimming a curse to the fish; flying to the

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[16]Ibid., pp. 110, 182, 368-69, 378.

bird--as working to man!") Nor did religion improve things with the Protestant work ethic, which Gilman said valued labor for its exertion rather than its achievement; she called this the "Empty Work Ethic."[17]

Despite this long history of misconceptions, Gilman saw hope for increased understanding of the value of work. She believed that through the specialization required by industrialism, society was reaching "the last step" in the evolution of labor: "mankind working for mankind." In this highest stage--the ultimate expression of social consciousness--persons worked not as inferiors, not under duress, not for return, but for the sheer pleasure of expressing energy productively. People were beginning to learn, she said, that greater pleasure comes from doing than from getting. She emphasized that this fact accorded with natural law: "The receiving capacity of our nervous system is soon exhausted, but the discharging capacity has no limit but that of natural periods of rest. The pleasure in expression increases with use, the pleasure in impression decreases with use." Defining work as "fulfillment of function," she declared that herein was the valid incentive

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[17]CPG, _Human Work_, pp. 63-65; CPG, "The Labor Movement," p. 12, Folder 268, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 6(October 1915):272.

to work: happiness derived from fulfillment of function. The true motivation for work came from within; it was a distinctly human impulse.[18]

Gilman based her optimism that society had begun to demonstrate a new level of social consciousness in regard to work on the following observation:

> We have great names and many to prove the true human spirit, such as Agassiz who "had not time to make money" because of his joyous devotion to science; Stradivarious, delighting in his master violins; Ruskin, neither poor nor highly sexed, yet working heartily for art and beauty; and besides these great names there are little ones past counting, who choose some ill-paid work . . . because they care more for the process than the pay . . . . Social servants in all fields show the irresistable urge, the joy and pride, of normal human work.

She took care to note, however, that not all labor conduced joy--only "normal human work," which she defined as "that special social function for which the individual is specially fitted." The condition of enjoying work depended upon the selection of tasks commensurate with one's talents. For instance, she explained, a Gladstone functioning as a postal clerk would be underusing his abilities and therefore would find the work unsatisfying; the same would hold true

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[18] CPG, Human Work, pp. 63, 213, 302-3. Gilman likened the "impulse to labor" to Thorstein Veblen's description of "the instinct of workmanship." Forerunner 4(March 1913):78.

for a Napoleon functioning as a chauffeur. On the other hand, a person with limited abilities would be unhappy in an excessively demanding position.[19]

Gilman labeled work unsuited to one's talents as "abnormal work." Such labor resulted in "a suicidal waste of energy," she said; for "it costs immense draughts of vitality to do what one does not like." The body instinctively recognized as wrong the undue expense of energy, and this in turn created negative reactions to one's tasks. Gilman believed that abnormal work was all too common. Even in America where work had been most honored, most people defined it as "what you don't like to do." Individuals like Louis Agassiz and John Ruskin who chose work suited to their talents and specialized in it provided encouraging evidence that "normal human work" was on the increase. But the fact remained that too few people chose tasks in keeping with their abilities. In fact, she said, "so hampered is our choice of work . . . that we look with honest envy at the man who does love his work and can do the work he loves, like Agassiz."[20]

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[19]CPG, His Religion and Hers (New York and London: Century Co., 1923), p. 268; CPG, Human Work, pp. 110, 220.

[20]CPG, Human Work, pp. 221, 224.

What hampered society in making right choices of work? In an industrial economy which increased opportunities for specialization, what interfered with a person's working in the area of his special talents? In Gilman's view, two conditions were at fault: economic individualism and the economic dependence of women. The two problems were related, redress of the latter necessarily following that of the former. Thus, she first gave attention to correcting errors within the economic system; she then addressed women's rightful place within that system. Her motivation in both areas was to hasten the goal of social evolution: the integration of all persons as functioning parts of organic society.

Gilman supported the basic elements of capitalism: the right to own property, the right to work, and the right to earn a profit. But she took issue with the individualistic context within which these rights had been interpreted. She alleged that during the Gilded Age the "ego concept" of capitalism had turned America's burgeoning industrial order into the "anarchy of the hunting ground." The nation's economic process took the form of a combat marked by fierce competition as each person struggled to make profits at the expense of others. The government acted as referee, "making

laws to restrain predatory instincts . . . [and] insuring to some 'opportunities.'" Individualistic capitalism resulted in a polarization of wealth and poverty. Under these circumstances the motivation to work focused upon economic survival rather than social service.[21]

In Gilman's view, the crucial question facing America in the early twentieth century involved the political and economic aspects of social consciousness: "Is it right for the government to extend its economic functions?" Should the government assume an active role in regulating the economy for the benefit of all? Gilman emphatically believed so. Reinterpreting capitalism within a social context, she argued that the government must balance property rights with human rights. Both categories of rights were important; but when not in proper balance, private ownership infringed upon the public good.[22]

Defining a "right" as "an essential condition," Gilman asserted that property and human rights alike were socially determined by common agreement on what constituted "essential conditions." The determination of rights, therefore, was subject to adjustment as society changed. For instance,

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[21]CPG, "Study in Ethics," p. 225.

[22]Ibid.

men once owned slaves as a property right; but as society grew in social consciousness, it withdrew this property right and extended the human right of freedom. Parental ownership of children previously had undergone a similar change. Throughout history, Gilman said, the reevaluation of rights had been a slow yet consistent procedure, adequate for pre-industrial society. But nineteenth century industrialism had quickened the pace of social evolution from individual existence to organic relation, thereby making mandatory drastic adjustments in property and human rights.[23]

What constituted the essential conditions of ownership and human needs in an industrialized society? This was the point in question, Gilman claimed. Individualist interpretations of capitalism assumed that ownership inhered in the production of goods, meaning "All that a man produced is his own, and he has a right to consume it all himself, or destroy it--in any case to withhold it from those who want it till they give him as much as he can get for it." This principle of ownership subsumed that men worked only to satisfy their wants and that the satisfaction of desires comprised life's chief purpose. In effect, production was

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[23]CPG, Human Work, pp. 306-7, 333.

a means to consumption, not an end in itself. This idea minimized society's responsibility for meeting human needs; if a person needed something badly enough (including necessities such as food and shelter) he could work to obtain it.[24]

Gilman contended that the claim to ownership of production was appropriate only in situations of individual subsistence. It became anachronistic to the degree that people lived collectively and injurious in an industrialized society of highly interdependent individuals. In her view, the vast productivity of American industry had been perverted from social wealth benefiting all (its true course) to private wealth benefiting the few. She attributed this perversion to "the most primitive members of Society, those still most actuated by pre-social instincts . . . [those] taking advantage of the immense social productivity, and claiming for themselves the social wealth." But she refused to condemn these individuals, claiming, "It is our common concept of ownership that is to blame, not [Andrew] Carnegie and [John D.] Rockefeller." The true culprit in economic injustice, she said, was the fallacy that "a man owns what he produces . . . but . . . has no right whatever to the necessities in life."[25]

[24]Ibid., p. 312.

[25]Ibid., pp. 329, 332.

Rejecting an individualistic concept of rights, Gilman set forth her socialistic (that is, society-centered as opposed to ego-centered) interpretation of what constituted essential conditions of ownership and human needs in an industrialized society. Maintaining that in organic society legitimate ownership inhered in goods one consumed in order to produce, not in the goods one produced, she reasoned as follows: Society required of its constituents the performance of special functions needed for the well-being of the social body. That performance required the use of certain physical, mechanical, and intellectual supplies. Therefore, society must guarantee to each of its members the possession of those supplies necessary for him to do his work. Gilman called this the "social right of property." It meant that an individual had a claim of ownership to those things necessary for him best to serve society. She elaborated:

> The carpenter has a right to his tools, and the musician to his instrument, both to their special education, and they and all men to the food, shelter, clothing, and other things _necessary to their best social service_.
>
> Not a return equivalent to . . . but a supply _necessary_ to, in advance.[26]

This principle of ownership held consumption to be a means of production, not an end. In Gilman's view, this

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[26]Ibid., pp. 306-7.

idea accorded with the natural law of energy transmission whereby impression was of value as it led to expression. In effect, one must receive before he could produce. She explained: "Man works _not_ for what he is to get--but because of what he has already had. Surplus energy prompts him to labor--to produce." Inadequate supplies drained his strength until he could only consume.[27]

Gilman concluded that the essential conditions of an organic, industrialized society were: property rights to functional necessities (including food, shelter, clothing, tools, and training) sufficient to ensure the human right to work along lines suited to one's talents. The absence of such property rights hampered the choice of "normal human work," deterring both individual fulfillment and social progress. Society, therefore, must recognize the necessity of distributing to its members the supplies required for their specialized functions. Further, it must recognize this "social distribution" as a natural duty. According to Gilman, "We are not born into a world which has the right to say to us 'work or you shall not live.' It is the world's duty to keep us alive that we may work."[28]

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[27]CPG, _Human Work_, p. 307; CPG, "Labor Movement," p. 13.

[28]CPG, "Labor Movement," p. 14.

Only an economic philosophy responsive to this duty would suffice for organic society. In Gilman's view, this meant socialism, which she considered the economic system most compatible with organic society. She reasoned that as society had become the human unit, socialism was a natural evolvement of its economic order. Socialism, in fact, was the condition of social consciousness. She therefore called for the socialization of America's economic system as a means to attaining organic social relation. Just as democracy had extended political justice within the nation, socialism would extend economic justice.[29]

Gilman described socialism as "a change in the administration of the world's economic processes from a private to a public basis." It involved the "public ownership of public things." The question was, "What things are public?" The answer seemed clear to Gilman. Public property consisted of those things which were social necessities, specifically: natural monopolies (such as land, water, coal, oil, and other natural resources) and the means of production (such as mills, factories, and shops). Unlike communism, which Gilman

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[29]CPG, "A Study in Ethics," p. 15, Folder 230, CPG Collection. Gilman summarized the logic of her economic philosophy in one statement: "I am a socialist because I am a human being." She remained a theoretician, however, choosing not to join the Socialist party.

disavowed, socialism did not abolish private property. It did, however, restrict individual ownership to articles of personal use (such as houses, clothes, and tools).[30]

A system whereby the advantage of all must include the advantage of each, socialism would provide the assurance of basic necessities so that one could be free to work in a chosen area and thus benefit the whole. The chief privilege conferred by socialism, Gilman said, would be the right to employment at a minimum wage above the poverty level. This did not mean that everyone would be paid equal wages, only a common base beyond which each could earn more according to his talent and ambition. Thus, socialism would neither destroy incentive nor reduce every worker to the same level. Rather it would provide equal opportunities and advantages so that each person could develop his distinctive talents. The goal in socialism was "to be sure of a living because you belong to a civilized society--to understand and honor your work--and choose it. To have the freedom to rise as far as you were able--but not to fall."[31]

Gilman's socialist viewpoint diametrically opposed Marxian socialism. She rejected the latter because of its

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[30]Forerunner 3(September 1912):232; ibid. 2(April 1911):114; ibid. 1(December 1909):7.

[31]CPG, "Socialism," p. 12, Folder 178-2, CPG Collection; Forerunner 1(December 1909):7-9.

divisive tenets of economic determinism, class struggle, and revolution. She explained that originally the term "socialist" referred to one interested in the study of society and that the term "socialism" had implied a humanitarian vision of the unity of mankind. (Nineteenth century French and English socialists reflected this position.) But so powerful had been Karl Marx's influence on the socialist movement that after 1848 the term "socialism" began to connote his doctrines of discord and strife. Marx saw only oppressors and oppressed in society, and he perpetuated this dualism with a theory of inevitable class antagonism. According to Gilman: "Marx named the existing system of industry Capitalism and set up in opposition--his system of Socialism and said the only step from one to the other was revolution and the destruction of capitalism." Marx labeled the oppressed, "Working class." He deified workers, in contrast to capitalists, whom he condemned. This "socialist psychology" stirred envy, hate, and revenge. And worse, Gilman added, it "turned off millions who gladly would have accepted a legitimate socialism based on sound sociology."[32]

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[32]CPG, "Socialist Psychology," pp. 1-6, Folder 178-2, CPG Collection. Gilman claimed that Russia failed in its socialist experiment because the proletarian dictatorship showed "no knowledge of the social organism or the laws of social evolution."

Obviously, Marx was no sociologist, said Gilman. His polarization of economic classes indicated that he lacked a concept of mankind's unity. Indeed, she declared, it was "ridiculous" to label workers, who comprised "almost the whole of humanity," a separate class. Marx' further error was in "seeing capitalism as the enemy of economic progress," when the "real opponent is individualism." But, regardless of Marx' influence, Gilman expressed confidence that understanding society's organic nature would dispel false economic divisions:

> With right economic concepts, there would be no division between Producer and Consumer. There would be no Leisure Class, Working Class, Capital [or] Labor. All would produce and consume. All would work and have leisure. All would share in the social capital and social order.[33]

Gilman predicted that classlessness would evolve naturally as society increasingly realized that its "advantage, personal and general, [was] in full cooperation and just distribution, not in a ceaseless struggle to get ahead of one another." No need existed for revolution. Collectivism would eventuate as a "gradual and legitimate extension of present tendencies," for "human nature is socialistic." In fact, she observed, many socialistic functions already

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[33]CPG, "Socialist Psychology," p. 3; CPG, "Study in Ethics," p. 229; CPG, Human Work, p. 356.

existed in America: public schools, libraries, highways, and postal service. These facilities were available to rich and poor alike, without regard to a person's ability to pay for them.[34]

Gilman recommended an escalation of social services through legislation. If the government could regulate building codes and moral codes, why not social justice? It seemed as logical to forbid hunger as to outlaw nakedness. It would be a natural step for the state to specify a minimum standard of health and comfort and to make the minimum compulsory. Gilman even cited the Lord's Prayer (which she described as a collectivist statement) as justification for welfare legislation. She regarded the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread" a natural, reasonable request--to which mankind had the power to respond.[35]

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[34] CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 136; Forerunner 1(December 1909):8.

[35] CPG, "Race Improvement," Independent 66(March 1909): 631; Forerunner 2(May 1911):124. Gilman called hunger a "disgrace to humanity," since "the first business of any organism is distribution of nourishment to all its parts." CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 181. She claimed that "no government which allows poverty is doing its duty." CPG, "A Study in Ethics," p. 226.

Although Gilman rejected personal political activism, she lauded others' attempts to expand the government's role in establishing social justice. She praised the Populist party for advocating public ownership of transportation and communication facilities but lamented its abandonment of this position in favor of the silver coinage issue in 1896. During the 1912 presidential campaign she commended the Progressive party platform, especially the eleventh point which advocated "social and industrial justice to wage earners, including a minimum wage." If implemented, she said, this action would make the Progressive party socialistic. She demonstrated her political pragmatism in the following observation:

> This new [Progressive] party of ours is going to be useful whether it gets anywhere or not. It is fondly announced to be "a buffer against socialism and anarchism."
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> What they call it, however . . . will not alter its real effect. To have set before the country a platform including the list of measures Colonel [Theodore] Roosevelt stands for, without calling it socialistic, is a good thing.
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> If [Roosevelt's] party can establish Social and Industrial Justice to wage-workers the Socialistic Party can take its name off and put it on the Colonel's [party].[36]

Gilman allowed that if Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive party's presidential candidate, "really

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[36] CPG, Lecture note, 1896, Folder 288, CPG Collection; Forerunner 3(September 1912):252.

promote[d] the various good works" in the 1912 platform (including the nineteenth point, female suffrage), his possible third term as president "would not be an unmixed evil." But her clear preference in the 1912 election remained the Socialist party, which she called "the only constructive one there is," the Progressives having merely borrowed from it. Gilman demonstrated a special affinity for Eugene Debs, the Socialist presidential candidate, whose belief in the brotherhood of man accorded with her own socialist position.[37]

Gilman's pragmatic commitment to furthering socialism led her to support Woodrow Wilson for reelection in the 1916 presidential election. She reasoned that of the two parties in the race, Republican and Democratic, the latter was "far closer to the spirit of our people, and to those lines of work which mean social progress." The consistent motivation in all her political endorsements was to aid the advancement of organic society.[38]

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[37] Forerunner 3(September 1912):252; ibid. 3(December 1912):317; CPG, "Labor Movement," p. 10. For an account of Debs' humanitarian socialist stance, see Ray Ginger, The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949). Gilman gave short shrift to the two major presidential contenders in the 1912 election, dismissing Republican candidate William H. Taft and Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson as representing respectively "the status quo" party and the "mere opposition" party. Forerunner 3(December 1912):317.

[38] Forerunner 7(December 1916):336.

Although Gilman claimed no allegiance to a single political party, her position should not be construed as a theorotician's disdain for involvement. To the contrary, she considered politics "the business of taking care of the world," an activity which should involve everyone. She defined politics as "the practical aspect of ethics. It deals with our common needs and meeting them through public service." This viewpoint explains her political relativism and also gives insight into the kind of political stance she assumed.[39]

Within America's political spectrum, Gilman best fits the description of a progressive. Equating "progressiveness" with "the willingness to improve," she identified with early twentieth century progressivism as a political means of establishing nature's ultimate imperative: the law of growth. She sought progress in the form of "improved people, schools, and cities," which would result in "greater health, beauty, and happiness." Her conviction that people could be changed by changing their conditions corresponded with the reform Darwinist philosophy shared by a host of progressive reformers, including: socialogist Edward A. Ross, economists Richard T. Ely and Thorstein Veblen, churchman

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[39]Ibid. 3(January 1912):8.

Walter Rauschenbusch, jurists Oliver W. Holmes and Louis Brandeis, philosophers John Dewey and William James, and journalist Lincoln Steffens.[40]

More specifically, Gilman was an urban progressive. Like those in the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, and Jane Addams, she accepted America's industrial growth and concomitant urbanization as a social good, the abuses of which only needed regulation in order to be corrected. Unlike progressives such as Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan who extolled the rural values of individualism and limited government, urban progressives advocated a strong central government designed to aid the general welfare. Gilman concurred with this position, particularly as it was stated in Theodore Roosevelt's 1910 "New Nationalism" platform, which urged strong governmental control of industry and passage of extensive social legislation. Gilman's most significant expression of urban progressivism lay in her emphasis upon organization, specialization, and rationalization in regard to modern

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[40]CPG, "Social Ethics," Folder 228, CPG Collection; CPG, "As to Disarmament," p. 7, Folder 177, CPG Collection; Woman's Journal, 23 July 1904; Eric Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern Reform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956) provides an informative account of reform Darwinists, contrasting them with their conservative counterparts, social Darwinists.

institutions. This pragmatic emphasis, prevailing throughout her work, reflected a major thrust of other urban progressives seeking to impose order and efficiency upon a rapidly industrializing society.[41]

Few progressive issues escaped Gilman's attention. Throughout the 1890's and the first two decades of the twentieth century she addressed the gamut of economic, political, and social reforms identified with progressivism. Castigating economic corruption as the chief obstacle to achieving democracy in America, she prophesied that, as a corrective, economic parties would eventually replace political parties. In the meantime, she urged economic reforms such as anti-trust action and tax-equalization measures.[42]

To rectify political corruption, Gilman endorsed progressive attempts to inaugurate civil service reform and to establish initiative, referendum, and recall. Her

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[41]For an analysis of urban progressivism, see George E. Mowry, _The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912_ (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) and Robert H. Weibe, _The Search for Order, 1877-1920_ (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

[42]CPG, Lecture note, 1896, Folder 288, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 3(January 1912):9.

greatest efforts in political reform involved female suffrage. She wrote in 1910:

> I became a full advocate of suffrage for women as soon as I was old enough to understand the value of democratic government, to see that a true democracy requires the intelligent participation of all people, and that women are people.

Convinced that female suffrage must be achieved through a federal constitutional amendment, she urged women to join the Congressional Union, a splinter suffrage group which advocated political support of Congressmen favoring a women's suffrage amendment. Gilman couched her suffrage efforts in realistic terms, warning that female voters would not "bring the millennium"; but, she added, "universal suffrage among men has not done that!"[43]

Gilman gave prolific expression to the area of progressive social reforms. Regarding working conditions, she advocated minimum wage and hours legislation, as well as child labor laws. Concerned with the general public interest, she supported pure food and drug legislation, conservation of natural resources, and eradication of smoke and noise pollution. To promote social progress, she urged

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[43]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 174; Forerunner 1(May 1910):24; ibid. 4(November 1913):281; ibid. 6(May 1915):120; Newsclipping, Cincinnati Enquirer, 3 November 1913, Folder 288, CPG Collection.

population control through such measures as eugenics and contraception. Believing in the right to die if life portended "unnecessary anguish," she favored euthanasia and suicide.[44]

Prescient in apprehending "future shock" as an accompaniment of industrialism, Gilman recommended community, urban, national, and world planning. "Our conditions change faster than we do," she warned. "We don't have time to adapt before they change again." Only extensive planning could overcome this problem. Gilman saw cooperation as the essential aspect of planning for the future. In keeping with her wide perspective, she envisioned world cooperation as humanity's goal and thus spoke ardently for internationalism. Four years before Woodrow Wilson suggested a League of Nations, Gilman proposed a global federation of nations with a world capital as the seat of government.[45]

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[44]CPG, Lecture note, Folder 288, CPG Collection; Woman's Journal, 1 October 1904; CPG, "The Mind Behind Us," p. 1, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection; Woman's Journal, 24 September 1904; CPG, "A Social Sunrise," p. 7, Folder 181, CPG Collection; CPG, "The New Mercy," p. 2, Folder 182-2, CPG Collection; Forerunner 7(August 1916):203; CPG, "Up to Standard," pp. 5-6, Folder 177, CPG Collection.

[45]Forerunner 5(October 1914):260. Gilman's emphasis on social planning had a wide range of influence. In 1935 a Tennessee Valley Authority supervisor asked Martha B. Bruere, a visiting research technician, "Do you know Mrs. Gilman's writings? That's what set me to doing the scientific

Negative social reforms espoused by progressives also claimed Gilman's support: issues such as prohibition and immigration restriction, especially the latter. In the 1920's she assumed a vehement nativist position after concluding that attempts to "Americanize" aliens had proved futile. Echoing the paradoxically reactionary views of progressives, she protested the "mongrelization" of America's racially pure stock, that of essentially English descent. Such reactionism from a social visionary warrants brief analysis.[46]

Although Gilman perceived mankind as a unity, she did not view all people as equally developed in humanness. She reasoned that the "promiscuous interbreeding" of superior and inferior nationalities could only impede human progress. (Gilman saw no contradiction between this assertion and her advocacy of international cooperation.) The American character, she said, exhibited the highest human trait, the desire for freedom (a trait inherited from Teutonic and

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research as a basis." Bruere subsequently wrote Gilman, "If you could see it [T.V.A.] you would get a picture of some of the things you have wanted for humanity being realized." Bruere to Gilman, 9 June 1935, Folder 117, CPG Collection.

[46]CPG, "Sunrise," p. 7; CPG, "Is America Too Hospitable?" <u>Forum</u> 70(October 1923):1988.

Scandinavian stock from which the English descended). Foreigners with lesser goals exploited America's extension of freedom, making no contribution in return. Gilman charged that by refusing to assimilate, immigrants "merely use[d] this country as a convenience--for profit or for colonizing in ghettos."[47]

With uncharacteristic rancor, Gilman complained: "Foreigners take literally the idea, 'This is a free country.' They think it's free like a free lunch." This statement made in 1925 was a far cry from the socialist position she had advanced in earlier decades. Had Gilman's economic radicalism so quickly been tamed? To an extent, yes. In fact, even her optimistic belief in progress seemed somewhat dimmed by the 1920's, her sixth decade. She wrote in 1924, "The inferiority of people makes our progress cumulatively dangerous." But upon reflection one might deduce that Gilman's reactionary nativism resulted from her impatience with those who chose not to integrate into organic society. Her frequent references to immigrants' refusal to assimilate into American life substantiates this inference.[48]

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[47] CPG to L.L. Barnard, Norwich Town, Connecticut, 26 September 1927; CPG, "Hospitable," pp. 1988-89.

[48] Newsclipping, Pasadena Morning Sun, 10 May 1925, Folder 296, CPG Collection; CPG, Note, 1924, Folder 17-2, CPG Collection.

Gilman's social economics and her progressive politics ranged over multiple issues during the four decades of her writing career, 1890 to 1930. Yet all her economic and political ideas reflected a single purpose: the elimination of economic individualism. She believed that only by dismantling the institutionalized structures of economic egoism could humanity achieve a sense of its unity, the goal of social evolution.

Although Gilman believed that economic individualism was the primary obstacle to organic society, she spent the greater part of her career directing attention to women's economic dependence as "the next largest . . . world-wide error" hampering society's organic relation. She reasoned as follows: Man's historic exploitation of woman's domestic service had rendered her dependent upon him for a livelihood. In turn, this "artificial" economic relation bound her to an androcentric home characterized by male dominance and female subservience. Centuries of confinement to this "proprietary home" deprived women of the two conditions necessary for organic societal relation: wide associations and specialized work.[49]

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[49] Forerunner 4(July 1913):192.

To illuminate the results of these deprivations, Gilman analyzed the androcentric nature of the home. She contrasted in detail the social development of men and women as they responded to their respective opportunities for association and specialization, as dictated by their different relations to the home.

In Gilman's view, "The difference between primitive man and modern man [was] far greater than the difference between primitive woman and modern woman," and this variance stemmed from the sexes' opposite relationships to the home. When primitive man first subjugated woman, he attempted to seclude her from other men and thereby established a pattern of female isolation. As the home evolved from ancient hut to modern house, the male ownership principle prevailed through varying degrees of enforced female segregation within the home. Here woman labored in domestic service for the man to whom she belonged.[50]

Conversely, man's relation to the home was marked by his universal absence from it. Gilman described this situation and its results:

> By forcibly combining the woman with the home in his mind, and forcibly compelling her to stay there in

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[50]CPG, "Is Feminism So Dreadful?" Delineator 85(August 1914):6.

> body, then . . . by taking himself out and away as completely as possible, we have turned the expanding lines of social progress away from the home and left the ultra-feminized woman to the ultra-conservatism therein.

Man followed the same pattern throughout the centuries. According to Gilman, he provided the home

> at any cost of labour, care, and ingenuity; but if he has to stay in it too much, he knows it softens and enfeebles him. So he goes out, to meet men, to work and live as far as he can; and when he wants "a real good time," he goes altogether with "the boys."

Man used the home as he needed it: "to rest in, to work from; but not to stay in."[51]

Thus, as proprietary head of the family, man enjoyed the advantages of the androcentric home he created, even while advancing beyond it. As centuries passed, he progressed from a physical creature requiring only food and sex to a human being capable of social relationships. Exercising his faculties in physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions, he grew in humanness and achieved accordingly. Civilization was a masculine achievement, Gilman said, because androcracy allowed only men the freedom to associate outside the home and to organize in groups.

Gilman emphasized that men have always associated in groups. From primitive to modern times they have combined

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[51]CPG, The Home (1903; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 29, 283-84.

in hunting, fishing, sailing, fighting, trading, manufacturing, and "occupying the world as people." Meanwhile, throughout the same long period, women were denied the first condition of human life, community of action. In the androcentric home, a "sub-division of the world," woman worked alone--an "isolated atom" separated from humanity. Her social relations seldom extended beyond the family. Although man shared in family relations, Gilman remarked that he had "<u>something else</u> outside his separate personal life: the human world wherein he lives and moves and has his being." Had men remained such separate beings as women, she added, they could never have built the world as they did.[52]

Calling the androcentric home a lineal descendent of the harem in its power to confine, Gilman alleged that it de-humanized women because "in fair prisons or foul . . . an isolated human creature is a contradiction in terms." Being human predicated a relational state, an infeasible situation for the home-bound woman. Even women's small attempts at association elicited criticism. Whether doing chores together (as in drawing well water in ancient times

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[52] <u>Forerunner</u> 7(February 1916):48; ibid. 4(October 1913):273; CPG, "A Real Woman," pp. 15-17, Folder 165-2, CPG Collection.

or in modern-day sewing circles) or simply gathering for "society" functions, they risked accusations of "gadding," "gossiping," or "idleness." It was deemed more virtuous to work at home alone and to limit recreational activities to one's family. Women had no activities corresponding to male hunting and fishing trips or sports contests. Neither did there exist a female equivalent to the convivial male club.[53]

Gilman observed that by mid-nineteenth century women of the new middle class created by industrialism experienced a unique opportunity for group associations. Supported by an affluent husband, the "lady of leisure" had time to pursue broader interests than domestic life formerly allowed. But nothing of the sort happened. Gilman lamented, "You would think [the lady] would seek some form of public usefulness in return for this immunity," instead she developed "a game for larger children . . . called society."[54]

Gilman distinguished between "true society," the "people of the world," and women's notion of "Society," an "artificial creation" which she labeled "housewifery in extension"--

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[53]CPG, "A Social Hypothesis," p. 5, Folder 181, CPG Collection; CPG, "Social, Domestic, and Human Life," p. 4, Folder 165, CPG Collection.

[54]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 33.

its "'dinners, teas, suppers [being] merely housewives' business spread wider." She elaborated:

> "Society" is marked by the mental limitations of women.
> ....
> It is the domesticated woman who dominates society. Since she is kitchen, parlor, and nursery minded--this is the nature of her conversation. All serious conversation [and] general discussion is disbarred. Triviality and boredom [prevail] instead of stimulus and exchange.

She attributed women's tendency to deal in trivia while socializing to the limited nature of their lives. They had no "common ventures" to share. The dismal pattern of their conversations was broken only occasionally by those women who "laboriously to to Current Events classes to gather data for a momentarily intelligent conversation."[55]

Gilman considered women's creation of "Society" a "pitiful by-product of their aborted position within the home." While men participated in "the real society of large human activities," women pursued superficial relations. Their "Society" was removed from life, a hollow ritual:

> Women arise, and go to call on one another. They solemnly "return" these calls. They prepare much food, and invite many people to come eat it; or some dance, music, or entertainment is made the temporary ground of union. But these people do not really meet one another. They pass whole lifetimes in going

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[55]CPG, "Have You Paid Your Board?" Independent 65(November 1908):1221; CPG, "Social Ethics," pp. 138-140.

> through the steps of these elaborate games and never become acquainted. There is a constant thirst among us for fuller and truer discourse.[56]

Gilman hailed the women's club movement of the 1880's and 1890's as an important breakthrough in providing "fuller and truer discourse" for women. A host of new organizations gave opportunity for the "common ventures" necessary for meaningful socializing. Aside from abolition groups in the pre-Civil War era and temperance groups and missionary societies formed in the 1870's, the late nineteenth century club movement represented the first occasion for American women to congregate in organized groups. By 1890 there were enough women's clubs (such as the New England Women's Club, the Chicago Fortnightly, and the San Francisco Century Club) to form the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Other women's organizations founded by the turn of the century included the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Parent-Teachers' Association, and the American Association of University Women. Gilman called the women's club movement

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[56]CPG, "Social Ethics," p. 33, CPG, Home, p. 220; CPG, Women and Economics (1898; reprint ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 307-8. Gilman observed that men were impatient with "society" because it was remote from the real world: "Men don't care for 'society' as much as women because they have real social life--the daily contact and interchange of their specialized labor." Woman's Journal, 26 November 1904.

"one of the most important sociological phenomena of the century--of all centuries--marking as it does the first timid steps toward social organization of these so long unsocialized members of our race." She placed this degree of importance on women's groups because she believed social life to be "absolutely conditioned upon organization." Without group participation in meaningful affairs, women would remain excluded from true society.[57]

The androcentric home arrested woman's participation in organic society not only by secluding her from the world but by denying her the human function of specialized labor. In the course of social evolution, industry once domestic and primitive became social and complex through man's freedom to specialize. Although his participation in productive labor was "late and reluctant," he overcame woman's early industrial superiority as the original worker because he could choose the work he liked and become proficient at it. Men divided their labor and specialized in a favored area, becoming masons, smiths, farmers, sailors, carpenters, doctors, and merchants. Interdependent in

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[57]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 164-66; Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 179-181; Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 136.

their specialties, men worked together at their tasks. They profited by human intercourse, even while earning a living, and contributed to society's well-being by providing productive, skilled labor.[58]

While men specialized in work of their choice, women enjoyed no similar freedom. Historically, women functioned at a primitive level of unspecialized domestic work. Gilman considered this an anomaly, claiming that, "Domesticity as it applies to the industrial system whereby work is done at home is the work of a stage of civilization which men have passed--and women should have too." She asserted that industrially men lived in the twentieth century and women lived in the first, or earlier, for in modern society "nine-tenths of the world's women worked in the same way as the antediluvian squaw did," the only difference being the exchange of wigwam for house. The androcentric family had limited women--even into the twentieth century--to the single occupation of domestic servant. Gilman called this an ignominious position, despite sentimental accolades to the "keeper of the home." Personal service, however dignified by affection and a sense of duty, ranked low in the scale of industrial evolution.[59]

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[58]CPG, Man-Made World, pp. 36-38; Forerunner 6(March 1915): 82; CPG, "Social, Domestic, and Human Life," p. 4.

[59]Forerunner 6(March 1915):82; Newsclipping, New York Press, 29 December 1905, Folder 288, CPG Collection; CPG,

Doing the entire work of their families, women had no chance to concentrate on work that suited them best, and the results were far-reaching. First, women retarded human progress because, "civilization's advancement depended on _social service_, that is on work done competently for more people by a steadily improving specialization. Only by devoting one's self to _one_ kind of work and perfecting it--does the world improve." Furthermore, women's lack of specialization made even their domestic service inefficient: as generalists they functioned as "untrained housekeepers" and "amateur mothers." Finally, women's confinement to low-grade, unspecialized work impeded their personal development; for to grow in humanness, one must find one's work and do it. To be happy, Gilman reminded, "you must do what you are made for."[60]

She argued that women were "made for" two things: motherhood, a female function; and specialized work, a

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"Parasitism and Civilized Vice," Samuel D. Schmalhausen and V.F. Calverton, eds., _Woman's Coming of Age_ (New York: Horace Liverright, 1931), p. 118. Gilman noted that the low industrial status of housekeeping could be more easily discerned when a man did this work; he would be called a janitor. _Woman's Journal_, 31 December 1904.

[60]CPG, "Service, Domestic and Social," p. 10, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection; CPG, "Why Women Are Unhappy," p. 64, Folder 253, CPG Collection; _Forerunner_ 7(December 1916):333.

human function. They were to be wives and mothers "and something more." But, she said, "It is thought that women are made [only] for marriage and the family. They are unhappy because this is not enough." Neither would it be for the human male. Being male or being female was not the whole of life. One must be fully human to be happy, and this involved more than gender roles; it involved a wide social consciousness born of organic social relation. Thus, Gilman diagnosed the "woman problem" as follows: home-bound women doing non-specialized work retained a primitive egoism, while the world around them--the male world--grew in social consciousness and evolved into a social body.[61]

According to Gilman, women were "in the Social Body, but [were] not part of it"; and for this reason they constituted a sub-human class. She explained: "There are many persons, living in and on our Humanity, who are not Human. One cannot be Human without working." "To work, to perform specialized service for other people is the indispensable condition of humanness." Persons who did not work (as Gilman defined work) were not only sub-human--they were parasites. Restricted to unspecialized domestic service in the egoistic environment of the family, the female fit this doubly demeaning description.[62]

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[61]CPG, "Unhappy," p. 64.

[62]Forerunner 4(March 1913):81.

Gilman argued that mankind could never realize its human potential with half the race living in a dehumanized state. Thus, the "woman Problem" was in reality a human problem. Its solution rested upon a singular imperative: Women must become part of the social body. They must literally and figuratively join the human race. This entailed venturing beyond the female sphere of domesticity into the world of human affairs, not an easy move in light of society's conviction that "Woman's place is in the home."

Gilman viewed this move not as a rejection of the home but as a disavowal of the injurious androcentric feature imposed upon the home: female servitude based on economic dependence. Committed to the value of a human home characterized by freedom, equality, and justice, she focused her feminist efforts on dissociating servitude from wifehood and on encouraging women's economic independence. By so doing, she hoped to free women for a wife's true role, that of companion; for a mother's essential task, that of educator; and for a human being's ultimate fulfillment, specialized social service.

Where to begin? "The place to lay the axe," said Gilman, "is between the status of marriage, which is physiological, psychic, and social, and the status of house service, which is purely economic." Ideally, love between

husband and wife involved human companionship not female servitude. Yet even in the modern family with its higher demands for "true marriage," the assumption persisted that being a wife meant being house-servant to one's husband.[63]

According to Gilman, this false notion derived from "that prehistoric era" when man began to appropriate for himself the domestic industry of the mother caring for her progeny. In so doing, he discounted woman's humanness and regarded her only as female, a subjugated creature useful for providing domestic and sexual services. This situation continued into the patriarchal era (the beginning of recorded history) as man "added to his profitable, servile group" as many women as possible. Later he added male servants, and this early social group was called a "family," a term originally connoting servant bonds rather than kinship.[64]

Unfortunately, said Gilman, the family in modern society maintained in modified form the ancient patriarchal structure characterized by a male head and a household of servile women. The early twentieth century American home was still a place where man had "his meals cooked and served

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[63]Ibid. (October 1913):247.

[64]CPG, "How Home Conditions React Upon the Family," American Journal of Sociology 14(March 1909):593.

by the woman; his general cleaning and mending done by her." Although most often his wife, "the woman" who served him might be the man's mother, daughter, sister, or niece. "Failing these, he must hire one." In any case, Gilman said, each man continued the practice of requiring "one whole woman" just to wait on him. In the most wasteful use of human resources, men expected "one-half the race to live for them alone!" She added that no man was too poor to afford a servant; he had only to marry to obtain one.[65]

For perspective, she suggested visualizing the situation in reverse: "Let us suppose that the conditions of home life required every man upon marriage to become his wife's butler, footman, coachman, cook; every man, all men, necessarily following the profession of domestic servants." She called this an absurd idea; equally so was its opposite. For either sex to be domestic servants of the other was "abhorrent and incredible."[66]

Gilman forcefully protested the acceptance of female servitude as a concomitant of family life. First, by differentiating this relation from natural law: "The

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[65]Ibid., p. 598; CPG, "Service," p. 9; CPG, "Real Woman," p. 18.

[66]CPG, "Home Conditions," p. 598.

service of the man by his woman is a claim which has no parallel in nature. There is nothing in the natural relation of the sexes which should make the female the servant of the male." Second, by dissociating wife-service from woman's legitimate function of mother-service:

> This condition of female servitude accompanies marriage . . . and precedes maternity. It has no relation whatever to motherhood. If there are no children the woman remains the house-servant of the man. If she has many, their care must not prevent the service of his meals.

Third, by discounting the idea of a paid substitute: "If the man is able to hire other women to wait upon him . . . his wife is merely raised to the position of a sort of 'section-boss'; she still manages the service of the house for him." And finally, by emphasizing the anachronism of a patriarchal family existing within a democratic nation: "The claim, 'There can be no home without a master' is like saying 'There can be no nation without a king.'"[67]

Gilman recognized the difficulty of making her argument heard. The idea that a husband should serve society and his wife should serve him was accepted as "an essential, if not the essential," condition of marriage. "We are so

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[67]Ibid., pp. 493, 598; Forerunner 4(May 1913):139. If a family could not function without a head, why not form a committee and elect one, Gilman suggested.

absolutely accustomed to this relation," she said, "that a statement of it produces no more result than if one solemnly announces that fire is hot and ice is cold." To counteract this attitude, she analyzed the deleterious consequences of female servitude upon all of society: men, women, and children.[68]

The primary consequence for men involved the economic burden of being a "good provider," the male corollary of female servitude. Being the sole provider for a family intensified the responsibility. For instance, Gilman said, in a family of six "one man's production is forced to meet the consumption of six." This arrangement drained a man's resources unduly; why should not an able-bodied wife support herself and help support her children? But worse, "to segregate half the productive energy of the world" and use it in the private service of dependents represented economic waste. Besides, for all the economic demands made on the husband, he got a poor return for his efforts, because the housewife, being a non-specialist, performed her multifarious tasks with only "average capacity."[69]

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[68] CPG, "Home Conditions," p. 598.

[69] Ibid., p. 599; CPG, _Home_, pp. 94-95.

This situation in which the male functioned as sole provider had two results: among the lower class, poverty; and among the upper class, the parasitic wife who "performs no industrial service, produces nothing, and consumes everything." In either case the husband faced "inordinate expense." Gilman reminded men, though, that they had created their own trap by designating as a masculine function the "power of producing wealth" and, conversely, by considering it unfeminine for a woman to make money.[70]

A second consequence suffered by men was incompatibility with their servile wives. Gilman explained, "She may marry a senator, surgeon, editor--but he must marry a cook." And no man of any intelligence could gain social stimulus from spending every evening with his cook. She continued:

> That is the key to the whole thing. Your cook may be a "treasure," she may cater to your needs . . . she may also be the mother of your children . . . but she is none the less your own personal servant, and as such not your social equal.

A class distinction existed between a man of the world and a domestic servant, albeit his wife. This discrepancy precluded friendship, the hallmark of a happy marriage, for friendship subsumed equality. Estrangement was the

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[70]CPG, "Home Conditions," p. 600; CPG, _Home_, pp. 289-90.

result of a marriage structured on wife-service. In their hierarchical husband-wife positions men and women were "alien races," Gilman said, apart except for sex.[71]

She believed that men suffered excessively from this alienation, since they lacked human companionship with their wives. "It's a lonely business," she speculated, "for one sex to be civilized without the other." Why, then, would men perpetuate a marriage structure which so deprived them? She theorized that the system of marital inequality was self-propagating. Centuries of female servitude had kept man "in his nonage," childish and self-indulgent. He grew up to be "a big, strong creature, but unweaned." Such a man was in reality looking for a mother-substitute when he married. Thus, he found woman's service more desirable than her companionship because the former represented "motherliness." The child-man tended to marry the woman who "cares for his comfort." According to Gilman, this idea explained male antagonism toward feminists' demands for freedom and equality. Men were "naturally unwilling to

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[71]CPG, "Unhappy Marriages," pp. 504-505, Folder 250-3, CPG Collection; CPG, Home, p. 295; CPG, "Service," p. 9.

give up the best and cheapest servant possible, the mother in the home."[72]

And what of women? The demeaning status they experienced was an obvious consequence of female servitude. But there were other effects: endless toil of the poor wife: boredom of the rich wife; exaggerated egotism of one who has few outlets; debasing lack of achievement common to non-specialists.

Gilman singled out one consequence of female servitude as especially poignant for women. It involved the discrepancy between expectation and reality in marriage. She described the problem:

> When two young people love each other . . . do they dewll in ecstatic forecast on the duties of housekeeping? They do not. They dwell on the pleasure of having a home . . . on enjoying each other's society . . . and on what they will _do_ together . . . walk . . . work . . . read . . . paint, write, sing, anything you please, so that it may be together.

Following marriage, the reality of the wife's economic position shattered these expectations. As housekeeper she had little chance to do things with her husband; and he did not "make beds and sweep and cook" with her. Furthermore, as a domestic worker, she lost much of her allure. According

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[72]CPG, "The Future of the Home," _Independent_ 61(October 1906):792; CPG, "Wash-Tubs and Woman's Duty," _Century_ (June 1925):153, 158; CPG, "Service," p. 9.

to Gilman, the idea that men admire domestic women was "one of the roaring jokes of history." She observed:

> The best-loved women of all time have not been the little brown birds at home . . . . It is not easy . . . to maintain the height of romantic love for one's . . . housekeeper . . . . Too often the husband's love strays . . . to follow a freer bird in a wider field.

She summarized succinctly, "No man can love a doormat, though he finds her useful."[73]

Children suffered most from a marriage structured on female servitude, for "househood" took precedence over motherhood. This reversal of priorities was ironic since, according to Gilman, "the home _belongs_ to the child; he is the cause of its being; it is for him, hypothetically, that we marry and start a home." Notwithstanding this truth, nor even the popular sentiment concerning the nobility of motherhood, care of children took second place to care of house and husband. Gilman described the typical mother's schedule as including a washing day, ironing day, baking day, cleaning day, and sewing day--but no children's day. "The children are there every hour of the day, of course. Yes, but which hour of the day? With . . . twelve hours of necessary labour . . . what time remains for children?" She

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[73] CPG, _Women and Economics_, p. 219; CPG, _Home_, pp. 280-81; Newsclipping, Folder 253-4.

concluded that housework was incompatible with the proper care of children. Reared by a servant class, albeit their mothers, children grew up associating womanhood with house-service and "necessarily assume[d] that the main business of life" was cooking and cleaning.[74]

Summing up the damage inflicted by the patriarchal home based on wife-service, Gilman spared no feelings. Men experienced financial and emotional deprivation; women existed in "domestic inertia"; and children lived "under the tutelage of the primeval mother." Social consciousness, on which civilized life depended, could not develop in such a domicile. Still, Gilman reiterated, the blame lay not with the home itself but with that androcentric phenomenon imposed upon it: female servitude. By removing this perversion, the home could be restored to its original purpose, a place of rest, refreshment, and growth for all its members.[75]

How could this be done? By applying to the home those progressive measures induced by industrialization: specialization, organization, and rationalization. In Gilman's view, "to specialize any form of labor is a step up: to

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[74]CPG, Home, pp. 96-97, 235, 250.

[75]Ibid., pp. 307, 312, 315, 321.

organize it is another step." This progression from the simple to the complex tended to minimize effort and maximize efficiency, the essence of rationalization. Paralleling these steps in industrial evolution with those in physical evolution, she interpreted them as a natural means of human progress in all areas, including the home. Hence, she advocated the organization of household work into specialized, professional services. Such a plan would reform the archaic, patriarchal home into a progressive home commensurate with advanced, industrialized society.[76]

Gilman argued that paid experts who worked by the hour could service a family more efficiently and satisfactorily than could unpaid, unskilled housewives. As she envisioned it:

> The daily needs of a . . . house could be met easily by each individual in his or her own room . . . and the labor less frequently required would be furnished by an expert, who would clean one home after another with the swift skill of training and experience.

Although Gilman felt men should do their part in caring for "the daily needs" of a house, she did not advocate spouses sharing the housework in lieu of professional house-services. Why should men, "who do everything else that is done to maintain our civilization," regress to a stage of

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[76]CPG, Women and Economics, p. 67; CPG, Home, p. 84.

primitive work? (She defined any unspecialized work as primitive.) "It is time we objected to the woman's effort to harness the man to the home, in all its cumbersome old-world inefficiences," Gilman said. "It is not more labour that the home wants, it is better machinery and administration." Besides, housework was as non-appealing to a rational man as to a rational woman.[77]

Granting that cleaning could be a useful and therefore honorable occupation when so regarded, Gilman suggested that a wife who chose to do her own housework be paid by her husband "the same salary he would [pay] to any other servant for the same work." Or, as an alternative, each wife could specialize in a segment of housework she enjoyed--such as baking, cleaning, or sewing--and be paid for these services by other women who utilized them. Anticipating the question, "Where would women get money to pay for these services?" she replied, the same way as men do--by performing similar services for each other. Wealth was created originally by specialization in industry and the exchange of products. Indeed, the exchange of products made money necessary in the first place. (In regard to utilizing professional

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[77]CPG, Women and Economics, p. 247; CPG, Home, p. 287; Forerunner 1(July 1910):6.

house-services, Gilman believed that women could help pay for these by working in specialized areas of their choice.)[78]

Gilman refuted the "common opinion" that wives earned a living by keeping house: "Their labor is neither given nor taken as a factor in economic exchange. It is held to be their duty as women to do this work; and their economic status bears no relation to their domestic labors, unless an inverse one." To illustrate, she noted that "the women who do the most work get the least money, and the women who have the most money do the least work." Having argued this point throughout her career, Gilman pointed to governmental concurrence in 1935: "The Social Security Act just passed," she said, "made no provision for wives engaged in housework."[79]

To implement the removal of domestic industries from the home, Gilman proposed a radical innovation: kitchenless homes. A center of smoke, grease, and dirt, the kitchen constituted the source of most housework. Its removal would lessen woman's menial labor, freeing her to specialize in work of her choice. Acknowledging that her idea of a kitchenless home affronted popular sentiment regarding

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[78] CPG, "Unhappy Marriages," p. 505; CPG, "A Home Where Women Can Rest," p. 4, Folder 183, CPG Collection.

[79] "Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Equal Rights" (1935), p. 202, Folder 266-2, CPG Collection.

home-cooking, she nevertheless presented a cogent argument for this new arrangement.[80]

As long as every woman prepared meals for her own family in her own kitchen, Gilman said, cooking could never rise above an amateur level. Done in this fashion, without the advantages of specialization, home-cooking involved inordinate time, labor, and expense--all the while yielding unhealthy, unsanitary meals. She held that cooking was a science requiring knowledge of nutrition and hygiene; and it seemed unlikely that wives busy keeping house had time for such study. Past progress in cooking had come through professional male cooks and nutritionists.[81]

The problems of home-cooking were exacerbated by the sexuo-economic relation of husband wife, a relation predicated on the exchange of service for support. The economically dependent wife must cook to please the man who paid for dinner. Gilman elaborated:

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[80]Newsclipping, London Daily News, 15 February 1905, Folder 293, CPG Collection. Gilman told a British reporter in 1905, "My chief heresy is getting rid of the kitchen." That she had indeed struck a nerve was revealed in numerous press critiques of her lectures, such as the following New York Times caption: "[Gilman] Hits at Mother's Bread." Newsclipping, New York Times, 12 March 1914, Folder 293, CPG Collection.

[81]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 231-32.

> Since the wife-cook's main industry is to please,--that being her chief means of getting what she wants or of expressing affection,--she early learned to cater to the palate instead of . . . studying and meeting the needs of the stomach. [She] cooked from affection, not from knowledge . . . [she] cooked to please.

This attitude resulted in "fancy cookery," rich delicacies pleasing to the taste but ruinous to health. According to Gilman, the proverb, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach," had held powerful sway; and, in consequence, "we have come to deprave our bodies and degrade our souls at the table." She deplored the "Cupid-in-the-kitchen" arrangement which mingled "sex-interest and self-interest with normal appetites." The stomach should be left to its natural uses and the heart approached through higher channels. She warned that the human race would never be well-nourished if cooking remained "a sex-function common to all women."[82]

The vital matter of food selection and preparation should be in the hands of trained experts, Gilman asserted. Toward this end she suggested that families be served by professional dieticians who would prepare nutritious meals in large, centralized kitchens. These meals, which would taste better and cost less than home-cooking, could be distributed to one's private quarters by way of dumb waiters

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[82]Ibid., pp. 230-32, 236-37.

in urban apartments or through a system of cables in rural areas. In suburban areas groups of homes could be connected to a central kitchen by a cable system as well as by covered walk-ways. Gilman qualified these plans for meal distribution as feasible possibilities, not as final blueprints, explaining that, "No detailed prophecies can be made of the precise forms which would ultimately prove most useful and pleasant."[83]

She did predict that people would become so accustomed to the reduced cleaning made possible by removal of the kitchen that they would soon relinquish the dining room as well, preferring to go to their food rather than having it brought to them. Families could go eat together just as they went to listen to music together. Or family members could go alone if they chose; the stomach need not be compelled to serve as a family tie. There were, after all, higher avenues to family unity than the physical process of eating.[84]

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[83]Ibid., pp. 240, 242-43. Gilman distinguished between professional food service and cooperative kitchens. She saw no value in the latter, claiming they merely pooled amateur labor. She did not advocate communal living in any form. She stressed the need for private dwelling places, even while utilizing centralized kitchens and dining rooms.

[84]Ibid., pp. 244, 253.

In trying to implement home progress through specialization and organization Gilman envisioned changes in the nursery as well as the kitchen. She asserted that pre-school children should be cared for by experts trained in child culture. The idea that maternal instinct sufficiently equipped women to rear children was fallacious, she said. Motherhood required more than reproduction; its highest function was education, and this required training. No matter how strong a mother's love, it did not necessarily include wisdom. "It is 'natural' for a mother to love her children," said Gilman; "but it does not follow that she knows what is best for them." Lamentably, training for motherhood was almost non-existent. The only requirement for this vital post was that a girl be attractive enough to get married. The rest was left to nature. Thus, motherhood, the most important human function, had remained "from age to age in the hands of absolutely untaught women." Centuries of child care by "amateur mothers" had registered little improvement in the rearing of children. Expertise in child culture had come from male pediatricians and educators.[85]

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[85] CPG, Concerning Children (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1900), p. 266; CPG, "Real Woman," p. 21; CPG, Women and Economics, p. 193.

Gilman deplored the fact that women had "never stood up together in . . . organized action" and studied their unique profession of motherhood." She declared: "No man runs a business by instinct. He learns how." Neither should women operate their business of rearing children by instinct. Instinct sufficed for animals but not for humans. In fact, Gilman noted, "in humans instinct disappears in proportion as reason develops." Rational motherhood required that a woman study methods of child culture or else entrust her children to trained specialists. She deemed the latter alternative more realistic since not all mothers would make good educators.[86]

Thus, convinced that education began with life itself, Gilman proposed the establishment of "baby gardens," staffed by expert teachers. The kindergarten movement had "brought education to the nursery door." Why not open that door and extend organized learning to babyhood? By sending their children to baby gardens, mothers would not be excluded from child-rearing, only supplemented. Gilman reasoned:

> It is no new and daring heresy to suggest that babies need better education than the individual mother now gives them. [The baby garden] is simply a little

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[86]CPG, "Real Woman," p. 23; Forerunner 1(June 1910):10; CPG, Women and Economics, p. 284.

> further extension of the steadily expanding system of human education which is coming upon us as civilization grows. And it no more infringes upon the mother's rights, the mother's duties, the mother's pleasures than does the college or school.[87]

Gilman stressed the advantages of baby gardens for mothers as well as children. While the latter would benefit from surroundings designed for their optimum growth, the former would enjoy "free hours as a human being, as a member of a civilized community, as an economic producer, as a growing, self-realizing individual." At the end of the day "a busy woman, happy and proud in her work could return to her nest--with husband and children returning from work and play--to as contented a home life as the world has known." Gilman speculated that in such a setting, with work removed from the home, parents would have the time to become better acquainted with their children. "They will seem to us not so much creatures to be waited on as people to be understood." She clearly believed that quality rather than quantity of time spent together was the major consideration.[88]

Gilman summarized her efforts to dissociate female servitude from marriage by declaring that society's insistence

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[87]CPG, Women and Economics, p. 286.

[88]Ibid., pp. 289-90, 301.

upon this injurious association had left woman bereft of a true home. "The home," she said, "should be to a woman what it is to a man--a place of rest, not a workshop. Else--woman really has no home!" Home life had no connection with housework, she insisted; and housework was not related to love. Therefore, marriage and the family should be restructured accordingly, the one to allow for companionship between equals, the other to place motherhood above "househood." A home based on these values would "assure women of the comforts of home, without imprisonment therein . . . allow for love, without loss of liberty . . . and ensure proud mothers, without house care." Until maintenance and reproduction ceased to consume women's time, they would never fulfill life's highest law, growth. Until "devotion to animal comfort, to physical relations, to the ABC of life" ceased to define their parameters, women would never develop social consciousness. According to Gilman, Christ himself verified these priorities: the devotion he recognized was "not of Martha to the housekeeping" but "of Mary to the truth."[89]

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[89] Forerunner 1(July 1910):7; CPG, "The Passing of Matrimony," Harper's Bazaar 40(June 1906):498; CPG, Home, pp. 313-314.

Gilman concluded that future evolution of the human race demanded that woman once again be free--that she be liberated from man's control, that she be released from the domestic servitude to which he had subjected her.

What must women do to become free? "The absolute essential condition," said Gilman, "is economic independence." Surrender of this right had led to women's subjection, and only its recovery could restore their equality. She described economic freedom as "the essential right to guarantee our own survival." Money was symbolic of life. It meant food, clothing, shelter, education; it meant survival. Yet, Gilman reminded, "almost all the money in the world is held by men. They command life by means of it. They command [women] by means of it." In her view no human creature could develop independence, responsibility, and self-respect when the means of subsistence lay outside one's control; only with economic self-sufficiency could a person think and act freely. No matter what degree of equality women obtained legally and politically, so long as they depended on the opposite sex for sustenance, they were not free. Thus, Gilman said, "The earning and holding of money--the spending of which she is accountable to no man--is one of the

vital conditions of woman's growth--as it is of man's." Economic independence was the key to woman's freedom.[90]

Gilman noted in 1898 that radical changes in women's economic status were already occurring. The "pressure of industrial conditions" had led many women to pursue gainful employment in mills, factories, and offices--as well as in some of the professions. (She referred to the 1890 census which reported three million women in America's labor force.) Yet despite this progress, women faced severe limitations in seeking employment because of society's bias against working women. Gilman attributed this bias to two false premises: first, that "human work [was] a male function"; and second, that "a woman who achieve[d] in extra-domestic lines forfeit[ed] all hope of love and marriage." She refuted both ideas.[91]

Work was a human function, Gilman argued; therefore, gender connotations were inappropriate. True, work historically had been considered first "feminine," women being the original workers, then "masculine"as men began to work through

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[90]CPG, "The New Status of Women," p. 6, Folder 177-2, CPG Collection; CPG, "The Way Up," pp. 12, 14, Folder 166, CPG Collection.

[91]CPG, Women and Economics, p. 153; Forerunner 3(March 1912):84.

the coercion of slavery and continued working by choice. But these terms were entirely relative to cultural points of view. And, in Gilman's judgment, they missed the real point: "To the primitive savage, skill and industry are not human but feminine. To the modern mind, skill and industry _still_ are not human, they are masculine." The latter view had created the prejudice that working women were unfeminine and, furthermore, that a job involving high wages made them even more unfeminine. Utter nonsense, said Gilman: "Work doesn't make a woman less womanly. Neither does getting paid." Critics of working women should remember, she said, "that human labor is an exercise of faculty, without which we should cease to be human; that to do and to make not only gives deep pleasure, but is indispensable to healthy growth."[92]

Gilman also argued against the idea that women could not successfully combine a career and marriage. These two roles were antithetical only if one conceived marriage and

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[92]CPG, _Human Work_, pp. 213-14; _Forerunner_ 3(June 1912): 148; CPG,"The Significance of Modern Feminism in Social Progress," p. 11, Folder 181, CPG Collection; CPG, "Motherhood and Modern Woman," p. 384, Folder 253-4, CPG Collection; CPG, _Women and Economics_, p. 157. It is important to note that Gilman considered "human work" to be that which one enjoyed and specialized in. Her advocacy of careers for women did not mean that she believed any random eight-to-five job would bring fulfillment.

housework as synonymous. If women must function as domestic servants by virtue of being wives, then obviously a career would double their work load--an untenable situation. But, Gilman reiterated, housework was not a concomitant of marriage, only an unnecessary and injurious appendage. When this fact became clear, she believed, women would no longer confront the artificial choice of being a wife or being a working member of society.[93]

She stressed that being a career-wife was not only possible but desirable, from two standpoints. First, women needed the companionship of marriage as well as the personal satisfaction of a career. An either-or choice was as unnatural for a woman as it would be for a man. Indeed, said Gilman: "It should _not_ be a question of either-or. She doesn't wish to give up home and family for a wider world--anymore than _he_ does." For either sex the fulfillment of function should not require the denial of a normal personal life. On the other hand, the career-wife was a desirable position because love alone was not enough to satisfy either spouse in a marriage. One must have "life" as well. Love was important, but it was only a part of

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[93] _Forerunner_ 4(February 1913):37.

life. In her poem, "Wedded Bliss," Gilman indicated that men knew this truth but women did not:

> "O come and be my mate!" said the Eagle to the Hen;
> "I love to soar, but then
> I want my mate to rest
> Forever in the nest!"
> Said the Hen, "I cannot fly,
> I have no wish to try,
> But I joy to see my mate careering through the sky!"
> They wed, and cried, "Ah, this is Love, my own!"
> And the Hen sat, the Eagle soared, alone.[94]

Gilman knew that her refutation of the two premises concerning working women might well fall on deaf ears. Historical acceptance had lent credence to them both. Moreover, men were inclined to keep their wives economically dependent in order to maintain control over them. How then could women establish their right to work and thus their economic freedom? Gilman had a ready answer.

Women must begin to make their own marriage terms, negotiating for a better life than domestic servitude and financial dependence provided, and, in turn, offering more to a prospective husband than to be only a house servant. "It takes two to make a marriage," Gilman said, and the

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[94]CPG, "All the World to Her," Independent 55(July 1903):1616; CPG, In This Our World (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1898), p. 157. Gilman advised that if spouses must choose between geographic locations regarding their respective job opportunities, the one whose profession best served society should win. Woman's Journal, 17 September 1904.

woman must set forth her terms clearly. She offered the following guideline: "I will marry you if you recognize my position and meet its needs. I must be free to follow my profession as you are to follow yours; but with money I earn, I will contribute half of our maintenance." The woman who chose not to follow a career should still require freedom from domestic labor to do her real work in the home, child care. In either case, if a man refused her terms, it would be clear that "he simply wanted a wageless housekeeper with marital duties included." If these negotiations seemed unromantic, women should remember that marriage was "a binding contract for life." It seemed "only wise and fair to be precise in understanding its terms." Indeed, Gilman added, it was "criminally negligent" not to do so.[95]

By establishing their economic independence, women would finally end the centuries-old sexuo-economic relation whereby "a woman gets her living by getting a husband," and a man "gets his wife by getting a living." According to Gilman, this unnatural association of love and money "sexualizes our industrial relation and commercializes our sex relation," thus perverting both work and marriage. Each sex had contributed to the sexuo-economic relation. With

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[95] Woman's Journal, 17 September 1904.

marriage viewed as women's only honorable occupation, they had embued it with a mercenary aspect: destined to find wealth, power, reputation, home, and food through the single means of "a small gold ring," women often married in quest of economic security. (Gilman considered mercenary marriages unfortunate bur understandable, it being as natural for a woman as for a man to desire wealth. She asked: why blame a woman who married for money? This was the only occupation open to her.) Conversely, men had linked love and money by making marriage a vehicle for purchasing creature comforts. Both sexes' tendencies in the sexuo-economic relation had kept alive instincts of egoism inimical to organic social relation. The economic independence of women would make possible the separation of sexual relations and economic relations, thereby restoring human relations in sex, in work, and in all of life.[96]

Gilman analyzed the effects of ending the sexuo-economic relation through women's economic independence. First, marriage would follow its true course as a union based on sex-attraction, romantic love, and comradeship. By removing economic factors from marriage, men would not need the incentive of sex to work and women would not need financial

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[96]CPG, Women and Economics, pp. 71, 89, 93, 110.

security for sex. Each spouse could "love better and serve more." Marriages in which love ceased to exist need not be endured out of economic necessity. Financially independent wives could afford the option of divorce, as could their husbands since alimony would be unnecessary. (Gilman characterized divorce as "social surgery," not to be rushed into unnecessarily--there being "a small difference between fires and frying pans"--but to be utilized judiciously in severing harmful relationships.)[97]

Second, motherhood would be improved by ending the sexuo-economic relation. Fiscal independence would enable women to exercise their prime responsibility: mate selection. "Right Motherhood" entailed choosing a good father for one's children. But this duty was contingent upon economic freedom, for "beggers can't be choosy." If dependent upon matrimony

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[97]CPG, "The Family in Modern Society," Folder 175, CPG Collection; CPG, Women and Economics, p. 143; CPG, "Divorce and Birth Control," Outlook 148(January 1928):131; CPG, "Unhappy Marriages," p. 505. Gilman did not share the conventional attitude of her contemporaries that divorce threatened the institution of marriage. She asserted that "no real marriage is in danger of divorce--only bad ones." CPG, "Marriage Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow," p. 455, Folder 255, CPG Collection. William L. O'Neill in Divorce in the Progressive Era (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), contends that by providing an escape system, divorce actually stabilized marriage during the upheavals of industrialization.

for a livelihood, a woman was forced to take "almost anybody" for a husband. Also, motherhood would improve with women's financial independence because, no longer subordinate themselves, they could reassert their rightful preeminence in parenting. Gilman believed that a father should share in the care and education of his children but only as an assistant to the mother. As the nurturing sex, women were the key parents. Fathers presuming the role of final arbiter were an abberation. "Not intended by nature to be the main factor in developing the young, the male has usurped and misused his power and exaggerated his authority," according to Gilman. She believed that "authoritarian fatherhood" derived from the "position of the human male as owner and master of his female--and thus of her progeny." With restoration of "rightful motherhood," children would be nurtured as nature intended.[98]

Finally, the human race would progress as a result of ending the sexuo-economic relation. Economic independence would free women to become full members of society. Turning from domestic service to social service, they would enter into organic social relation as functioning parts of the social body. As women's social consciousness expanded

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[98]CPG, "How to Make Better Men," Folder 179, CPG Collection.

beyond the hearth to include the world, humanity would become whole. Then, said Gilman, "we will [experience] a new era--the first attempt at a balanced, rational, natural civilization."[99]

"This new world--what shall it be like?" Gilman mused. No longer a man's world, "it shall be [woman's] world too--not hers alone, but hers with him, the natural combination of a home." But what of the tradition that woman's place was in the home? "The true human home is the round world," she said; "that is [woman's] home." As citizens of the world, women would bring to bear the female gender traits of love and service. Their emphasis on growth and nurture would mitigate the masculine tendencies of combat and destructiveness.[100]

Specifically, what would women do in the world? Gilman posed the question thus: "When we have political freedom and power, economic freedom and power, social freedom and power, physical freedom and power, what shall we do with it?" She believed women's involvement in public life would be vast and complex. World peace, both military and

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[99]CPG, "Masculine, Feminine and Human," p. 517, Folder 250-3, CPG Collection.

[100]Forerunner 4(May 1913):149.

economic, would be their first priority--followed by conservation, beautification of cities, a housing system incorporating privacy but devoid of workshops, an educational system allowing "body, mind and soul to reach full stature," and a political system supporting the general welfare. Women's tasks would be the same as men's: to exercise their talents in work they enjoyed--creating, producing, distributing for the social good. "We will work together," Gilman said, "for such growth in industry, art, and science, in health and beauty and happiness as the world has never seen." And domestic life? Women would be wives, mothers, and citizens, just as men were husbands, fathers, and citizens. The essential thing was to be free persons first, then wives and mothers.[101]

Gilman wrote in 1910 that the new "Humanness of woman" was already transpiring. For over a century the subjugated female sex had been "lifting itself," striving first for education, then for legal equality and justice, and then "with larger insight, for full equal rights with men in every field." Their efforts were succeeding; this "partially developed" sex was now "coming alive." Gilman described the

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[101]CPG, "Future," p. 792; Forerunner 4(May 1913):148-49; CPG, "Real Woman," p. 34.

phenomenon as a female renaissance: "Woman, encysted in her prehistoric domestic envelope is now in the process of a new birth. Born a woman, she is now being born a citizen--with a new field of life."[102]

Gilman warned not to expect too much too quickly of these fledgling human creatures. Their emergence from "domestic seclusion into a world established and carried on by men" required a period of adjustment. "It is very difficult for a mind that has always confined itself to the question of what to get for dinner to rise to consider the question of how to ensure pure food to the world," she noted. "You can't expect to make citizens out of a servant class . . . in one day."[103]

Furthermore, society must tolerate a degree of feminist extremism as a natural reaction to the pendulum-swing from female bondage to independence. For instance, some newly emancipated women were over-reacting to domestic exploitation by refusing to marry. Indeed, said Gilman, they "speak of marriage as if it were the invention of Queen Victoria." Other extreme behavior included sexual license (a reaction

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[102]Forerunner 1(January 1910):12; ibid. 3(February 1912):37.

[103]CPG, "New Generation of Women," Current History 18(August 1923):732; CPG, "Future," p. 792.

to the double standard), self-indulgence (a reaction to servitude), and repudiation of motherhood. Such extremism was understandable, Gilman said, but dangerous. The "new woman" must examine the fallacies of reaction. She must act, not react. By activating her intelligence, she would see that marriage and motherhood, purged of servitude, offered optimum fulfillment for women.[104]

Gilman's qualifying statements about newly emancipated women sprang from an awareness that feminism was a disorienting social force, bewildering to both sexes. To "the average mind," masculinity and humanity were identical. Hence, women's attempts to share in human affairs seemed "alien, unnatural, even revolting." In Gilman's view, protests against feminism reflected the fear that women's progress would injure womanhood, that the "eternal feminine" would be neutered. This fear was based on the assumption that the imagery of femininity--pedestal, halo, crown, even chains--represented true womanhood and that if these trappings vanished, society was "doomed to a womanless world." Nothing could be more false, she said. The essential characteristics of women do not change. In fact, as women increased in

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[104]CPG, "New Morals for Old Monogamy," Nation 118(11 June 1924):672; Forerunner 6(June 1915):175.

humanness, they became more womanly. She added that, contrary to some critics, feminism was not a demand for masculine power and prestige; neither was it a quest for female superiority. Women sought humanness, not maleness or femaleness.[105]

To assuage society's fear of feminism, Gilman tried to put the matter in perspective: "In our dread of the 'New Woman,' we should not lose sight of the fact that we were never satisfied with the old kind." History indicated that while man might venerate individual women, he had low regard for them generally. And women--"are they so happy now--either squaw or parasite--that they should dread becoming full human beings?" Moreover, it seemed clear that society's past ways had failed, that is, the pattern of "man doing the work of the world [with] woman holding . . . his hand--and bearing his children. We have tried this for 6,000 years!"[106]

Gilman concluded that no "honest thinker," man or woman, would be alarmed by America's female renaissance occurring in the early twentieth century. The rebirth of woman's human nature through free expression of her physical,

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[105] Forerunner 1(January 1910):13; CPG, "Is Feminism So Dreadful?" p. 6.

[106] CPG, "Status," p. 13; Forerunner 3(January 1912):16; CPG, "Real Woman," p. 16.

intellectual, spiritual, and social powers would indeed restructure the world but to mankind's benefit. Progress and happiness would abound for all when the humanization of woman released men from the burden of single-handedly representing the human race.

Gilman affirmed that despite centuries of belief in female subordination, rational minds could recognize the human imperative to be free. To such minds she appealed in advocating a humanist approach to feminism.

CHAPTER X

A REASONABLE RADICAL

Charlotte Gilman lived through a period of vast change in America's history. Born a year before the Civil War, she died mid-way through the New Deal. She witnessed the nation's transformation from a rural, agricultural people to an urban, industrial world power. She experienced the shifting social mores characterizing the Victorian era and the Jazz Age. She beheld a succession of reform movements, including feminism, populism, progressivism, and the New Deal. Her career, spanning the years 1890 to 1935, demonstrated a remarkable awareness of the problems confronting America during these upheavals, and her writings encompassed a broad spectrum of social, political, and economic causes. The issues of human welfare claimed her primary interest. And since she considered woman's sub-human status an obstacle to humanity's progress, feminism became the focal point of her efforts.

Gilman's role in feminist history is a complex matter. Was she, as some of her contemporaries claimed, a revolutionary bent on destroying the home? Or was she, as many

of the flapper generation thought, a reactionary whose message had become irrelevant? Or was Gilman a radical, calling for fundamental changes within the framework of established institutions?

Gilman's critique of the androcentric home aroused widespread alarm and elicited charges of subversion. At the turn of the century Ambrose Bierce, Washington correspondent for the Hearst newspapers, led a large section of the press in castigating her "dangerous" proposals. Similar pronouncements came from the pulpit. Representative of these was a collection of articles entitled _Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage_. One article called Gilman a "dangerous feminist" who "openly aims at a revolution of the home and state." A second declared that Gilman was "subversive of Christian morality, Christian marriage, and the Christian home." Even women found her ideas shocking. After hearing her lecture at the Brooklyn Civitas Club, a "young society matron" told a reporter, "Why I tried to read her books and some of the printed statements made me blush." A journalist covering Gilman's 1905 lecture tour in England reported, "Gilman challenged ideas that to the British housewife are as sacred as the Sermon on the Mount,"

particularly the idea that "housework is a curse and not a crown."[1]

Accusations of subverting the home did not surprise Gilman. She anticipated misinterpretation, explaining that people became suspicious of "Free Love" at the first hint of domestic reform. And indeed, despite her constant emphasis upon improving the home, many believed she would abolish it. Even a cursory reading of her works disproves the charge of domestic subversion. Gilman did not seek overthrow of the home; she advocated reform not revolution. Several of her reform proposals, considered heretical by her contemporaries, have been incorporated in current society. Professional house cleaning services are now available, nursery schools are commonplace, and increasingly Americans are taking their meals outside the home. These changes justify Gilman's assurance that the home would remain intact despite domestic reforms.[2]

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[1]Amy Wellington, _Some Have Told: Studies in the Feminist Tradition_ (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1930), pp. 120-21; Newsclippings, _Montreal Herald_, 23 March 1914, _Montreal Mail_, 24 March 1914, Folder 293, CPG Collection; _Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage_, Folder 242, CPG Collection; Newsclipping, _Brooklyn Eagle_, 29 February 1903, Folder 288, CPG Collection; Newsclipping, _Manchester_ (England) _Dispatch_, 25 February 1905, Folder 289, CPG Collection.

[2]CPG, "Social, Domestic and Human Life," p. 20, Folder 165, CPG Collection.

During the latter part of her career Gilman received criticism for being a reactionary. These charges are understandable, for while times changed, Gilman's ideas remained consistent. Her advocacy of chastity and continence, acceptable in the Gilded Age, appeared outdated in the Jazz Age, especially in light of Sigmund Freud's claim that sexual repression damaged one's psyche. Margaret Sanger, leader of the birth control movement in America, censured Gilman in 1914 for being "a reactionary who had lost courage by obtaining too much publicity." (In 1931 a mellower Sanger invited Gilman to write an article on birth control for a special issue of the Nation.) Further charges of reactionism were levied against Gilman in regard to her economic views. Mary Austin wrote in her 1932 autobiography: "Time went on and left her standing at the old corner, crying the same wares. She had become a socialist of the narrowest mold."[3]

Was Gilman a reactionary? Not in regard to her sexual views; she simply disagreed with Freud. Neither was she in her economic views; her support of progressive reforms

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[3]Zona Gale, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman," Nation 141(September 1935):351; Newsclipping, New York Evening Mail, 14 April 1914, Folder 295, CPG Collection; Sanger to CPG, 8 December 1931, Folder 146, CPG Collection; Mary Austin, Earth Horizons: Autobiography (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932), p. 326.

within the capitalist system showed a pragmatic flexibility. By the 1930's, however, the depression had rendered impractical her views on women's economic independence. Gilman did assume a reactionary attitude toward immigration. Throughout the 1920's she protested that aliens who refused to assimilate slowed the development of organic society.

Gilman best fits the description of a radical within the feminist movement. The term "radical," defined as "reaching to the ultimate source, to the root," denotes her stance because in asserting the human nature of woman, she challenged an authoritarian structure imposed upon the most fundamental level of society: the relationship between the sexes. Her claim that women were people as well as wives and mothers epitomized this challenge. Gilman's position was radical rather than revolutionary because she did not advocate an overthrow of the male-female relationship. She sought to enhance the relations between the sexes by replacing hierarchy with equality, by exchanging authority for autonomy. Recognizing that to view the nature of woman as human rather than female implied a fundamental restructuring of society, she wrote in 1904, "The Woman's Movement is a much more radical change in human history than even its staunchest advocates realize."[4]

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[4] Woman's Journal, 2 January 1904.

Gilman's radicalism requires refinement in definition: she was a reasonable radical, which is not to say that she was always right but that she consistently thought and argued in a logical manner. Although one might disagree with her premises, the conclusions she drew from them reflected sound deductions. Moreover, her method was to persuade through reason. She let facts speak for themselves, embellishing them with wit and humor; abrasive attack was not her approach. Alexander Black remarked upon this trait in 1923: "No champion of the woman side has ever been freer from controversial acidity . . . . To a man she must always look like a fair fighter."[5]

Testimony to Gilman's rationality abounded. A _Pictorial Review_ journalist wrote, "It is as a thinking person Mrs. Gilman is the most remarkable." A writer for the _Chicago Record Herald_ described her as a "logician" and said: "If you hold her to be wrong, it takes close reasoning to prove it. She thinks--and it takes thinking to refute her." A reporter for the _Labor Leader_ observed that her arguments were so rational that they were "specially acceptable and

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[5]Alexander Black, "The Woman Who Saw It First," _Century_ 107(November 1923):39-40.

comforting to male hearers." An Independent editor described Gilman's theories as "radical common sense."[6]

As a reasonable radical, what impact did Gilman have upon her era? Evidence indicates that her philosophy gained a wide audience and made a significant impression In demand as a lecturer for almost four decades, she spoke in all but five states in her own country and made five European trips to address international women's conventions and other groups. Her books engaged a large readership, with Women and Economics winning acclaim as a classic in feminist literature. This book and two others, The Home, and Concerning Children, were used as college textbooks at various times during the early twentieth century. The Forerunner was used as a study guide by groups who formed "Gilman Circles" in several cities.[7]

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[6]"Charlotte Perkins Gilman," Pictorial Review (October 1911):114; Newsclipping, Chicago Record Herald, 20 July 1904; Newsclipping, Labor Leader, n.d. Folder 288, CPG Collection; Independent 94(January 1918):418.

[7]Zona Gale to John B. Williams, 31 May 1935, Folder 118, CPG Collection. According to Gale, Women and Economics made Gilman a literary lion in England. T.V. Smith, The American Philosophy of Equality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 298; Zona Gale, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman," p. 351; "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Dynamic Social Philosophy," Current Literature 51(July 1911):68; Forerunner 5(May 1914):140.

Gilman exerted influence as an interpreter of feminism to those outside the movement. William Dean Howells lauded her ability in this area. Asked by a reporter in 1914, "Do you think the great social problems of the day, the feminine unrest for instance, are finding expression in literature?" Howells could recall almost none. He explained that the women who knew most about feminism were not writers; but in his judgment, "The best things said about [feminism] have been said by Charlotte Perkins Gilman." Two sociologists of note praised Gilman's ability to portray feminism in broad perspective. In 1906 Lester F. Ward wrote that the only person he knew who approached social problems with a "cosmological perspective" was a woman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In 1923 Edward A. Ross wrote Gilman that _The Man-Made World_ had inspired him to include a chapter called "Women in a Man-Made World" in his new book, _The Social Trend_.[8]

Academicians sought Gilman's expertise on at least two occasions. In 1897 the Kansas State Agricultural College offered her a teaching position, explaining that they meant

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[8]Newsclipping, fragment of an Oregon newspaper, 13 December 1914; Lester F. Ward, "The Past and Future of the Sexes," _Independent_ 60(March 1906):541; Ross to CPG, 25 December 1923, Folder 143, CPG Collection.

to "keep abreast of leading thought" and thus wanted at least one woman on the faculty. She rejected the offer because of ill health. In 1933 James M. Wood, president of Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, wrote Gilman to inquire, "What points should a college for women emphasize in educating students?" She responded at length with a four point program of physical, intellectual, social and vocational training.[9]

Gilman had considerable impact on feminism. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association from 1900 to 1904 and from 1915 to 1920, provided the most forceful witness to Gilman's importance. In 1922 the League of Women Voters asked Catt to list the twelve American women who ranked highest in achievement. Catt placed Gilman's name first on the list, explaining, "I credit Gilman's books with revolutionizing the attitude of mind of the whole country, indeed of other countries, as to woman's place." According to Catt, all classes of women read Gilman, and a large number of "the

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[9]CPG to Houghton Gilman, 28 April 1897, Folder 40, CPG Collection; ibid. 18 May 1897. The offer from Kansas State Agricultural College gave Gilman freedom to "teach anything she liked, perhaps Cooking and Hygiene." She replied that she preferred to teach ethics or sociology but chose not to risk her health with a full-time job. Wood to CPG, 6 January 1933, Folder 146, CPG Collection.

most prominent women on every continent admired her." Reflecting on Gilman's influence in 1940, Catt wrote Katherine Stetson Chamberlin, "Your mother's ideas were taken up and used by speakers and writers everywhere and I dare say the average worker of that time failed to realize how much the movement owed to Mrs. Gilman." In 1935 Catt wrote Gilman to communicate her personal response to these ideas. "Your books are all on my library shelf and I think what the world would have been if you had not written them," she said. "You leave behind an influence too great to measure." This view of Gilman is significant in light of Catt's own influence as chief strategist of the suffrage victory in 1920 and her position as the foremost feminist of the early twentieth century.[10]

Contradictory evidence exists concerning Gilman's effect on feminism. In 1913 Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the woman's suffrage movement in England, registered surprise that Gilman was "not heard of more and read more in the Woman movement." She added that feminism would have a "tougher intellectual fiber" if Gilman were better known.

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[10] New York Herald, 5 June 1922; Appleton Century Book Chat, 12 October 1935, Folder 126-2, CPG Collection; Catt to Chamberlin, 19 July 1940, Folder 156, CPG Collection; Catt to Gilman, 28 May 1935, Folder 149, CPG Collection.

According to Pankhurst, many feminists feared Gilman's "advanced ideas." A 1904 article in the Critic expressed the same view, claiming that Gilman's views caused "amazement and distress to old-line suffragists." Further indication of Gilman's lack of influence came in 1933 when the New York City Review of Literature published a list of the 100 best books written by American women. Compiled by a committee of writers and approved by the International Congress of Women in Chicago, the list ignored all of Gilman's books. And finally, in the most telling evidence of her ineffectiveness, tangible response to her major reform proposals was negligible. At the end of her forty-year career in 1935, domestic service and economic dependence continued to define woman's role and status.[11]

In light of conflicting evidence regarding Gilman's impact on feminism, how does one measure her significance? Historical perspective is essential to such an assessment. Her work must be evaluated in relation to the feminist trends of her day.

Gilman's radicalism was out of joint with her times. Her career coincided with a period when radical feminism

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[11] "Mrs. Pankhurst and Mrs. Gilman," article from Reedy's Magazine, 19 September 1913, Folder 266, CPG Collection; "Portrait," Critic 44(March 1904):195-96; Newsclipping, New York Times, 3 September 1933, Folder 295, CPG Collection.

had spent itself and conservative feminists concentrated on political reform. The conservatives' suffrage efforts dealt with a manifestation rather than the source of women's inequality and therefore entailed scant change in the status quo. In contrast, Gilman's focus upon male-female relations as the root of the problem and her proposal to establish sexual equality through women's economic independence implied a fundamental change in society. The conservative feminists' aim, less threatening to the established order, proved more acceptable. In 1920 passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granting female suffrage marked the conservatives' success in achieving their limited goal. Thereafter, the feminist movement dissipated.[12]

Gilman's ideology conflicted with society's concept of woman's nature, and her philosophy became overshadowed by a "feminine" view of reform committed only to enlarging the separate female sphere. Yet lack of response to her radicalism does not diminish her significance.

Gilman made a unique contribution to feminism through her humanist approach to woman's status. Unlike most reformers who treated female inequality as a class issue, she interpreted

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[12]The terms "conservative" and "radical" describing feminists are used as they are defined in Chapter I, pp. 14-15.

it as a social issue involving every human interest. Her philosophical arguments in support of women's rights provided intellectual perspective to the efforts of feminists working for specific reforms. Her advocacy of female independence represented a logical extension of America's course of action set forth in 1776, the dismantling of a sexual hierarchy being a prerequisite to establishing "liberty and justice for all." Finally, Gilman's own life contributed a model of human autonomy.

Gilman was a prophetic figure in the woman's movement, one widely known and read but one whose time had not yet come. Her place in feminist history is that of a "forerunner," her own self-description. The emergence of a neo-feminist movement in the 1960's vindicates her radical stance and underscores the necessity of reexamining stereotyped definitions of the nature of woman.

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