

‘ [...] there remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house’

John Stuart Mill *The Subjection of Women*

The situation of women in Victorian Era may be compared with a limitation of sorts – as if they were closed in a golden cage. Married middle-class women might lead a nice and easy life. But, is it enough to be happy and lead a good life? Ethical stance known as utilitarianism, in its classical version might meet with this kind of criticism. If it is all about pleasurable sensations, is it anything wrong in real inequalities between people, for example between women and men? Victorian women might have been satisfied, but they still faced real limitations.

I suppose that this kind of classical utilitarianism, which defines happiness in terms of subjective pleasure has weak grounds to defend the conception of justice which takes into account equality between women and men. John Stuart Mill overcomes this riddle by including perfectionism into his version of utilitarianism. Those perfectionist motives emphasize the importance of developing of our generic human capacities and most admirable character traits for our good life.

JS Mill’s philosophy has its proponents and opponents. Critics point out inconsistent consequences of his theories in particular. The relation between his ethical theory and liberal feminism is also met with criticism. Yet, after taking a closer look, we may reconcile them with each other.

In this project I plan to solve the problem of the place of equality in JS Mill’s utilitarianism. For this purpose I will take a few steps: (1) I will reconstruct his conception of human nature; (2) I will present a stance unifying a hedonist and perfectionist threads in his utilitarianism; (3) I will reconstruct a few stances of opponents and proponents of his conception of justice and I will explain, why gender equality is of great importance in this theory; (4) I will defend his stance on liberal feminism against typical critics; (5) I will emphasize, that his practical demands are still up to date and I will show, that they may be ‘translated’ into fields of relevant current philosophical, social, political, legal, and bioethical problems.

In the Anglophone world JS Mill’s philosophy has been analysed in many works and his liberal conception is included into the canon of political philosophy. Mill is leading author of classical liberalism and liberal feminism – how often being the subject of harsh criticism in many discussions.

My research may shed a new light on still insufficiently explored relation between JS Mill’s ethical theory and his liberal feminism. Furthermore, I examine the place of equality in JS Mill’s utilitarianism, because I am convinced, that there is a need to have a closer look into the problem of perfectionist threads in his utilitarianism. As a result I will develop a reading including gender equality into his ethical theory. Defence of JS Mill’s liberal feminism against some critics might be an additional value. I will propose – in a way that gives a solid ground to his theory – incorporation of capabilities of care and physical/ sensual aspect of a human nature into his concept of liberal feminism, what will complement the intellectual dimension of his perfectionism.

The results of my research will be of great merit to development of research in the field of philosophy, feminism and gender studies. Moreover, an additional asset of my research will be analysing of a historical context of Victorian Era, and analysis of the human mind and emerging new science of psychology in particular.

The problem of the correctly defined and justified place of equality in JS Mill’s utilitarianism, even though usually discussed on the ground of philosophy, is of major importance for other disciplines and for economic and social problems of the modern world.