

Free essay on the subjection of women

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John Stuart Mill argues that there should be an equality of the sexes in his essay. The fundamental thesis of the essay is that the subordination of one gender to the other sex is wrong, and by extension an obstacle to the development of humanity. In light of this, Mill argues that this state of affairs should be changed and same opportunities given to both sexes. Key to this argument is John Stuart Mill's conviction that the moral and intellectual advancement of humanity would result in greater happiness for all. Though he does not quite explain what he means by happiness, he asserted human pleasures can be divided into two categories; pleasures of the intellect and pleasures of the pleasures of the senses (Perry &, Bratman, 2012). Mill argues that the treatment of women as parties of lower status in marriage, in politics, in employment and in the society in general is wrong, and indicative of underlying problems with society, and particularly with men. Mill argues that this state of affairs needs to change to one where women have equal opportunities with men in politics and in employment, and where women are equal parties in marriages. Mill argues such a change would not only correct what he considers a moral wrong, but would also facilitate a positive development of the society, both economically and socially. In this paper, my argument will be in support of the proposals that John Stuart Mill made on the emancipation of women from societal yokes of inequality. I will argue that gender equality does indeed result in a more developed society and is beneficial to both genders in the long term. I will also analyze the current status of women against the proposals that Mill presented in his paper, and evaluate the effectiveness of these proposals to bring positive change to society (Perry &, Bratman, 2012).

The arguments and conclusions made by Mill in “ The Subjection of Women” were deemed controversial when he made them in mid nineteenth century. At that time, the notion of gender equality was a controversial one in a European society was very patriarchal. Developments since that period to date have seen changes in line with the changes that Mill was proposing; women gained voting rights, the right to divorce their husbands, the right to participate in politics, the right to equal education as men and many other rights. Affirmative action has been implemented in many societies. Gender equality, though not achieved to the level that Mill envisioned in “ The Subjection of Women”, has registered progress especially in the last few decades. However, I feel that the society needs to institute more changes towards the achievement of equality of the sexes.

In his initial argument, Mill argues that it is wrong for the society to allow for one sex to be subordinate to the other. A closer look at the status of women in the world reveals that gender equality has been achieved in only some parts of the world. In many regions of the globe, women are still subject to control by men, and their participation in education, politics, employment and their status in marriage is still not accepted. A good example of such a region would be Saudi Arabia where women are not even allowed to drive without male supervision. This means that equality of the sexes has not been achieved. Going by Mill’s argument that the society would be better off development-wise, these societies would be underdeveloped than those that have embraced equality of the sexes. However, this is not the case, and some of the societies (nations) that still have women in subjection have registered substantial economic development. Though I fully agree with Mill’s

assertion for gender equality, I do not quite agree with his proposition that gender equality is principal to the development of a society economically and socially.

On the argument that society would be happier if equality of the sexes was achieved, cannot offer an opinion since Mill did not make a definition of happiness. Happiness, he argued, would result if human beings could enjoy both pleasures of the intellect and those of the senses. It is very difficult to measure happiness, and whether or not the society is happier as a result of gender equality is indeterminable.

At the time Mill was proposing that equality of the sexes to be a recipe for economic and social development, England was undergoing the Industrial revolution. This was a period of rapid economic growth that was happening in a society where women were not being afforded equal opportunities in employment, education and politics. There were laws in that society that actively made women subject to the control of men in the family and in politics, yet development was occurring anyway. This is evidence that gender equality is not requisite for a society's economic development.

I concur with Mill's argument that women should have equal rights in marriage. Mill argues that women's position in marriage at that time was akin to slavery, where there was no choice for the woman. A woman could not remain unmarried, and when she did, she was under the control of her husband and could not divorce him. Mill argued for a change in laws so that women could institute divorce, work outside homes and inherit property. These changes occurred decades after Mill made known his opinions. As a result, women were able to participate more in commerce and politics. The

effect of this change is that evidence that Mill's proposal on some of the changes in society as a result of gender equality were true. Mill argued that men's assertion that women were weaker than men and their abilities were lower were not true because women were simply not given the opportunity to prove otherwise. Women have since established themselves as capable leaders in business and politics. Many of the stereotypes that were used to subject women have since been proven wrong as a result of change in marriage laws and gender equality. Mill was correct in arguing that change of marriage laws and facilitating equality of the sexes would prove that women were not weaker than men, especially in terms of thinking capacity. Equality of the sexes has not been achieved completely. Many of the current progressive political systems allow for the scrutiny of the people who seek elective posts. Most of this scrutiny is carried out by the media and does not follow any set laws. Women, in this case are still under subjection. Women receive more scrutiny than men in such circumstances. The society is also quick to pass adverse judgments on women in such cases than it does to men. This, in my view, is a continuation of the subjection that Mill was talking about in his paper.

In light of the arguments by mill in " The Subjection of Women", one can only ask if the society is a happier and better place now that inroads have been made in realizing equality of the sexes. The answer to that question is both yes and no. Gender equality has illustrated clearly the loss that society had been subjecting itself to since women have proved an ability to make positive contribution to the development of the society equal to that made by men. The society is indeed better with contributions of women who are

not subject to stereotyped control by men. Affirmative action has also brought other unforeseen problems. With focus being on the liberalization of the woman, men have to some extent been ignored. I feel that women hold better chances of success in society than men because there are safeguards in place to protect them from subjection. Such protections are not available to men, and this cannot be considered as equality of the sexes.

Mills arguments were valid, and as the developments over time have shown, equality of the sexes has had a positive impact on the development of the society. However, some aspects of his arguments, as explained in this paper are not true or simply cannot be verified in the passage of time. Changes in the laws that govern the relationship between men and women over time have in effect affirmed the proposals suggested by Mill in “ Subjection of Women”. Women have more rights and freedoms, and the effects on the society have been overwhelmingly positive.

References

Perry, J. & Bratman, M. (2012). Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.