Why Friendship?

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Marisol Alhena Brito

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Sarah Holtman

December 2014

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive.
— Anais Nin

Introduction

John Stuart Mill: Giving friendship a central role

Why Friendship? Because it is overlooked, undervalued, under imagined, under supported, and deeply valuable to our wellbeing and development.

Amongst social and political philosophers, discussions of human wellbeing and development often focus on either the individual or society. Of course, these discussions naturally interrelate, and it is not unusual to find them in conversation with one another. For example, a certain account of rights of the individual might culminate in a call for certain obligations of society. However, the story that results is still a story with only two leading roles: the individual and society. In the story, the actors often have a fraught but dependent relationship: needing one another while all the while searching for their independence. They make sacrifices to be together. In the end, so the story goes, the benefits of their relationship usually outweigh the cost. This dualistic story of human wellbeing is an old story, an important story, and an often retold story. But, it is not the only story.

Some years ago, I was inspired to question the story of "The Individual and Society" when I was struck by the importance John Stuart Mill places on friendship in marriage (aka *marital friendship*) in *The Subjection of Women*. Amidst incendiary, but now familiar, cries for improvements in women's education and the dismantling of sexist and repressive marriage laws, Mill calls for the necessity of friendship between spouses.

This call to recognize friendship's place in righting the ills of the marriage relationship was unique among Mill's contemporaries, and is still relevant today. It is especially intriguing and fruitful to examine the broader implications of Mill's work, moving beyond marriage to imagine potential roles for friendship in contemporary times.

Moreover, understanding the importance Mill places on friendship in *The Subjection of Women* offers a new lens through which to view his wider cannon. The result, captured here, is both a call for the importance of friendship to human wellbeing and development, and a Millian influenced account of human wellbeing and development. In this account, personal relationships, such as friendship jump into the story of "The Individual and Society" and take on an additional leading role, adding a third player and a new narrative into the mix.

This new tripartite story of wellbeing and development is not meant to be the end all be-all account of human life, nor is it meant to replace all stories that have have come before it.[1] However, when friendship is held as central to individual wellbeing and development, several important and informative notions come to the foreground. Among other things, a focus on the importance of friendship highlights: individual wellbeing and development as tied to the wellbeing and development of others; wellbeing and development as importantly different from gaining societal power; and the value and importance of supporting a diverse range of interpersonal relationships in society.

Friendship as a position of epistemic advantage

In her TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Adichie introduces the existence and problematic nature of what she calls the single story. According to Adichie, humans are both "impressionable and vulnerable" to stories and narratives that surround their lives. This is particularly true of single stories, stories that are dominant in one's life or in society, but that present a narrow view of a complex situation. While single stories may have elements of reality behind them, or in fact be genuine in their own right, they are dangerous because of their ability to overshadow other elements of a broader situation — to stand as *the* story rather than as *a* story. When single stories are adopted as the only story, they can create and perpetuate stereotypes — one dimensional understandings that can harmfully or falsely shape our understanding of ourselves, others, and our actions in the world. In Adichie's own words:

> The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story (Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*).

For example, Adichie discusses the influence and ignorance of the common western story of Africa, a narrative that homogenizes an entire continent, encouraging pity for Africans, and the belief that Africans can do little more than passively "wait to be saved" by white strangers. Adichie blames the wide adoption of this view on the western

[1] Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum, and others have discussed friendship as a potential human good. However, viewing friendship as one good among many may cloud its potential, or at least reveal different (though perhaps complimentary) strengths, than an exercise in which friendship is able to take a central role.

media's perpetuation of the story, and on Westerners' lack of exposure to other stories of, and from, Africa:

> If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner (Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*).

The single story of pity for Africa perpetuates more than just naivety. The single story holds those in its power in a place of stereotyped ignorance, one in which meaningful, genuine, and effective interaction with Africa and Africans is difficult to achieve. While under the influence of the story of pity, westerners can only engage with an essentialized and otherwise false version of what it is to be African, and further, can adopt a mistaken understanding of their own role/identity in relation to Africa and anyone from the myriad cultures and places within Africa that they might encounter. Further, rather than engaging as equals, the westerner may engage in a paternalistic way, perhaps as a caretaker, educator, benefactor, or in other ways superior person. In this way the single story can damage not only our view of others, but our view of ourselves as well. Adichie writes:

> I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or person without engaging with all of the stories of that place or person. The consequence

> of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*).

Interpreting Adichie for my own purposes, I understand single stories to inhabit our lives in at least two ways: on a societal level and a personal level. On a societal level, these stories permeate our culture or sub-cultures, become our customs and assumptions, and in some cases are mistaken for *the* way things are rather than simply *a* way that things can be. In other cases, single stories are invisible, or hover on the edge of our peripheral vision, silently influencing our thinking and actions without our conscious awareness of their influence. On a personal level, each of us has a single story of the world as viewed through our own thoughts and experiences. Our lives are experienced in the context of certain bodies, times, places and circumstances. In combination, our personal experiences give us a lens, our own single story, through which we view the world. Though this lens can include complexity, there are ways in which our lens cannot be other than a single story. We necessarily experience the world as the persons the world perceives us to be. In this way we have both a limitation and an advantage. We cannot experience the world as a person other than ourselves, yet we also have the epistemic advantage of experiencing the world as ourselves in a way that others cannot. We have our own single story, each and every one of us. Put another way, we each have a story of the world that is shaped deeply through the world's reaction to us — our physical appearance, our way of speaking or interacting, etc.

Of course, societal and personal stories necessarily interact, sometimes challenging and sometimes reinforcing one another. For example, I grew-up a block from a police station, and was surrounded by a strong societal story that police officers belong to a helping profession, supporting public safety and wellbeing. I recall that in elementary school, I was told that if I felt unsafe I could talk to "a teacher, a police officer, or someone else [I] could trust." On a personal level, despite living only a block from the station, I had few interactions with the police, and those I had were either neutral or positive. It follows that I could easily hold a positive view of the police. However, while this rosy impression has roots in my real experience, it would be a mistake to universalize these experiences, despite their agreement with the societal stories with which I was familiar.

While I was teaching in a low-income neighborhood, my students shared many stories with me that painted a very different picture of the police, what it meant to encounter a police officer, and how it felt to have a police presence in one's neighborhood. In fact, as I built relationships with my students and learned more about their lives, it became increasingly evident that their societal stories differed from my own.

In either case, mine or my students', moving from our particular experience of police to a universal understanding of police would fail to take into account the complexity of the world in which we live, including strong socio-economic influences, racial privilege, and a host of other factors that influenced our experiences without our even realizing it. As Adichie posits, the danger of single stories is not that they are untrue

— the worry is not that our experiences are unreal, but that on their own they are incomplete. Neither my experiences, nor my students' experiences, should be mistaken for universal truths. Rather, we can only move toward truth when we recognize a complex and intricate combination of stories within a complex and historical societal frame.

In the face of single stories, Adichie calls out the importance of alternate stories. Much as the difference between my own story and my students' story illuminated complexity, alternate stories are important because having multiple stories of a person, people or place can help us to avoid the trap of the single story by demanding that we begin to engage the complexity of the real, never simply one-dimensional, world.

Perhaps because she is a novelist and storyteller, Adichie suggests diverse authorship as one way to challenge the single story, and I wholeheartedly agree that we can benefit greatly from shows, articles, novels and other works that include and disseminate a diversity of voices. In fact, I will go so far as to claim that supporting and seeking out such work is a morally rich act.

However, I borrow Adichie's notion of the single story to introduce the importance of personal relationships, namely friendship, in challenging single stories. Friendship offers a unique venue for personal connection with others. Our care for our friends, in combination with our sharing of personal thoughts and experiences gives us a window into one another's lives and a strong sense of care for what we see through that window. In this way, the understanding and care we develop in our friendships can affect our own world view. Through friendship, we can broaden our lens by layering,

refocusing, and expanding our own lens in combination with the lenses of those we are close to. Put another way, friendship allows us to share our single stories with others. Friendship, can be a way to challenge the limitations of our own experience, and, in combining our experience with others, to gain a kind of epistemic advantage that allows us to see beyond our own single story and to recognize and engage with the complexity of societal stories that surround us.

However, though friendship has incredible potential, what friendship is, and when it can contribute to the kind of epistemic advantage mentioned above, deserves further discussion, discussion it will receive in the chapters that follow. To begin, it is important to note that I am particularly interested in examining the potential of fostering friendships between persons who have diverse life experiences. If we see value in challenging our single story, and broadening our lens, it follows that stories that are similar to our own, and lenses that are similarly focused, will present less of a challenge to our current worldview. In fact, we could worry that only engaging with similar stories will hyper-focus rather than broaden our lens, and correspondingly limit our worldview. By engaging only with those whose stories are like our own, we run the risk of reinforcing our single story, of accepting *a* truth as *the* truth for all. But, if we can find ways to build friendships with those whose life experiences are different from our own, we have an opportunity to grow. To return to the work with Mill that I've outlined above, by adding Friendship to the story of "The Individual and Society," we add a new way to challenge personal and societal stories — a way that can add nuance and complexity and, in doing so, support our potential for individual and societal growth.

Challenges to friendship

Friendship may sound like a relatively simple prescription for growth, but unfortunately, there are many challenges and obstacles to forming friendships between persons who have different life experiences. Further, such obstacles are often so societally entrenched and normalized that they are difficult for us to recognize. In this work, both to illuminate the value of friendship and the challenges that can exist to forming friendships I will look at a particular case of friendship that I have labeled "cross-gender friendship." This case will explore the potential of friendships between persons primarily identified by society as female and persons primarily identified by society as male. Of course, this case study is not meant to capture all of the myriad friendship combinations that might have value, and, as they read, I ask readers to hold in mind the potential implications the work has for any friendship between persons who have different life experiences.

I have chosen to examine cross-gender friendship for many reasons, including the value such friendships have had in my own life, and the pervasive nature of the limitations our society places on such friendships. Further, exploring cross-gender friendship is a natural and important extension of Mill's work. In *The Subjection of Women* Mill offers a type of cross-gender friendship, friendship between spouses, as a means to challenge and change the society in which he lived.[2] Work with Mill, and work

[2] In Victorian England marriage was limited to "opposite" sex spouses, thus in discussing "marital friendship" Mill was explicitly discussing a type cross-gender friendship.

reflecting on contemporary society, will reveal that friendship is a valuable means to challenge single stories and support individual and societal growth. However, such reflections will also reveal that friendship can suffer and be hindered by societal stories. In the following sections I will discuss challenges to developing and nurturing cross-gender friendships.

Challenging an old adage: Can we really pick our friends?

I've come to believe that one of the most dangerous things for human beings may be an inability to imagine that things can be other than they are. This kind of failure of imagination presents a challenge to cross-gender friendship, and other forms of friendship, that are not currently widely practiced in, nor supported by, our society. One danger of this failure of imagination is that we may not realize that our choices are limited, and experience a sense of freedom around areas of life that are in fact quite socially constructed. To borrow Adichie's theory, we can think of current societal norms and practices as single stories of how to live, stories that are so normalized and ingrained in our day to day life it can be difficult to even recognize their existence.

Thoreau captures this concern well in the first chapter of Walden. In the chapter, he warns us that sometimes what we experience as genuine choice and agency is, in fact, an illusion. As we go through the day-to-day movements of life it is all too easy to feel that we have actively chosen those movements. Further, we can feel that the way we live is *the* way to live—if perhaps not ideal—it is, at least, what life is. Thoreau writes:

> [It] appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left… It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What every body echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood to-morrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields (Thoreau, *Walden* 10).

However, if we can find a way to step back from societal narratives, we can see that the way we live is not *the* way to live, it is simply *a* way to live. Moreover, very often we have not actively chosen a great deal of what we accept as our way of living, despite the illusion of our day-to-day freedom. As Thoreau suggests, to find a richer freedom, we must find ways to see and challenge our prejudices, habits, and ideals. For, even what seems to be the most solid truth may turn out to be merely the product of opinion.

I chose to include Thoreau's words because they capture a concern that pairs well with Adichie's work—that we are living amongst an alarming and potentially destructive lack of freedom, or unfreedom, that we rarely recognize and often inadvertently reinforce. Regarding cross-gender friendship, we can recognize that we appear to have, and experience that we do have, the ability to choose our friends freely. However, as I will outline in the following sections, there are in fact many challenges to imagining, forming and maintaining cross-gender friendships.

Unfreedom surrounding cross-gender friendship, or other forms of friendship between persons with different life experiences, is particularly alarming if such

friendships are one of the important ways that we can and do grow as persons. If so, any limitations we place, intentionally or otherwise, upon friendship merit serious consideration and must duly take into account the value of such a relationship. If we can, as Thoreau might urge, begin to see and challenge limitations on friendship—if we can start to imagine that things can be otherwise— then we will be one step closer to a richer kind of freedom and closer to exciting personal and societal growth as well.

Companion Gardening: a tree of friendship, nurtured individuals, thriving society

An analogy may be useful here. Imagine a companion garden, one in which the plants are chosen to support and be supported by the other plants. In the middle of the garden a thriving tree provides much needed shade to the lush and beautiful plants around it. In the fall, the fruit of the tree drops and nurtures the soil, feeding plants that in turn enrich the soil and nurture the tree's roots. How did the tree and the garden come to be? It is doubtful that they came about simply because there was nothing specifically forbidding them to grow—instead, many factors must come together to support their creation and maintenance. For example, a garden needs physical space, it needs soil, water, nutrients. It also needs mental space. It needs someone to imagine it, to see its possibility, to want it, to believe it is possible and to take action to create it. Such action is unlikely to be solely individual, as societal spaces, for example, zoning laws, a cultural investment in certain aesthetics, access to seeds, knowledge of how to care for plants could all come into play as well. In short, creating and maintaining a garden that can support such a tree is an effort that requires physical, psychological, and social resources.

We can imagine creating and maintaining a friendship in a similar way. Imagine with me that as we move through life we navigate not just physical spaces but psychological and societal spaces as well. If we want to go in a certain direction in life, to choose a certain path, a non-physical barrier may be just as effective a deterrent as a physical one. A fallen log may block a path, but so might fear, judgement, belief, or even a failure of imagination. For example, in our own society there were times in which few young women, if any, would have imagined they could grow up to be doctors. And, in which a person identified as one race could scarcely imagine marrying a person identified as another. Now those spaces are more open. There may still be barriers, but we can see how changes in laws, attitudes, and the presence of living and past examples, among other things, have opened those spaces to the imagination of many. We can see spaces where a single story has been replaced by a multitude of voices and space has opened. Further, when a friendship is allowed to grow, we can imagine that it, like the tree in the garden, can support the individuals and the societies it engages. We might represent such a garden with the following image:

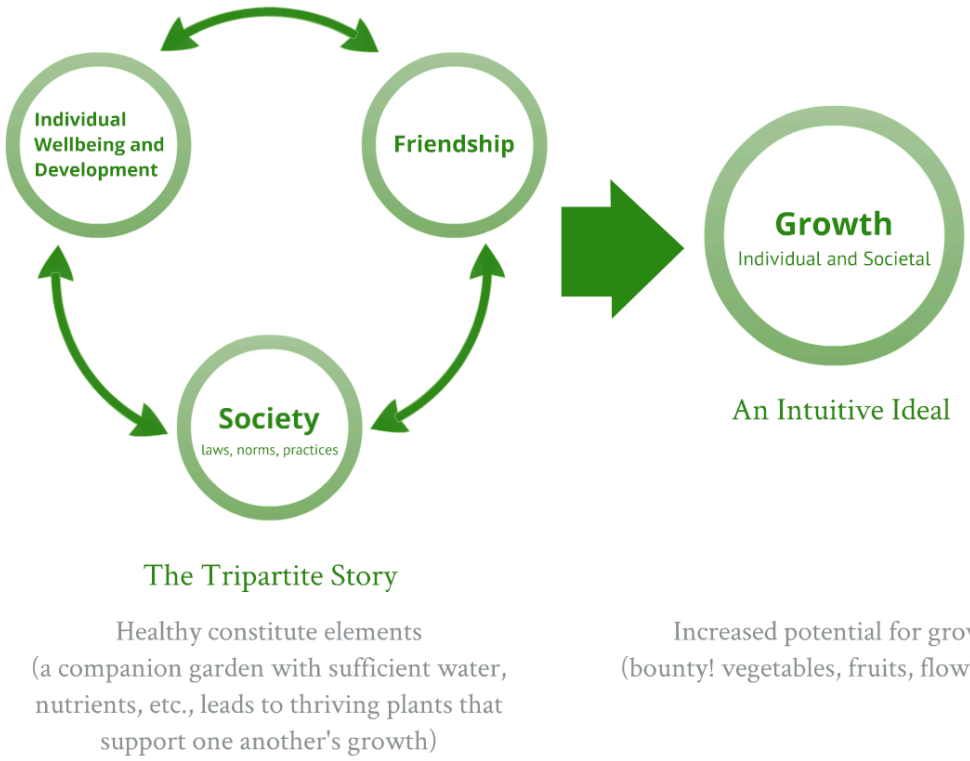

Figure I-1

As we go through this work I am hoping we can ask ourselves whether there are spaces, like our garden, that can support cross-gender friendships in our lives. Are such friendships something we can imagine? Something we can think to want? Are they something we can conceive of actually trying to pursue? Are they something that we might have good reason to value and wish to have space to nurture in our lives? If so, more questions follow. What kind of space do two people need to make a connection that they value enough to call it a friendship? What limits space for friendship in our society and are those limitations there for good reason? Are there, in a sense, fallen trees blocking paths toward cross-gender friendships? Fears, judgements, beliefs, failures of imagination? How could nurturing such friendships in turn nurture our broader lives?

As Adichie and Thoreau both point out, the repercussions of limited space can be dire. Yet, there are currently strong social barriers that impede us from imagining, valuing and pursuing cross-gender friendships and also from supporting others to do so. Finding ways to dismantle these barriers will be necessary if we are going to claim genuine space for cross-gender friendship. Additionally, we will need to engage in practices that support such spaces.

Further, it is worth noting that tolerating the growth of a few plants is not the same as cultivating rich soil. Allowing persons who somehow manage to imagine for themselves something different than what is usual is not the same as providing genuine space for all to pursue such a life. Acknowledging, or tolerating, some cross-gender friendships in our society is not the same as supporting and valuing cross-gender friendship. What we can imagine for ourselves, what we can imagine for others—those things need not only abstract freedom, but substantive freedom—they need nutritive space in which to grow.[3]

Cross-gender friendship is currently under-supported in our society, and further, it is something that we have compelling reasons to value. By examining our current practices with a critical eye, we will see not only the value of cross-gender friendship, but also begin to imagine how space can and should be created to nurture it.

"Cross-Gender Friendship"

[3] For a more in depth discussion of positive freedom v. negative freedom one can look to Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* or Isaiah Berlin's "Two Kinds of Liberty".

Current terminologies and constructs prevalent in our society combine to leave little room for finding a phrase that aptly characterizes the type of human relationship that is the primary subject of this project. After much thought, I have settled on ‘cross-gender friendship’ and it is important to explain the thinking that led me to choose this particular project and this terminology.

This work responds to, engages with, and in many ways challenges, pervasive societal narratives, including, among others, heteronormativity and binary sex and gender. The effects of these narratives are pervasive and powerful — so much so that it is difficult to find words to communicate clearly without inadvertently supporting them. Try, for example, to discuss a person for any length of time without using a gendered pronoun. Or, to find movies, television shows, or children’s stories that do not reinforce the heteronormative narrative that women and men are destined to desire or form romantic and sexual relationships with one member of the “opposite” sex. Or, that present something other than romance and sex as the foci of our relationships with our sexual opposites.

Thus, to tease out a meaningful phrase for a phenomenon that both engages with and challenges heteronormativity and binary sex and gender is problematic. What words are appropriate for something that, if fully explored, could subsequently make those very words start to feel archaic and meaningless—or at least result in an 'unraveling' of the very terminology being employed? The challenge then, is to find words that recognize the existence and power of societal narratives, including heteronormativity and binary gender, and their *very real effects* on the lives of members of our society, while still

presenting the narratives for what they are: constructed realities rather than non-negotiable or unchangeable empirical realities.

One complexity of these narratives is that, as societal stories, they become real because they affect the way we experience our realities. Whether we are watching *When Harry Met Sally*, following the adventures of nearly every Disney princess, preparing a Homecoming Float, or "joking" about the flirtation and future marriage of our toddlers, these stories are present. Further, persons born in bodies perceived as female and persons born in bodies perceived as male are treated in significantly different ways in contemporary society and thus their lived experiences are affected in very real ways by the binary narrative of sex and gender[4]. A person's biological sex at birth begins and perpetuates a societal construction of the person as one of two things: female or male. While inherent biological differences continue to be debated, anyone who has experienced the confusion of being unexpectedly perceived of and treated as the "other" sex, or experienced the confusion people exhibit when faced with a person they cannot easily categorize as female or male, has caught a glimpse of the force of these stories. Unless one finds reason to push against the stories, sex and gender are widely perceived as one and the same human experience.

Thus these stories, for most, become our reality — they become *the* way life is. In doing so, these societal stories close space for genuinely imagining friendship between women and men as they provide pre-written scripts instead of genuine space for individuals to imagine what may be valuable to them. At the same time, binary sex and

gender set up persons with bodies perceived as female and persons with bodies perceived as male as opposites and reinforce a gap or disparity in the experiences of those perceived as female and those perceived as male. Thus, the term 'cross-gender friendship' may be useful in its ability to both recognize existing narratives and, partly through doing so, to open up language and imaginative space to explore bridging or crossing the experiential gap we create in relation to gender, and to examine possibilities of being in relationship with others beyond those that the current pervasive societal stories might lead us to expect.

I do not mean to imply that a world in which the concept cross-gender friendship is understandable and useful is the world exactly as it ought to be. I am interested in and often personally identify with sub-cultures that challenge dominant societal narratives, including those of heteronormativity, binary sex, and corresponding notions of binary gender performance. Relatedly, I chose to use 'gender' rather than 'sex' throughout this project in the hopes of encompassing to some extent the experiences of persons identified at birth as one biological sex who self-present and/or identify as another. Thus, my phrase 'cross-gender friendship' can refer to friendship between any person in society who is mainly identified and treated by society as female and any other person who is mainly identified and treated by society as male, regardless of their biological make-up. In addition, because I am so often writing in relation to the dominant binary narrative, at

[4] For example, among many possible sources, one can look to Lise Eliot's *Pink Brain Blue Brain* for an in depth discussion on the effects of contemporary practices surrounding sex and gender on children's development.

present I have chosen to retain the use of she/he, female/male, and woman/women/man/men for the majority of this work.[5]

However, my hope is that in calling attention to 'cross-gender friendship' and the societal narratives it engages, I will open room for alternative narratives rather than alienate any who have experienced or carved out alternate stories. As I stated above, in many ways this project is about space — recognizing when spaces are closed in our lives and exploring ways we might open them. In fact, though it is not the focus of this work, I strongly believe that those who challenge the binary notion of gender, those whose lives push against the heteronormative story, are among those who are best positioned to recognize the ways in which those narratives close spaces in our society, and also whose lives may do substantial work to open those spaces.

This idea is not mine alone. The idea that one is in an epistemically advantaged position to see societal narratives when aspects of one's being does not fit easily into those narratives has often been drawn upon in work on race and feminist theories.[6] We are constantly immersed in such patterns, and while it may be tempting to claim that we can live outside of them (e.g. attempts to claim or practice colorblindness) that is rarely, if ever the case. In that vein, a genderqueer friend of mine, Ray, reminded me of something I would like to ask my readers to hold. In thinking on how persons whose lives do not easily fit within the dominant narratives might engage with this project, Ray asked me to remember, "Gender is not a moment, not a single decision. We live out gender in micro moments, gender depends on who we are with, where we are, what we are

[5] I am open to and eager to receive suggestions and feedback on this choice and possible alternatives.

thinking." I take Ray's thoughts as a reminder that all persons, even those whose lives do not easily fit within the dominant narratives, are constantly engaging them.[7] We all live in them, and into them, or against them, with every breath we take. We are constantly faced with choices — but how present they are to us very much depends on whether or not we, or some outside force, call those choices to attention. It is my hope that the work that follows helps to draw your attention, at least a bit, to places it might not usually rest.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that, while all I have said above holds with my own beliefs, I also hope that 'cross-gender friendship' is a concept that is accessible to readers who come to this work from a more strongly heteronormative perspective and/or with a more strongly binary understanding of gender. I very much hope that they too - if not alienated by this interlude - may engage with this project as well.

What Constitutes Friendship? — A Little Help from Aristotle

Before moving further it is worth recognizing that an exploration of space for cross-gender friendship will require some consensus on what counts as or constitutes friendship.

I want to begin with a recognition that our discussion is complicated by the fact that it is common to use the term "friendship" to describe more than one kind of relationship. While these relationships may, in fact, all be legitimate forms of friendship, it is

---

[6] The work of Gloria Anzaldua and James Baldwin have been particularly influential to me in this area.
[7] Personal Communication with Ray Van Fox, Chicago, IL, Summer 2013. Ray's work on gender identity can be found numerous places online, including rayvanfax.com

important to recognize that space for one, or two, or more incarnations of friendship does not necessarily mean there is space for all.

To get at this idea it may be helpful to borrow from Aristotle. The idea here is not that we must directly adopt Aristotle's understanding of friendship, but rather that his work will be useful to us in recognizing that we engage in various qualities and types of relationships under the heading of friendship.

Aristotle proposed that there are three kinds of friendship, which parallel three kinds of goods we can have reason to value in our lives: utility, pleasure and virtue. Correspondingly, the first kind of friendship he proposed is one of utility. It is a relationship with another that is in some way useful to us, and that is based mainly on that usefulness. For example, two young mothers may be friends because they can help one another care for their children. Such a relationship may be useful in that it makes their lives a bit easier, gives them time, perhaps, to run an errand that would have been more difficult with a child in tow.

The second kind of friendship he proposes is one of pleasure. It is a relationship that brings something enjoyable into our lives, and is based mainly on that enjoyment. For example, two people may enjoy playing chess, and may spend time together playing or discussing the game because they find such activities enjoyable. Friendships of utility and pleasure, while valuable in their own right, are considered somewhat fickle, for they are contingent on a desire or need for the utility or pleasure that is connected to them. The children may grow up, one's interest in chess may fade, and with those changes the friendship may fade as well. This is because the friendship is not rooted in a connection

or affection for the person herself, but rather in what use or pleasure the relationship offers our lives - when the use or pleasure is no longer present or desired, the relationship fades. Aristotle writes:

> Those who love for utility and pleasure ... are fond of a friend because of what is good or pleasant for themselves, not insofar as the beloved is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant. Hence these friendships as well [as the friends] are coincidental, since the beloved is loved not so far as he is who he is, but insofar as he provides some good or pleasure.
>
> And so these sorts of friendships are easily dissolved, when the friends do not remain similar [to what they were] for if someone is no longer pleasant or useful, the other stops loving him (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1156a1023).

However, for Aristotle there is an additional kind of friendship that is more enduring - one of virtue. Such a friendship is a relationship with another person based on a mutual recognition of the value or virtue of the other person in the relationship, not the utility or pleasure the other person brings, but an appreciation of the person herself. Aristotle describes this type of connection as a *complete* friendship, one in which the members of the friendship care for one another is based not on something external, but on

valuing the person for who she or he is.[8] As such, virtue friendship is a more enduring friendship that will only be dissolved if one of the friends is to change in a substantial way. Aristotle writes:

> Now those who wish goods to their friend for their friend's own sake are friends most of all; for they have this attitude because of the friend himself, not coincidentally. Hence these friendships last as long as they are good, and virtue is enduring (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1156b7-11).

In common language, we may perhaps think of this kind of friend as a *best friend*, or may describe said person as one of our closest friends.

Again, I bring up Aristotle not to claim that there are indeed three specific categories of friendship, but rather to introduce the idea that there are different relationships in our lives that we might refer to as friendship. When we are examining space for friendship between women and men we should keep in mind that room for one kind of friendship, particularly a lesser, less enduring kind of friendship, does not constitute true societal space for friendship between women and men. We would be mistaken, for example, to say that women and men who are co-workers can have utility-esque friendships and therefore women and men can be friends *quod erat*

[8] Interestingly, somewhat like Mill, Aristotle writes that friends will be similar "... complete friendship is the friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other insofar as they are good in their own right. [Hence they wish goods to each other for each other's own sake.]" In this way my work may diverge from Mill and Aristotle, as it focuses particularly on supporting and building friendship across difference.

demonstrandum. We want, instead, to recognize that different kinds of spaces may be needed to support different kinds of friendship. That is, sufficient conditions for one kind of friendship may not support another. And, a true substantive freedom for friendship between women and men would support myriad kinds of friendship we can recognize and envision. These myriad types need not be Aristotle's, but it is important to recognize that we often use friendship as a catch-all term and we must be mindful that we are richly understanding friendship when we examine the freedoms and unfreedoms that surround it.

Further, we can keep in mind that the kind of friendship we are looking for is one that can help us to grow by supporting our understanding of the world with that of another person. As we will discuss further, there is good reason to believe that such a friendship will be dependent upon a certain level of intimacy—one that can, among other things, support a deep level of care and the exchange of personal stories and personal experiences.

Encumbering v. Empowering Stories

At this point, I would like to briefly respond to two potential objections. First, that my work may be perceived as paternalistic—telling others they have been brainwashed by societal stories and don't know what's good for them, but *I* do! Second, that there may be good reasons for society to hold the stories and related practices that it does.

Regarding the first concern, I do not wish to dictate to anyone how to identify in regards to gender/sex or who to be friends with or how to relate to their friends or any

such thing. However, I do want to call attention to reasons we feel or believe we have rich freedom around certain choices, when in fact, we do not. The aim here is to open space, not force a particular outcome.

With that in mind, we can move to the second concern. We might ask: Isn't it possible that society closes space with good intentions? Yes, but good intentions are not always backed by good reasons and I would like to draw attention to the fact that we sometimes close spaces out of fear or ignorance. For example, one might argue that we close space for cross-gender friendships to protect our deeply valued romantic relationships. However, the blanket decision to close space for cross-gender friendship to protect romantic relationships overlooks many factors, including the heteronormative assumptions behind this practice, the value cross-gender relationships might offer in and of themselves, or even the role that cross-gender friendships might play in developing our ability to choose healthy romantic partnerships.

Perhaps it may be helpful to imagine our relationship to societal stories—attitudes and practices that surround us—as taking on two possible roles: encumbering or empowering. When a story is held in society in such a way that it hinders us from imagining other possibilities, or evaluating whether other possibilities can work for us, that story is encumbering— it is a story that closes off space. Instead, we can hope for an empowering relationship to stories, one that allows us to see the stories at hand, yet encourages us to imagine other possibilities, or evaluate whether or not those possibilities can work for us—those are stories that open space.

Many of the stories our society currently holds surrounding friendship between women and men are encumbering narratives—they are held as *the* truth and they do not allow room for examination, imagination, or divergent views. If we carefully examine our lives we will see various ways that such friendships are limited—including limitations on our very ability to imagine that life could be otherwise. Our relationship to these societal stories hinders our ability to imagine, choose, and pursue a life that includes cross-gender friendship in ways that could be deeply meaningful to our growth as individuals and as a society.

Practice Challenging Narratives

We'll spend a great deal of time talking about friendship as a rich way to challenge societal stories, but as Adichie pointed out, stories themselves can be another way to examine our current views and practices. One useful way to begin to see and challenge narratives that may be difficult for us to recognize and question is to reframe the stories, and messages that surround the narrative in question, in a new light. One way to accomplish this is to change the content or subject matter just enough that the narrative is no longer familiar to us. Of course, this can present us only with an analogy, which will of course not map perfectly onto the original. But, if we are careful to take the questions raised without conflating or equating the subjects of the analogy, a shift in content can be helpful.

With this in mind I have created the narrative below, titled *Green & Orange*. In *Green & Orange* I use discussions of height to aid in viewing our standard practices around gender and sex through a new lens—and hopefully to, somewhat humorously,

challenge some of the dominant societal stories we hold around childhood, adolescence, and their trajectory toward heterosexual romantic relationships in adulthood.

Green & Orange

Imagine there is a town—maybe even a province or a state—very much like your own. People go about their lives, drive their cars, ride buses, bike when the weather holds, much like you do. Many of the adults work. Children go to school. They even have some of the same stores, familiar names you pass every day. But, there is a difference. Perhaps you will think it a small one. In this province — yes, let's call it a province — inside those very same stores, you will find sections of children's clothes, all green, conveniently separated by an aisle from tiny orange clothes. If you look carefully, you'll see other differences: many of the green clothes have pictures of trees or circles, while many of the orange clothes have pictures of houses or triangles. This is because everyone knows that tall children love green and trees and circles, while short children prefer the color orange, houses, and triangles. Most people cannot explain why. It seems to be something one just knows. Occasionally someone might venture an explanation, "green is just such a tall color." Anyway, it is evident, isn't it? If you look around you'll see that all, or mostly all, tall children wear green and choose to play with green things. At school, they doodle trees and circles. They might even cry, say, if their favorite green circle shirt is lost.

It makes sense then, that if you find you are having a tall child — and with technology available in the province you can often find out before the child is even born

— you would paint the child's room green and fill it with circles and trees and other things the child will love. Like all parents, you want what's best for your child.

You might read books to help you understand your tall child, learning that it will most likely love cooking, but have a need for rough play. On the playground, when a scuffle leads a tall child to tumble to the ground amidst a sea of other green clad children, someone might remark, "Oh, tall children will be tall children."

It is perhaps because of the rough play of tall children that tall and short children rarely play together. But then again perhaps it is simply because they aren't interested in similar things. Sometimes, amidst friends, people who have only short children will admit they are a bit disappointed, "Of course we love our short children more than anything—but we had always hoped we'd have an tall child—you know—to have both."

Occasionally a small figure in a orange jacket might carry a triangle over toward a group of tall children, but a well-meaning teacher will probably intervene, "Wouldn't you rather play with the other short children? Look at all of the triangles and houses they have!"

The teacher would not want the short child to get hurt.

As they get older, some people think it is easier to separate short and tall children in school. Their different interests and learning styles make it difficult to create an effective classroom for both sizes. And, of course, bathrooms and locker rooms are always separated. It is important for both safety and propriety that tall people and short people do not use the same toilet seats or see one another's unclothed bodies before marriage, or as

the progressive left might advocate, before they are ready to responsibly engage in monogamous sexual relationships.

As exciting as the attraction between the sizes can be, sometimes as adults, tall people and short people find they have difficulty relating. Magazines offer popular advice such as, "How to think like a tall person" and trusted tomes such as "Tall People are From Mars, Short People are From Venus" can provide guidance during these times. Further, the internet revolution offers new options for those who have trouble meeting the right tall or short person, as online dating sites can provide relief, for example, for older single tall people who lament, "It's just so hard to meet a good single short person. They're all taken!"

For those who are fortunate enough to find true love, the joys and challenges of living with the opposite size abound. The truly dedicated will find that if they stand by their tall person, or cherish their short person —if they can keep from the fickle temptations of straying toward others of the opposite size — they will know the richest and most rewarding happiness.[9]

Reflections on the Narrative

In the *Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill argues that, as we cannot view persons outside of society, we cannot view the natural state or qualities of women or men.

[9] Originally the analogy used in this short story was between race and gender, using "asian" and "white" in place of "tall" and "short". For this iteration of the work I steered away from using race as an analogy for gender due to concerns surrounding the historic appropriation and conflation of race in feminist work. However, while the tall/short analogy captures a sense of absurdity, I believe that it fails to capture the violence/wrongness of the situation in the same way. I will continue to reflect on this and may ultimately restore the race analogy in later work.

However, he believes we can usefully examine society to see if it contains elements that would support characteristics of the persons within it. He writes:

> We cannot isolate a human being from the circumstances of his condition, so as to ascertain experimentally what he would have been by nature; but we can consider what he is, and what his circumstances have been, and whether the one would have been capable of producing the other (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 65).

Following Mill, we might argue that we can't isolate people from society to identify natural behaviors of biological females or males, in fact, we can't even know if such behaviors exist. However, it certainly seems fair to say that our current practices around sex, gender, and friendship could have been produced by, and are constantly being reinforced by the society in which we live. So, though it may appear that we have deliberately chosen our common mode of living because we prefer it to any other, there is a real danger that we are simply failing to imagine that things can be otherwise. Our societal practices *do* affect our hearts and minds and it is important for us to recognize this influence and to decide for ourselves whether it is encumbering or empowering. For, as Thoreau emphasized, it is never too late to give up our prejudices. We may come right back around to decide that we wish things to be exactly as they are, but that will not have been a free choice until we have space to sincerely consider alternate ways of living. Let us examine, or reexamine, cross-gender friendship.

Chapter 1
The Value and Subjection of Friendship

Only after twelve years of dropping deeper and deeper into [research on vulnerability] did I finally understand the role it plays in our lives. Vulnerability is at the core, the heart, the center of meaningful human experiences.

This new information created a major dilemma for me personally: On the one hand, how can you talk about the importance of vulnerability in an honest and meaningful way without being vulnerable? On the other hand, how can you be vulnerable without sacrificing your legitimacy as a researcher? To be honest, I think emotional accessibility is a shame trigger for researchers and academics. Very early in our training, we are taught that a cool distance and inaccessibility contribute to prestige, and that if you're too relatable, your credentials will come into question - Brené Brown, Daring Greatly

Brené Brown's reflections on vulnerability and research hit home for me. Given that my choice to pursue this project and research were in many ways personally motivated, I have often wondered if I ought to include any of my own life in this work, and further, how I might do that in a way that felt appropriate to the project at hand. After much thought I decided it would be insincere, and also perhaps less effective, to entirely avoid the personal in this work. It is my hope that by including some personal experiences I will be able to more clearly convey motivations behind the questions I have chosen to engage with, and also some of the value cross-gender friendship has held in my own life.

To this end, though this work will not be fully autoethnographic, I will intermittently offer brief personal narratives. I also hope that, by offering my own reflections, I will encourage my readers to step toward their own vulnerability and examine their own lives and friendships as they read this work.

Autoethnography

In case my call for personal vulnerability is not wholly convincing as an academic endeavor, I want to offer a brief discussion on the value and use of autoethnography in academic research.

In his book *Writing the New Ethnography* Lloyd Goodall explains autoethnographic writings as creative narratives rooted in a writer's personal experiences. Additionally, rather than being directed at a general audience, autoethnographic writings are crafted specifically for an academic audience with the intent of providing important material for critical exploration. He writes, "[Auto-ethnography] is a way of writing to get to the truth of our experiences. It is a method of inquiry, scholarly inquiry, that privileges the exploration of self in response to questions that can only be answered in that way, through the textual construction of, and thoughtful reflection about, the lived experiences of that self" (Goodall, *Writing the New Ethnography* 191).

Further thought on autoethnography can be found in Michael Patton's book, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Patton describes autoethnography as the "study of one's own culture and oneself as part of that culture" (Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* 84). That is, by evaluating your own experiences in

your culture, you gain an important lens for viewing the culture in which you live In autoethnography, Patton continues, "you use your own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part" (Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* 86). In this way, autoethnographic writing differs from autobiography or biography in that its explicit aim is to examine the culture in which you live.

I find this particularly compelling, as I've no doubt that every author always brings their own culture and lens to their work, academic or otherwise. Autoethnography is a chance to critically examine that lens, and also to transparently offer knowledge of that lens to one's audience.

In this work, autoethnography will appear intermittently to introduce my motivations to pursue this project and to offer examples that exist in dialogue with more traditional academic elements of my work. I have attempted to craft and present my essays in line with the understanding of autoethnography presented by the authors mentioned above, and additionally the work of Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner, and Laurel Richardson.

Ellis and Bochner note that autoethnographies are "usually written in the first person voice" and "appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (Ellis and Bochner, *Autoethnography …* 749). Richardson builds on this notion by also offering specific standards by which autoethnographic work can be

evaluated. These standards include: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality.[10]

My ethnographic writing, a series of short personal essays, begin in this chapter and are revisited and further explored in the concluding chapter. Through my narratives I offer my own experiences with cross-gender friendship as a way of engaging the critical analysis offered in this work. My hope is that by sharing my own experiences, I will open space for thought, discussion, and perhaps even imagination regarding cross-gender friendship in my own life and the lives of my readers and wider society. Importantly, I also believe that offering my own experiences are in line with a Millian notion that will shortly be further explored in this chapter, that of engaging in *experiments in living*.

With all of this in mind, I will present my first short essay in the following section as an opening case-study for our exploration of cross-gender friendship and the limitations it currently faces in society.

An Informal Case Study - Meeting Santi

[10] In order to hold autoethnography to high standards Laurel Richardson (2000) offers a series of five criteria:
1. Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?
2. Aesthetic merit: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does this use of the creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. Reflexivity: How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?
4. Impact: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
5. Expression of a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem a "true"—a credible—account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?

The summer before I began graduate school I participated in an interdisciplinary summer research program. Fellows in the program met once a week to share our work, check-in, and attend workshops or talks. The group was full of nice people, but one of the things that quickly came to my attention was that philosophical research can be lonely. Many of the other students worked in labs or on research teams. I read books and thought, quietly, by myself. Because the other students had lab and group commitments there weren't many opportunities to work with them and I found I missed the undergrad environment I had come to associate with higher education: working near others, having companionship and a sounding board, or many sounding boards, to explore and share ideas with on a daily basis.

In the fall, members of the summer program were encouraged to attend a networking luncheon that included other graduate student groups. At the luncheon, we were asked to introduce ourselves and I stood and briefly stated my interests in philosophy and social justice. When we finished eating there was time for mingling and a political science student came up and introduced himself: Santiago — he went by Santi.[11] Santi and I had similar research interests, and we quickly discovered that we had several other things in common — we were both from California, both from working-class backgrounds, both in long-term relationships, both planning to have children during graduate school, both taking required courses that were time consuming and, we felt, pulled us from the work we were passionate about. We didn't have a lot of time to talk,

[11] Santiago's name and other identifying information have been altered to respect the privacy of his family.

but over the course of our conversation we each promised the other a few journal articles and we exchanged email addresses.

The early years of graduate school left little time to breathe, but over the next several months Santi and I shared articles, exchanged emails and managed to meet a few times for lunch at a nearby volunteer run cafe organized by a local church. The backdrop of the non-profit cafe, whose proceeds were donated to various relief organizations, fit well with our social justice interests — our conversations wandered between our academic lives, our commitments to social justice, and our personal lives. After a few cafe chats, we even managed to have a dinner with our partners. Santi's wife made a lovely lasagna, my partner and I brought salad, and we had a chance to look at pictures of their wedding. I left feeling it had been a nice evening.

In retrospect, Santi and I were both doing a lot of thinking about how to understand and balance our new roles as graduate students with our other interests and commitments: How did our social justice interests fit with our, at the time, mostly required courses? How did we balance work-time and time with our non-academic partners? How could we include those partners and other non-academics in our lives and the work we were doing? How did graduate school and higher education change our relationships with our working-class families? Why was Minnesota so cold?

Santi and I could never seem to get our schedules to align, but after a few months I realized that we were developing a kind of friendship I had been missing since my move to Minnesota. Our friendship helped me to tie together my new life in graduate school and my broader life, our conversations jumped freely between the personal and the

professional. I recall that he helped me to reflect on my grandmother's death, we spoke about adjusting to and appreciating life in Minnesota, we created both a need and the space to explain our work to someone outside of our discipline, we talked about finding balance between school and our commitment to our partners, we were able to be resources for one another by exchanging article titles and references — our relationship was more than the companionship I had known I was missing during my lonely summer research — it also pushed me to reflect on my life and my work in new ways, despite our similarities, Santi's experiences offered a different story of the world, and as I came to understand that lens, the friendship offered me a chance to grow. I remember telling my partner how fortunate I felt that Santi had introduced himself at the luncheon. My partner was pleased, because he'd known I was finding graduate school lonely and remembered how important it had been to have close friends as he worked towards his teaching license. Also, as a first-year teacher, he was incredibly busy and was comforted by the idea that I had other people I could count on.

Then, at the beginning of winter break I got an unexpected phone call from Santi's wife. Santi was away visiting family in California and had asked his wife to check an email message for him. With his password in hand, she had also read through his other messages, including the emails Santi and I had exchanged. After finding my phone number in one of the messages, she called and told me that she did not want me to contact or see Santi anymore. She said it wasn't personal, but that she thought that as a woman I would understand and wanted to ask me to leave her husband's life.

A Friendship with No Space

When I got off the phone I looked back through the messages Santi and I had exchanged to try and find something that could have been misconstrued. I talked to my partner and he said he was sorry and that Santi's wife sounded insecure. He suggested that perhaps there was more to the story — perhaps Santi, or someone else, had been unfaithful to her in the past. Perhaps Santi did not usually have female friends — making his friendship with me appear out of character and thus suspicious to his wife.

Santi called later that night from California to apologize for the situation. He said he would talk to his wife when he got back into town. He was frustrated that she had read his messages and called me without speaking to him first — but he wanted to honor her wishes, however unfounded her concerns seemed to him, until they could work things out.

With his wife's permission, we met a few times after all of this — but it clearly made her uncomfortable as did any calls or emails. Our communication petered out. We didn't have space, either physical or emotional, to continue to build a friendship. After all, without room for correspondence, spoken or otherwise, without room for communication free from guilt or doubt or the general weight of possibly hurting another, without room to share confidences, without room to build trust ... What space does a friendship have?

No Literature on Cross-Gender Friendship

The next semester, I took a seminar on friendship with a visiting professor. The first day of class, I shared this story. Throughout the course, as I completed readings and discussions on friendship, I felt the story pulling at me. It wasn't just the loss of my friend, but something more—something worried me about the ending of the friendship. I found that my experiences gave me a heightened awareness to the prevalence of narratives in our society that denied space for cross-gender friendship. Such messages seemed to come in all forms, from popular culture magazines, to movies and adages, even thoughts from well-meaning friends or co-workers. Additionally, none of the academic literature I found addressed friendship between women and men. There was a good deal of discussion of ways in which women's friendships differed from men's friendships, and there was abundant literature on sexual and romantic relationships between women and men, but I didn't see my friendship with Santi reflected in the literature. Academia seemed to be saying, through a silence, that women and men simply were not friends. After all, if they were, certainly someone would be writing about it? A look at popular culture returned the same, though sometimes less quiet, results.

I kept digging through the literature, looking for a reflection of myself. Or, at least, of my concerns. When articles and books did not emerge, I decided my search needed to take a more creative turn. Perhaps people were not writing about friendship between women and men, but surely there were women and men who had been friends. Immersed in philosophy, my mind jumped to the famous correspondence between Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes. What about the writing and work exchanged by Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson? Or the work and support shared by Rosa

Parks and Myles Horton?[12] All held promise, but I was looking for a relationship that included extensive reflections on the value of the relationship itself. Eventually, I found letters and autobiographical work that led me to discover Harriet Taylor and to reexamine the work of John Stuart Mill.[13]

In many ways what I found both surprised me and did not. Taylor and Mill's letters, and the work, close friendship, and wider lives the letters reveal are deeply reflective of well-known ideas from Mill's canon. Further, their lives and work reflected not only the difficulty of maintaining cross-gender friendships, but also a great deal on the value of friendship.

Part I - The Value of Friendship

Learning is a growth process and growth only happens in relation with others and our world — be it a book, traveling, or bumping into a wall. If it were possible to put someone in a vacuum, she or he wouldn't learn much — it is through contact with 'other' that we learn about ourselves and expand our concept of the world. Looking inward, we have a relationship with ourselves as well that challenges us and prompts learning and growth - William S. Slattery

[12] Thank you to John Wallace for drawing my attention to, and sharing archived info on, this relationship.
[13] After much thought, and not for any lack of feminist sensibilities, I chose to refer to Harriet Taylor Mill as Taylor, a name she took on during her marriage to her first husband. Referring to her as Harriet, but retaining Mill for JS Mill seemed unduly diminutive, and adopting first names for both was confusing as both her first and second husbands were named "John." In fact, if the use of Taylor is due to a lack, I blame the paucity of English names during the 1800s.

The subjection of friendship is perhaps only worrying if friendship is of some value. I suspect most are intuitively inclined to agree that friendship has worth, but I would like to offer more than that claim as a foundation for worry. So, we can ask: Why might friendship be worth prioritizing? Why are encumbering narratives surrounding certain friendships concerning? I suspect there are many compelling answers to these questions. For example, I recently read an article on depression and suicide that discussed the importance of interpersonal connection to mental health. Brené Brown, who I cited earlier for her work on vulnerability, also comes to the conclusion that interpersonal connection is key to a rich human life. And, philosopher Martha Nussbaum includes affiliation, of which friendship is a form, on her list of central human capabilities.[14] Mill himself recognizes something similar:

> When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is caring for nobody but themselves (Mill, *Utilitarianism*).

However, while these arguments are compatible with my own, a general need for connection, or even for friendship, wouldn't necessarily provide an argument for friendship between specific persons. Thus, recognizing that there are numerous reasons to value friendships, I want to offer a series of specific, and Millian, reasons we might value cross-gender friendship. This will, in fact, ultimately be an argument for friendship

[14] For more on Central Human Capabilities see Martha Nussbaum's *Women and Development*.

between any persons who have diverse experiences in the world, but, as previously mentioned, I will focus on cross-gender friendship as a case study. To frame this argument, it will be helpful to consider more closely the passage by Slattery, a psychologist and educator.

In the passage, Slattery connects relationships, growth, and learning. Reflecting on work by Carl Rogers, Slattery claims that in his work as a therapist he has consistently observed human growth as necessitating an other, even a wide range of others we might engage with to grow. For example, that other might be a wall, a new experience, or, as Adichie suggests, a story. When we engage an other, we create space in which we can learn about ourselves and the wider world. Through conversation with Slattery, I am confident that he would also include people on his list. Building on the idea that relationships, growth, and learning are closely connected, I will offer friendship, specifically friendship between persons who have had diverse experiences in the world, as a particularly rich source of learning, of growth, and of creation.

Relationships as a way to learn – John Stuart Mill and friendship

When trying to confront challenges of sexual inequality in his time, Mill advocated for marital friendship (a form of cross-gender friendship) as a necessary part of marriage, and as one of the most promising ways to effect genuine change in society. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill wrote extensively on the suppression and exclusion of women from important aspects of society. However, the book contains much more than a laundry list of oppression. Upon close reading, Mill reveals a deep conviction that friendship is one

of the most meaningful ways that we learn and grow. For example, amidst a discussion on friendship he writes:

> When each of two persons, instead of being a nothing, is a something; when they are attached to one another … the constant partaking in the same things, assisted by their sympathy, draws out the latent capacities of each for being interested in the things which were at first interesting only to the other; and works a gradual assimilation of the tastes and characters to one another, partly by the insensible modification of each, but more by a real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to its own (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 90).

When two people are able to form a meaningful friendship, the time that they share together and their care for one another combine to support each member of the relationship to grow by adopting the interests, tastes, and abilities of the other (which enhance or modify, rather than replace, their own). Given this, we can read Mill as holding that friendship allows us to grow in (at least) two specific ways: first, by increasing our knowledge and understanding; and second, by increasing our sphere of care. Expanding on Mill, we can reflect that both of these things are deeply important to our growth, for when we both understand *and* care about something we will be both able and motivated to act, and act well, in relation to it. Visually, this claim can be represented in the following way:

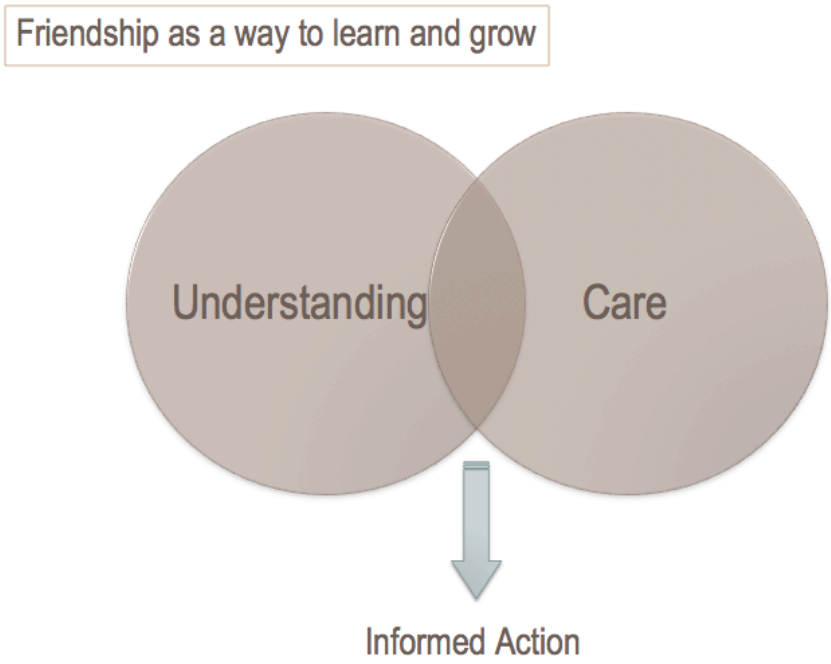

Figure 1-1

Without both understanding and care, we might worry that our potential for informed and caring action is decreased. For example, if we understand something, but don't properly care about it – we could worry that we won't act enough, or at all. And, if we care about something, but don't properly understand it – we could worry that we won't act in a duly informed way. In short, for Mill, friendship is a way that we learn and grow. However, Mill does not stop there. For Mill, friendships are not just teachers, they are also creators.

Relationships as a way to create knowledge – Mill, Taylor and friendship

In addition to helping us better navigate the world of knowledge as it already exists, Mill also views friendship as a way to create new knowledge. Writing about his friendship with Taylor, Mill offers a notion of *reciprocal superiority* to capture the ability he and Taylor have to look up to one another, to challenge one another, and to otherwise engage

one another in meaningful ways. He further goes on to say that their relationship of reciprocal superiority enables them, together, to discover knowledge in the world that as individuals they might not have come to. In an 1832 letter to their mutual friend, William Bridges Adams, Mill writes on his experience of reciprocal superiority with Taylor:

> We two possess [one of] the greatest sources of friendship between minds of any capacity; this is, not equality, for nothing can be so little interesting to a man as his own double; but, reciprocal superiority. Each of us knows many things which the other knows not, & can do many things which the other values but cannot himself do, or not so well. There is also just that difference of character between us which renders us highly valuable to each other in another way for I require to be warmed, you perhaps occasionally to be calmed. We are almost as much the natural complement of one another as man and woman are: *we are far stronger together than separately, & whatever both of us agree in, has a very good chance, I think, of being true* (Mill, *Collected Works*, emphasis added).

For Mill, friendship is a way that not only individuals, but also the wider world, can learn and grow, as our different experiences and understandings combine with the care we have for one another to help us come to new truths which we can then offer to others. Friendship allows a particular kind of exchange, one in which different experiences and thoughts can be brought together and engaged with one another within a context of respect and care that is not always present in our general interactions in the world. In this

context, the exchange of thought and experience can lead to the discovery, recognition, or creation of knowledge that otherwise might have been overlooked in the world.

It is worth noting that the importance of the caring personal relationship to knowledge and action in the world has previously been recognized by Millian scholars. It is, for example, in line with work Elizabeth Anderson has done on Millian psychology. In her article, *Mill and Experiments in Living*, she connects the personal and the political:

> Mill's psychology predicted that sentiments had to be cultivated if one were to lead a happy life while exercising analytical skills. The impersonal artificially induced zeal for the improvement of humanity could not survive analysis unless it was reinforced by a genuine, cultivated feeling of unity with other people (Anderson, *Mill and Experiments in Living* 19)

That is, personal connections are necessary supporting elements of moral and political thought and action — a theory or a law will only have its full strength when the people connected to those theories and laws feel a personal commitment to the persons the theories and laws discuss and hope to affect. In this context, we could say that one importance of friendship lies in the power of personal experience. Friendship is a transformative relationship which has the ability to affect us in ways that theory and policy alone cannot.[15]

[15] The 2012 Vote No campaign, in reaction to Minnesota Amendment 1, might serve as an interesting example here. The campaign utilized personal stories and connections to forward the injustice of denying homosexual couples the right to marry. More on the campaign can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota_Amendment_1

Hopefully, we now have a foundation for imagining ways in which friendship might be valuable. Ways it might, returning to our analogies, nurture the world around it as it grows. However, we have only nodded at why friendship between particular persons might be of specific value and why we might be concerned if there seem to be limitations on certain kinds of friendship. Let us now turn to those questions.

Why Friendship Across Difference can be of Particular Value

In some ways the claim is quite simple — given that the two persons can form a meaningful relationship of care — whatever differences, of thought, experiences, etc., each person brings to the relationship she or he can then offer the other. The larger the differences, the more potential exchange as long as the differences do not breach a theoretical tipping point such that persons encounter so much difference they have trouble forming, or cannot form, a meaningful relationship of care. I suspect that the range of this theoretical zone of potential friendship could vary among persons and depend on available supports. But, the general message would remain the same: Friendship between people with different experiences — friendship across difference — may be a way to both recognize, create, and foster important knowledge and action in the world. For example, such relationships could help us to avoid falling prey to stereotypes or narratives of the 'other' that might close space in our lives for genuine understanding, or allow for and perpetuate abuse and violence.

Part II - The Subjection of Friendship

The Subjection of Friendship

In *The Subjection of Women* Mill argues that women's lives, as his society knows them, offer only the illusion of free choice —while in fact insidious and sometimes subtle pressures combine to deny women the agency they need and deserve. Further, he claims that this subjection of women is harmful not only to women, but to the wellbeing and progress of all members of society, present and future.

Cross-gender friendship currently suffers under a similar subjection—one that offers the illusion of free choice, when in fact societal messages and pressures combine to hinder individuals' ability to freely imagine what relationships may be most valuable in their lives. The lack of this agency then perpetuates behaviors that reinforce the societal messages from which they arose, and the result is harmful to all.

Thus, in the sections that follow, I make use of Mill's argument for his society to recognize and respond to limitations on women's agency (the subjection of women) as the basis for a parallel argument: an argument for our society to recognize and respond to limitations on cross-gender friendship. Let us call this argument *the subjection of friendship*. Further, while Mill did not discuss the subjection of friendship as such, there is ample evidence that Mill saw improving women's lives and wider society as connected to increasing space for cross-gender friendship. Exploring the connections he draws between the two can help us begin to see friendship as central to wellbeing and development, and further, to see how increasing support for cross-gender friendship can support the wellbeing and progress of all members of society.

The Subjection of Women

Mill's most overt discussion of cross-gender friendship occurs near the end of *The Subjection of Women*, where Mill argues that friendship between spouses (in combination with increasing women's agency and changing societal practices) is a necessary element of enacting true social change. However, before jumping ahead to the end of the book, it will be helpful to have some background on his argument.

Controversy has long been connected with *The Subjection of Women*. It is clear from Mill's personal letters that he anticipated at least some of the controversy and was concerned about public reception of the work long before it was in print. Though he completed the book in 1861, Mill delayed publication until 1869, when he felt the political and social climate was better for its reception. Unfortunately, eight years was not long enough. The book was poorly received and unpopular. It was, perhaps notably, the only work of Mill's on which his publisher lost money (Ryan, *John Stuart Mill* 125). Did Mill not wait long enough? Was it only a matter of time before society would catch up with his progressive views? It has been a long wait. Nearly one-hundred-and-fifty years later the book is still controversial and still poorly understood. In part, the root of modern misunderstanding of the work is a failure to recognize, or at least adequately recognize, the role that Mill envisions for cross-gender friendship, both in supporting women's agency and also in creating space for substantive and positive change in the lives of all members of society.

Mill hoped his book would improve the lives of women by helping to bring much needed legal, economic and social changes to society. The "little book"—as Mill often refers to it—was, in a sense, intended as a rallying cry and was aptly full of incendiary statements. Throughout the book, Mill quite intentionally likens marriage, as practiced in his culture in his time, to slavery, claiming that a woman's role in marriage is the only legally sanctioned form of slavery remaining in the developed world (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 5). He argues that while it may appear that women of his time enter into marriage freely, women are in fact forced into marriage by a society that denies them any other means of adequately supporting themselves. In addition to forced economic dependence, Mill believes that society hinders women from developing the abilities necessary to imagine and pursue alternate life choices. According to Mill, many women are so disempowered by society that they lack the critical thinking skills necessary to recognize or criticize the dearth of options presented to them; to put it another way, they lack the imaginative space to envision alternate possibilities. All of these factors push women into marriage, wherein women lose legal control over their lives and become, in essence, their husband's property (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 1-28).

Mill believes that the corruption of the marriage relationship is harmful not only to women, but also to men and to society as a whole. He claims that while women suffer greatly from the societal stunting of their natural potential—and the abuses to which they are subject within marriage—men's natural development also suffers from the false sense of superiority and the undeserved power they are given over women's lives. Mill sees the inequity of this family relationship as the locus of widespread corruption of human

potential. He believes that living and growing within such an unnatural relationship corrupts the wife's, husband's, and their children's understandings of identity, rights and power. This corruption, in turn, is injurious to society, as its members on all sides are kept from reaching their fullest potential. Mill then proposes that individuals and society can heal and thrive by undertaking a multi-faceted approach to reconstructing the marriage relationship. To pursue this project, Mill advocates changes in three areas: individual agency, societal laws, norms, and practices, and interpersonal relationships. Each will be discussed at length in chapters to come, but a short introduction is relevant at this point.

Mill argues that women in his society suffer so greatly that their very "somethingness" is damaged. That is, societal forces collude to reduce women to a state that is nearly less than personhood — one in which women struggle to imagine that their lives could be otherwise, or even that they could want their lives to be otherwise. Put another way, women's individual development and wellbeing is not only under-supported, it is hindered, to the point that one may think of their potential agency as damaged in some way. Mill suggests that this must be rectified, and calls for increasing women's agency through changes in societal practices and also through marital friendship.

Mill suggests changes to societal structures and norms, including legal practices and cultural attitudes. He claims that the legal structure of the marriage relationship reinforces a harmful disparity of power between wife and husband, that must be eliminated:

> The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other [in marriage] – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by *a principle of perfect equality*, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 1, emphasis added).

That is, Mill believes that the corruption of the marriage relationship, and in turn the family relationship, is rooted in the inequity of power from which the husband and wife enter a marriage, and worsened by the further inequalities that the legal and social pressures place on them once the marriage is complete. To stop the cycle of corruption, and allow the family to be a model of healthy supportive human relationships, he believes that the harmful inequity of power must be replaced with a rich form of equality that Mill calls *perfect equality*. Thus, by replacing the inequality of power between wife and husband in marriage with perfect equality Mill believes that society will be closer to removing a *chief hindrance to human improvement*. In other words, society will be closer to supporting his ideal of human beings as progressive beings.

But what is perfect equality? Maria Morales spends two-hundred-and-thirty-eight pages addressing that very question in her aptly named book, *Perfect Equality*. Because we lack that the space to engage with perfect equality in that detail, we will have to settle for a more limited understanding. Fortunately, this should be enough to serve the project

at hand. For Mill, to live in perfect equality with another human being is to live in such a way that no power disparities exist between the two of you. Mill importantly recognizes that legal changes are not enough to create such an environment, but that changes in social norms and practices are also required. Thus, perfect equality is a wholesale call to mitigate power discrepancies in society such that individuals have a foundation to support experiencing one another as "equal[s] in rights and in cultivation."

In imagining the application and execution of perfect equality Mill begins to introduce the importance of interpersonal relationships. For, perfect equality cannot be merely theoretical but must *be experienced* in relation to others in order to be fully actualized. Near the end of *The Subjection of Women* Mill writes:

> The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations [(marriage)] is placed under the rule of equal justice, ***and*** when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 92, emphasis added).

That is, genuine change and progress for human beings is dependent on not only external equalities (such as justice) but also on e*xperiencing one another as equals* in a close and meaningful relationship. As we will explore at length, Mill saw men and women enacting perfect equality through friendship-based marriage.

To restate, a foundational step towards perfect equality is to dismantle and break down power structures that lead to inequality. But, at the same time, perfect equality

cannot be fully realized unless we foster sympathetic relations such that individuals can experience one another as equals (as opposed to, for example, theoretically holding one another as such). If we are able to accomplish both of these things, individuals will be supported just as friendship and society are bolstered.

Near the end of her book, *Perfect Equality*, Maria Morales notes a relationship between rich equality and sympathetic relationships in the creation of rich human lives:

> A corollary of Mill's theory of life is the need for a wholesale transformation of the general ethic that governs society … Power is parasitic on selfish feelings, while perfect equality thrives under the influence of sympathetic affections … The development and cultivation of other-regarding concerns, including concerns for the improvement of society as a whole, are the cornerstone of Mill's ideal of human character (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 200).

Thus, as Morales recaps the danger Mill saw in unequal power relations and the role that perfect equality can play in development, she further notes that perfect equality is fostered by sympathetic relationships. Thus we begin to add more depth of understanding to our tripartite recipe for change: a melange of concern for individual well-being, societal laws, norms and practices, and interpersonal relationships. Further, we have a story that reinforces the recognition that the success of any one of the three is interconnected with, and supportive of, the success of the others. Recall the thriving garden in which the health of each constituent element contributes to the health of the others, and in turn to growth and bounty. Looking to the chart below, we can imagine

equality of power in society, other-regarding concerns, and the cultivation of sympathetic affections, further nurturing the garden like a spring rain:

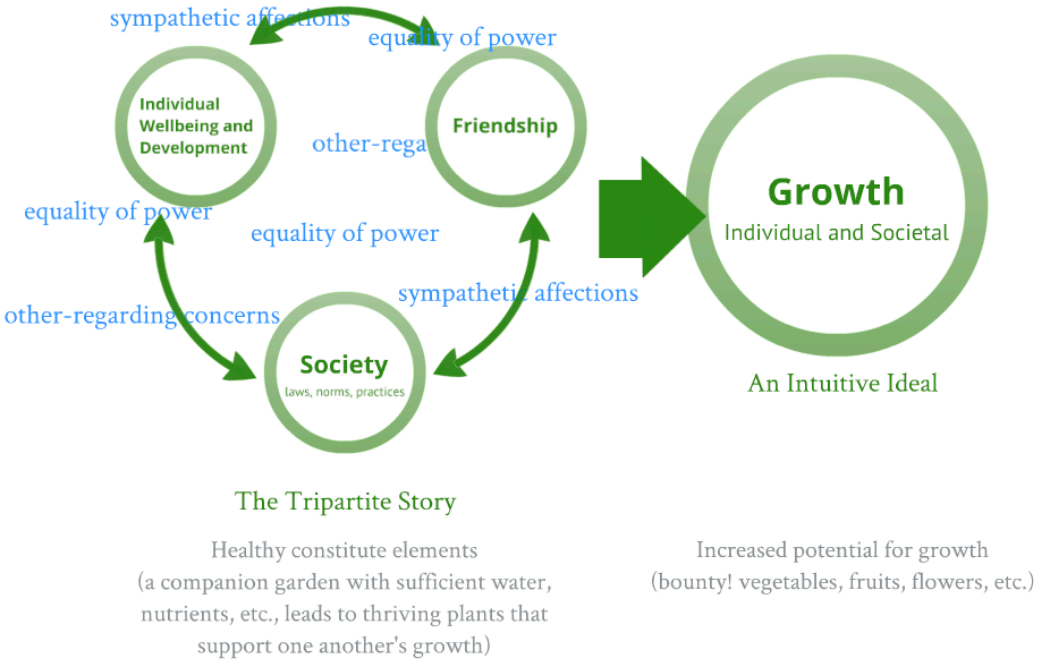

Figure 1-2

Next, to further explore the importance of creating space for friendship and its potential value let's look to Mill's theory of experiments in living.

Experiments in Living

In his work *On Liberty,* Mill offers the notion of *experiments in living*. Much like the passage we explored from Thoreau, Mill urges us to be willing to question our understanding of truth. Noting that human beings are, for the present at least, fallible beings, he claims that diverse voices and practices are important elements of human

progress toward richer truths and other forms of human improvement. In other words, Mill claims that alternative ways of living are not only possible, but that their diversity can be a source of valuable knowledge in the world. He writes:

> That mankind are not infallible; that their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable, and diversity not an evil, but a good, until mankind are much more capable than at present of recognizing all sides of the truth, are principles applicable to men's modes of action, not less than to their opinions. As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different *experiments of living*; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. *Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions of customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress* (Mill, *On Liberty* 66, emphasis added).

To return to earlier metaphors, for Mill experiments of living create space, particularly space for imagination, for both individuals and society. They are a defense for us against

the lack of freedom that both Thoreau and Mill believe that singular opinion, acceptance, complacency or ignorance could bring. When supported, experiments in living produce new information in the world, leaving both those who partake in, and those who witness, the experiments in a more informed position as they consider what life choices they might have good reason to value. Experiments in living help provide new information that can help human beings to make informed choices, rather than encumbering them with narratives that pressure pre-scripted life. Diverse and empowering narratives are key to individual growth, which can support broader individual agency and, in turn, societal growth.

But of course, this is quite a bit to claim from one passage of a prolific writer's canon. To fill in this picture, and to understand how their own lives and work may be held as an experiment of living, let's look more closely at the relationship between Harriet Taylor and Mill.

Taylor and Mill: An experiment in living

Taylor and Mill met in 1830 and went on to build and share a close and long lasting friendship. Eventually, after the death of her first husband, Taylor and Mill married. It is perhaps for this reason, among other societal stories of the Victorian era, that Mill focused his discussion of the value of cross-gender friendship on marriage. However, as will be further addressed in the concluding chapter, Mill hoped that cross-gender friendship would be more prevalent outside of marriage in the future, and insisted that his friendship with Taylor was invaluable regardless of their later romantic relationship. For

now, I ask that readers hold Mill's Victorian context in mind, but also leave room to imagine the wide implications his understanding of friendship can have for our society today.

In his autobiography, Mill describes his friendship with Taylor as one of the most valuable experiences of his life, contributing not only to his happiness, but also to his work and broader life:

> ... Friendship [with Taylor] has been the honor and chief blessing of my existence, as well as the source of a great part of all I have attempted to do, or hope to effect hereafter for human improvement (Mill, *Autobiography* Chapter VI)

However, others did not appear to hold their relationship in such high esteem. Mill reports that he and Taylor found it a challenge to find room in their own lives and in society for their friendship. While it seems that Taylor's husband, much like my partner, was willing to allow Mill and Taylor room for their relationship, Mill and Taylor nevertheless felt societal pressure to limit their friendship. This pressure included censure and judgement regarding the public and private time they spent together. For example, Mill wrote that his friendship with Taylor owed a great deal to her ability to ignore or not give credence to the assumptions others made about their relationship:

> I ... was greatly indebted to the strength of [Taylor's] character which enabled her to disregard the false interpretations liable to be put on the frequency of my visits to her while living generally apart from Mr. Taylor, and on our occasionally

> traveling together, though in all other respects our conduct should be such as in no degree to bring discredit on her husband, nor therefore on herself ... (Mill, *Autobiography* 236).

Further, Mill and Taylor faced societal assumptions that their relationship was not as they claimed to understand it, nor as they presented it. In his autobiography Mill writes of facing continuous assumptions that his relationship with Taylor must have a sensual element and further, that he and Taylor must be, perhaps secretly, acting on those elements without due regard to other things that they themselves, not to mention the society around them, held to be valuable:

> ... we disdained, as every person not a slave of his animal appetites must do, the abject notion that the strongest and tenderest friendship cannot exist between a man and a woman without a sensual relation, or that any impulses of that lower character cannot be put aside when regard for the feelings of others, or even when only prudence and personal dignity require it (Mill, *Autobiography* 236).[16]

[16] Mill's reference to "lower character" here is intriguing. I originally read the reference as related to a puritan influence. However, both Mill and Taylor's work challenged many puritan ideals, including their work to improve education around, and access to, birth control. However, Mill's personal letters reveal some chiding from his friends that imply that he may have personally had limited sexual relations, even in marriage. Ultimately, I was not able to fully understand Mill's position on this issue. In the conclusions, I will forward my own position, raising concerns over the consideration of the sensual to be of "lower character". Instead, I offer a picture in which the opportunity to imagine as a possibility, and to choose for one's self, how to practice and value sensual and sexual relations is an important element of human life.

Here, I see Mill making a kind of agency related claim. We could perhaps rephrase his words in the following way: Individuals in a close friendship can duly weigh and reflect on multiple things that they might value. For example, in this case an individual might value: the friendship, sensual relationships, care for feelings of others, what s/he considers prudent, and her/his own sense of dignity. After weighing these things, the individual can then decide to prioritize accordingly. One possibility may be to choose to maintain a close friendship that does not involve a sensual element, despite a desire for such an element, because the individual values both the friendship and, for example, the feelings of others.

When read in concert with Mill's commitment to experiments of living, and his concerns regarding the potential of social forces toward conformity to be encumbering or harmful, one reasonable reading is: Women and men, following their own individual agency, can choose to engage in a friendship, or choose not to, choose to have a sensual relationship, or choose not to, but the key element in this formula is that they are choosing from a place of genuine agency — not from a single societal story or the influence of a custom they do not themselves value. If said persons are not choosing from a place of genuine agency, we might as well say they have little or no choice, and that they are experiencing a lack of freedom. In the passage below, Mill discusses this lack of freedom in a manner that both addresses a concern with a lack of agency and maps nicely onto the distinctions we've previously drawn between encumbering and empowering narratives. He writes:

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his life plan for him, has no more need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties ... It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are in which they do it. Among the works of man, which human life is rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first importance surely is man himself (Mill, *On Liberty* 56).

According to Mill, though one could live a life following societal scripts, one would not be living a full human life. What matters is not only what we do, but also why we do it. That is, the role that we play in choosing to do it and the reasons underlying that choice. In order to live in a fully human way, individuals must participate in forming and following their own life plans.

Returning to my personal example, I would then say that ultimately it is less important which outcome is reached, but rather, how the outcome is reached. That is, depending on the forces behind the choice, there could be genuine agency behind Santi and me continuing a friendship or deciding to end a friendship. The same could be true of his wife asking us to end our friendship, or supporting us to continue. What matters is how much each of the actors involved is able to take a position from her or his own

values and motivations, and how much each actor is hindered by encumbering societal stories.

Mill and the Power of Social Limitations

While our society does not carry any direct legal limitations on friendships, it is now clear that there is reason to suspect, and motivation to examine, the existence of social or societal limitations on friendship between women and men. In *On Liberty*, Mill addresses the existence of such limitations and the pervasive nature they can have in our lives — affecting not only how others might see us, but also how we see ourselves and the possibilities we can imagine for ourselves:

> In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others but also in what concerns only themselves, the individual or the family do not ask themselves — what do I prefer? Or, what would suit my character and disposition? Or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play. And enable it to grow and thrive? (Mill, *On Liberty* 58).

Mill likens social pressures—what I have called encumbering narratives—to a kind of censorship. Further, he worries that external pressures can affect not only our actions but also our desires and imagination. If the pressures are strong or insidious enough, we may not only refrain from doing something because we fear recourse, but because we cannot

even imagine that we might find value in it. We could perhaps imagine this influence as weeds choking our garden as fears, stigma, and ignorance (among other things) hold back the growth of individuals, society, and friendship. Below is a visual representation of a withered or withering garden:

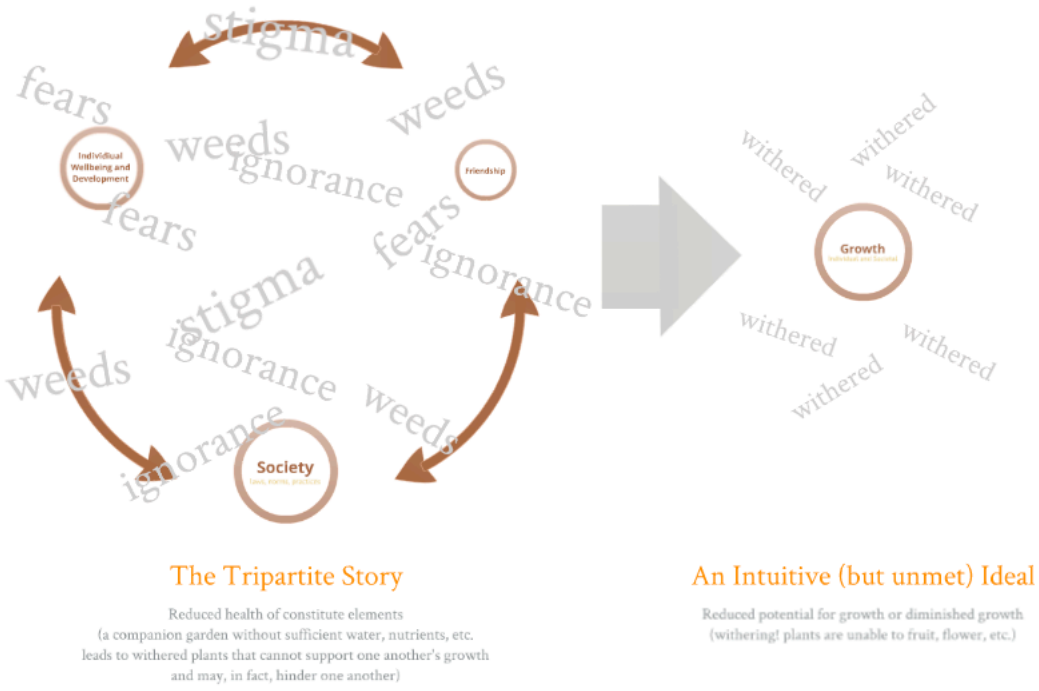

Figure 1-3

Just as Mill and Taylor's relationship bears on my relationship with Santi, despite the many years that passed between our experiences — I suspect, and hope I have begun to make my readers suspect, that Mill's worry about censorship is still salient today. In order to examine this censorship, in order to examine the space we have in our lives for friendship, we can try to reflect on it in creative ways. We can ask ourselves, as we look at our friendships — and I mean ask in a rich way that takes a good deal of work — What

friendships might I prefer? What friendships suit my character and disposition? What friendships allow the best and highest in me to have fair play? What friendships will enable the best and highest in me to grow and thrive?

Learning about the plants in the garden

To move forward in answering these questions and to further explore the tripartite relationship between individual wellbeing and development, society, and friendship, it will be helpful to learn more about the plants in our garden. One species that may be particularly challenging to identify and understand is individual wellbeing and development. This difficulty is in part because an account of individual wellbeing and agency is implicit in Mill's work, yet he does not explicitly articulate such an account. Thus, in the course chapter two I will develop and defend a conception of Millian agency.

In route, I pay particular attention to Mill's argument regarding women's wellbeing and development in his time, an argument that parallels the challenges cross-gender friendship faces in our own time. In drawing out parallels, I establish an intuitive foundation for criticism—the tacit assumption being that all readers will be familiar with and sympathetic to the idea that women's agency has mistakenly been hindered in the past and continues to be challenged in the present. This lens will bring into focus how Mill's argument is relevant to, and can be translated into, a critique of our current attitudes and practices surrounding cross-gender friendship. Ultimately, through this lens, we will be better able to recognize how elements of our society may unduly and harmfully hinder the development and practice of cross-gender friendship. Thus, with a

focus on individual agency, chapter two will further explore the relationship between individual wellbeing and development, society, and friendship.

Chapter 2
Progressive Human Agency

I heard it proposed lately that two young men should travel together over the world, the one without money, earning his means as he went, before the mast and behind the plow, the other carrying a bill of exchange in his pocket. It was easy to see that they could not long be companions or co-operate, since one would not operate at all - Thoreau, *Walden*

In the passage above, Thoreau offers a connection between *operation* and *cooperation*. As one who generally thinks of cooperation as *working together* I had, in my familiarity with the word, overlooked the place that *operate* has within it. Thoreau notes that in order for two persons to co-operate, each person must be able to operate. I find this to be a useful analogy for one of the relationships between individuals and friendship: In order for two persons to be in a friendship, each person must be able to contribute to the friendship. If one person is not able to contribute to the friendship, perhaps the two people could have some kind of connection, but it would be difficult to imagine the two in a friendship, as friendship, like cooperation, implies the contribution and engagement of both of its members.

In agreement with Thoreau, it will be clear that in the Millian picture of friendship operation does indeed contribute to cooperation. Further, in chapter three, I amend Thoreau's notion and claim that cooperation, in turn, contributes to operation. More specifically, applying our analogy, I will argue that individual wellbeing and development support and contribute to friendship, and in turn, friendship supports and

contributes to individual wellbeing and development. Additionally, we will continue to see society as a major player in this tripartite story. We should not forget Thoreau and Adichie's warnings regarding the influence of society and our vulnerabilities in the face of single stories, customs, and societal practices. Nor will we ignore the positive role that society can play in relation to individuals and friendships. Instead, as we explore the relationship between individuals and friendships, we will recognize society as a third-player in the mix, affecting the individuals and the friendships in ways that are sometimes invisible and sometimes overt, sometimes detrimental, and sometimes nurturing. Thus, with a focus on the individual, in this chapter we continue to explore the tripartite relationship between individuals, friendships, and societies.

Why Build a Millian Conception of Agency?

One might worry that the quest for a coherent account of Millian agency is, at best, redundant — given the many rich conceptions of agency previously articulated, or, at worst, quixotic — given Mill's commitment to utilitarianism and the further fact that many modern readers view Mill's various works as inconsistent with one another. However, as previously mentioned, when Mill's work is explored with a focus on the importance of interpersonal relationships, an intriguing and valuable vision of agency emerges. Among other things, this Millian conception of agency reveals and emphasizes: individual wellbeing and development as tied to the wellbeing and development of others; wellbeing/development as importantly different from gaining societal power; and

the value and importance of supporting a diverse range of interpersonal relationships in society.

Progressive Human Agency (PHA)

Where to begin? Partly constitutive of Mill's view of agency is a picture of humans as *progressive beings*: beings that have the ability to grow—both intellectually and emotionally, as individuals and as a species—over time.[17]

In more detail, progressive beings have a complex positionality in the world. Progressive beings live together in societies, but don't necessarily know the best way to do so — either for themselves nor for the society at large. Further, as we've seen from both Adichie and Thoreau, Mill understands humans as vulnerable to the influence of the societies in which they live, and believes they may falsely adopt societal practices as "best" practices if they are unable to imagine that life can be otherwise.

Thus, it is important to the wellbeing and development of progressive beings that the society in which they live can enable their search to understand what it is they do and do not value. In addition, progressive beings should be enabled in developing their own (revisable) life plan according to these values. Finally, in order for all to thrive, it is important that progressive beings can recognize the importance of enabling others around them, especially allowing for and supporting in others the freedoms just outlined.

[17] Mill's notion of progressive beings is clearly forwarded in *On Liberty,* yet it is difficult to capture a "sound byte" definition of the term. For this reason, I will offer a summary of the notion here, and will continue to explore and support this summary, with textual evidence, in both chapters two and three.

Because Mill's notion of progressive beings is central to Mill's understanding of individual well-being and development I have chosen to call the account of Millian agency that I develop in this chapter *progressive human agency*, or, PHA.

How does this relate to friendship? Mill implies that friendship can provide a window into another person's values and experience of society. This privileged access into a life other than one's own is yet another way that progressive beings can test and challenge their fallible understandings of the world, and revise (or support) their beliefs about what practices and choices can best support their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. In short, friendship is a way for individuals to learn about their own lives and also the ways in which their lives may be affected by the society in which they live. It is also, as previously mentioned, a space in which individuals may imagine and discover new ways of being: friendship is a way in which we expand our capacities as progressive beings, and thus is a relationship that is deeply tied to progressive human agency (PHA).

To more clearly show the relationship PHA has to friendship, society, and growth—and thus also why it is justified to take an interlude from our project on friendship to articulate it—we can revisit the tripartite relationship we have previously discussed, holding PHA in place for individual wellbeing and development. Thus, in our

garden analogy, we replace individual wellbeing and development with PHA:

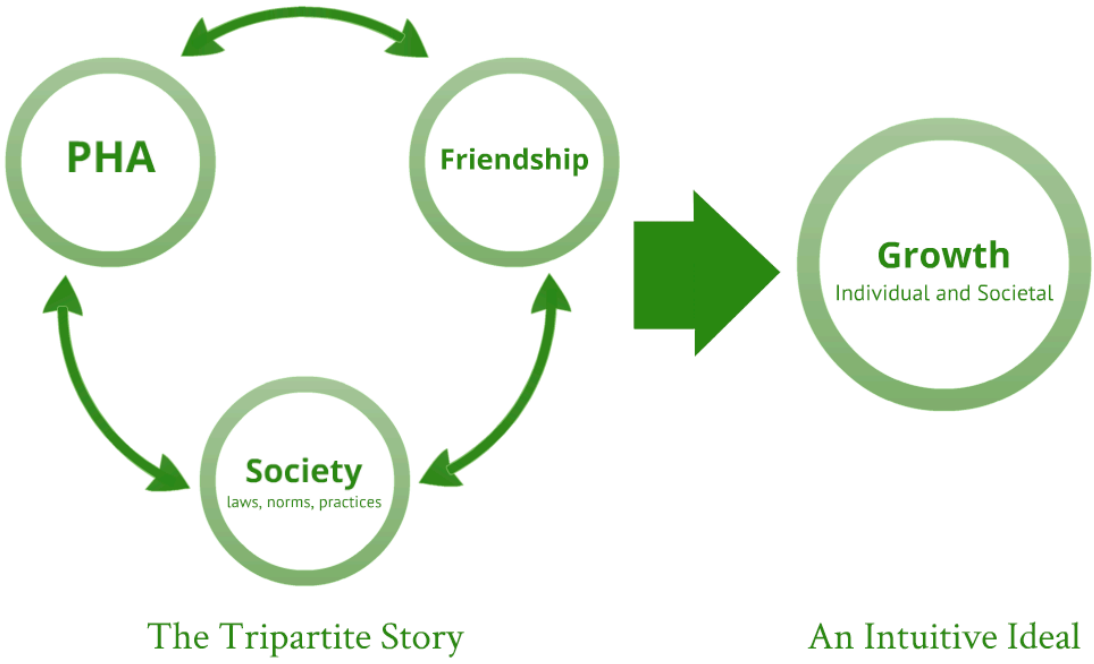

Figure 2-1

When PHA is thriving, it can help to nurture the growth of its companion plants, society and friendship. Which, in turn, can support PHA. When this tripartite relationship thrives, the potential for individual and societal growth is rich. However, as previously mentioned, growth can be hindered when PHA, Friendship, or Society are unable to thrive and support one another. When one element has less to offer the others, all elements can suffer:

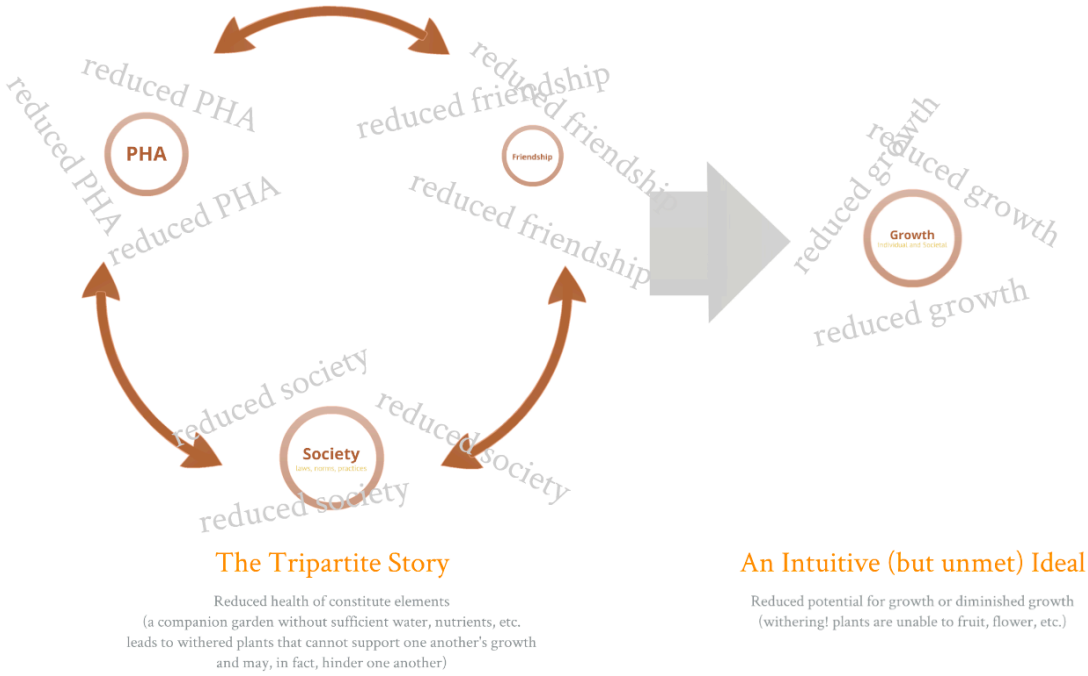

Figure 2-2

When PHA's growth is stunted, or PHA is withered, its ability to support society and friendship is diminished. Society and friendship, lacking proper shade and nutrients from PHA, may also wither or become stunted. The overall result is a diminished potential for individual and societal growth.

Millian agency: a new way to read Mill's canon

In addition to serving the argument at hand, a construction of PHA is interesting in its own right: Scholars have often interpreted Mill's canon as inconsistent and articulating a Millian conception of agency can help to mitigate their concerns. With this in mind, my argument is attentive and responsive to a particularly explicit version of this critique offered by Julia Annas in her article "Mill and The Subjection of Women;" thus, my

focus on friendship and agency in Mill's work provides an under-explored window into ways in which his canon can be read as consistent.

In the end, my aim is that readers come away from this chapter with a stronger sense of the interconnected nature of PHA, society and friendship. Further, with the importance of friendship in mind, I hope my readers will view Mill's argument regarding the subjection of women as an informative parallel for understanding that we may be suffering from a similar subjection of friendship today.

In the following sections I will use Annas' concerns about Mill's inconsistency as a foil to analyze Mill's argument regarding the subjection of women in his own time and demonstrate its reliance on a robust conception of human agency— namely PHA. I argue that Mill employs this conception of agency throughout his canon and that it is further reflected in his personal writings (e.g. *The Subjection of Women*, *Utilitiarianism*, *On Liberty,* and Mill's autobiography and personal correspondence).

Responding to Doubts

In her article, "Mill and The Subjection of Women" Julia Annas expresses doubts about the consistency of Mill's work, confusion around his use of utility, and skepticism about the usefulness of his suggestions for societal reform. However, Annas' concerns can be mitigated by recognizing two important themes in Mill's work: the emphasis Mill places on human beings as progressive beings and, importantly, the role friendship plays in individual wellbeing, development, society, and ultimately growth.

Without recognition of the importance of friendship to Mill's work, it is not surprising that Annas is representative of a feminist perspective that views *The Subjection of Women* as not radical enough.[18] For example, Annas expresses disappointment with Mill's practical suggestions for change, calling them, "timid and reformist at best" and is further disappointed by Mill's failure to see that if his theoretical goals regarding equality of the sexes were realized, women would necessarily take a new and broader role in society (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 189). However, Annas does note an important piece of Mill, and one element of our tripartite recipe: The broad and pervasive influence of many aspects of society. Thus, Annas does not fully write off Mill, and claims that The Subjection of Women is still ahead of its, and our, time. Unlike other critics who view the book solely as a call for legal change and dismiss it as antiquated, Annas rightly believes that it offers an important and complex understanding of the roots of inequality, which stem not only from legal inequality but from economic disparity and social pressures as well. Giving the example of the economic and social pressures faced by abused women to return to their husbands, Annas writes:

> While today there are few ways in which women are under legal disabilities compared with men (though it would be a mistake to think there are none) women are still subject to economic and social discrimination in a variety of ways, and it

[18] Feminist critique of Mill is also addressed by Maria Morales in her chapter "The New Ethic: Perfect Equality and the family" from her book *Perfect Equality* (168-200). In addition to Annas, other examples of such critique include Zilliah Einstein's *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (133-135), Richard Krouse's "Patriarchial Liberalism and Beyond" (164), Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* (226-230), and Gail Tulloch's *Mill and Sexual Equality* (13–15).

> is extraordinary to think that Mill's essay no longer contains anything interesting or controversial just because there have been a few changes in the law ... Although we are more receptive to the ideal, we are nowhere near achieving in practice the kind of equality between the sexes that Mill looks forward to. It will be a good day when The Subjection of Women is outdated, but it is not yet (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 179).[19]

Thus, Annas recognizes that we are still far from achieving the substantive equality between women and men that Mill hoped for. Her modern example of an abused woman feeling she has no choice but to return to her abusive husband stresses the very real impact that social pressures and practices can have on individual lives. Further, by drawing our attention to the improvements we've seen in legal equality, Annas points out that the key to substantive equality is unlikely to be single-faceted. Though overlooking the role of friendship, Annas does recognize that Mill is still relevant today as he sets the bar for equality high *and* recognizes that the recipe for equality, and the agency necessary for substantive equality, is complex.

In what follows, I will make use of Annas' critique to demonstrate how, if we push against Annas' claims by recognizing Mill's understanding of the progressive nature of human beings and the importance he places on interpersonal relationships, then consistent

[19] Annas published her article in 1977, and though some societal views have shifted since then, I believe it is still generally accepted that domestic abuse is a serious problem in our society and that there are a great number of psychological, social and economic pressures that make it difficult for women (and others) to leave abusive relationships.

and powerful messages regarding the interdependence of individual agency, society, and friendship emerge.

Outline

In developing and defending an account of PHA that respond to Annas' concerns, I will make three main claims with respect to interpreting Mill:

Claim 1: Mills theoretical and practical approaches are consistent

Mill's argument in *The Subjection of Women* begins to sketch a Millian understanding of agency as interdependent with society by highlighting ways in which women's well-being and development can be artificially limited by the society in which they live. Annas views Mill's argument surrounding the position of women in his time as containing two purportedly complementary approaches (which she refers to as *radical* and *reformist*, respectively): one theoretical and one practical. However, Annas views the two approaches as inconsistent with one another, because one makes an appeal to human nature while the other cautions against such an appeal. However, I argue that these approaches are indeed compatible, and can be easily understood as such if one takes into account Mill's notion of human beings as progressive and the relationship he forwards between individual well-being and social norms.

Claim 2: Mill is committed to a sophisticated version of utilitarianism that holds human beings as progressive beings and allows for personal relationships to play a substantial role in the promotion of societal good.

One might think that the idea of PHA is inconsistent with Mill's commitments to utilitarianism and, accordingly, his remarks in *Utilitarianism*. My main aim is not to defend Mill against the charge of being a non-consequentialist in utilitarian clothing. However, analysis of his reflections in *Utilitarianism* and other works reveal a sophisticated view of personal relationships that is consistent with and supports an account of PHA.

Claim 3: Mill is not a naive individualist.

Many, including Annas, under-represent the role that personal relationships play in Mill's philosophy. Annas claims that Mill would not be comfortable with the level of societal intervention implied by his work in *The Subjection of Women*. However, looking at his work more broadly reveals that Mill recognizes both positive and negative roles that social pressures and governmental practices can play in individual development. Ultimately, I claim that Mill is not committed to individualism, but rather to the wellbeing and development of individuals. This latter form of commitment does require critique and removal of societal practices that hinder such development, but does not imply that all societal practices or more intimate interpersonal relationships can not or do not support individual wellbeing and development.

Claim 1 - Mill's theoretical and practical approaches are consistent[20]

According to Annas, Mill's argument is rich with inconsistencies. She explains that the root of Mill's inconsistency lies in his attempt to argue simultaneously from two conflicting positions. Annas summarizes these positions as *radical* and *reformist*.

Mill's radical approach is based in theory, and argues that we have no ability to know what natural behavior would be for women, because society is so oppressive that natural behavior has not had an opportunity to develop. This argument is very important for Mill, who uses it to contradict those who claimed that - on the grounds that many women reported being pleased with the lives they led - there was no problem with the male-dominated structure of society.

The reformist approach, on the other hand, is based on empirical evidence, and argues, among other things, that the small number of cases where women have broken from traditional roles provides evidence that women have more potential and potential desires than are commonly believed.

Annas insists that Mill cannot coherently hold both of these positions, alleging that it is inconsistent to claim that it is not possible to look at behavior to know what is natural and then look at behavior, minority or not, to argue for what is natural (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 180-181).

Response I - Mill as a Theorist and a Practitioner

[20] Morales makes a parallel, and significantly more thorough, argument in PE (131) "Was Mill an Essentailist". For example, she writes, "I shall argue that Mill consistently advances an empiricist conception of persons and that his agnosticism about the "nature" of women and men *strengthens* his equally empiricist arguments for perfect equality as part of the human good."

It is not necessary to read Mill's theoretical (radical) approach as inconsistent with his practical (reformist) approach. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill's argument is for the claim that women of his time *might* not have chosen to accept the terms of marriage they were subject to, nor believed they were fulfilled by the submissive roles they tended to occupy.[21] The theoretical argument for this claim, really, is just a repudiation of an argument for the opposing claim, namely, that women would naturally choose to fill the roles they have tended to occupy. Here we can imagine Mill responding with a question: "Really?" he asks, in theoretical mode, "How could we ever know what they would naturally choose, given the influence of society over their current preferences?"

The empirical argument for the same claim—that women of his time *might* not have chosen to accept the terms of marriage they were subject to, nor believed they were fulfilled by the submissive roles they tended to occupy—merely points out that we *can* find exceptions to the rule of women preferring their subservient roles in society. This possibility, at the very least, establishes that women *might* choose nontraditional roles if given the opportunity.[22] This is not necessarily a claim that minority behavior is natural, but rather a response to the sexist attitudes of his time that set limits on women's potential. By pointing to women who led lives beyond or outside of those limits Mill

---

[21] In general, in agreement with Morales, I do not see Mill as particularly wedded to questions of "naturalness" in terms of evaluating or understanding specific human behaviors. While his psychology does rely on an understanding of certain tendencies as part of human nature/natural human potential (Util, Chap 5).

[22] Mill scholar Elizabeth Anderson articulates this point well: *I don't see Mill as arguing that the minority behavior is natural to women. Rather he is giving an argument against the claim that currently sexist views about women's abilities set a ceiling for women's* ***potential****. He's saying we already have counterexamples to the claim that woman as a class are unfit for, say, politics -- look at Queen Elizabeth! This does not imply that if legal and social restraints on women's political engagement were lifted, that then they would "naturally" gravitate toward politics. It simply says they are not categorically disqualified from this* (Anderson, pers comm, 2011).

provided counter examples to arguments that claimed that women were categorically disqualified from various areas of life. Here we can imagine Mill saying, "What do you mean women have no interest in or capacity for politics and leadership? Look at Queen Elizabeth!."[23]

Of course, neither the theoretical argument nor the empirical argument is definitive; they are not meant to be. Instead, they are meant to establish the possibility that things can be, and perhaps ought to be, other than they are. Put another way: What *is* is not necessarily what *ought* to be. Further, it is perhaps worth broaching concerns of naturalistic fallacy. We may not know what is natural, and even if we could know what is natural, it is unclear to me that Mill would be wedded to claiming that what is natural is what ought to be. Rather than conflicting with one another, the empirical and theoretical arguments can work together, steering us away from various ways of understanding that set limits on women's potential, and instead toward the questions: How can things be now, and how ought they be in the future? What can we imagine for ourselves and for society? How can we make ample room to imagine possibilities that can help us develop well?

Seeing Mill as dedicated to these kinds of questions, rather than essentialist or empirical understandings of human nature, offers two things to our understanding of PHA: First, it develops a conception of individual wellbeing and development that recognizes that social forces are always shaping our understanding of agency — and that these social forces can and sometimes should be changed (e.g. altering societal laws,

[23] Note: Thank you to Elizabeth Anderson for help articulating this point.

norms, practices, or, making more room for friendship) to better support individual wellbeing and development and therefore the possibility of transformation. Relatedly, it clearly ties individual wellbeing and development to a notion of human beings as progressive: wellbeing and development, or agency, is not something humans either possess or do not possess, but a dynamic evolution over the course of our lifetimes within a social-historical context — it is something that can be hindered, yes, but that can also grow and develop.

Claim 2 - Mill is committed to a sophisticated version of utilitarianism that holds human beings as progressive beings and allows for personal relationships to play a substantial role in the promotion of societal good

Annas raises a second concern about Mill's radical argument. She worries that the radical argument conflicts with Mill's larger canon, particularly his proclaimed utilitarian ends. Recall that, according to Annas, Mill's radical argument claims that society's influence over women raises doubts about the possibility of looking to the majority of women of his day, either by observing them or inquiring of them, to know what behavior would be natural or desirable for women. How is it then that such a population could participate in a utilitarian calculus? How would we properly include the utility of a population that may not be able to correctly envision or imagine their own potential for happiness? Could we include said women's reports of their own utility in our calculus? If not, how would we otherwise move forward in calculating utility for this population? Must we abandon utilitarianism for a different normative ideal (e.g. women's rights)?

In support of Annas, it is true that Mill does not claim that his later works diverge from his utilitarian commitments. In fact, in the last chapter of *The Subjection of Women*, he raises seemingly utilitarian questions: *What good are we to expect from the changes proposed?; Would mankind be better off if women were free?* Mill goes on to answer these questions affirmatively, claiming that improvements in women's freedom would in fact promote general utility (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 75). So, if Annas is right, we may have good reason to be concerned about Mill's consistency.

However, I do not believe that Annas's concern is justified. Her error lies in her understanding of Millian utilitarianism. In responding to Annas I will attempt to show that Mill's arguments in *The Subjection of Women* are consistent with his claims in *Utilitarianism* and further with other aspects of his larger canon.[24]

While an exploration of Mill's consistency may be interesting in itself, as mentioned earlier, a large part of my motivation in crafting a response to Annas is that working through a response can help us with projects that are relevant to understanding cross-gender friendship today — which will not require the reader to be invested in Mill's consistency nor to be committed to utilitarianism, Millian or otherwise. We will explore questions of what constitutes individual agency and how said agency can be affected by society and interpersonal relationships (or a lack thereof). We will also begin to examine why Mill may be comfortable with questioning individual agency and advocating for

[24] In *Perfect Equality* Maria Morales makes a similar claim, though through a different argument. In Chapter Three, we will examine a section from her chapter "Well Constituted Communities" that includes the claim: "Throughout his life, [Mill] brought together elements of various philosophical outlooks he believed contributed to the progressiveness of utility as a general ethic of human improvement. The fundamental aim of his architectonic philosophical project was to confer *substance* to utilitarianism and liberalism by grounding them on a comprehensive conception of human well-being" (200).

changes in society to better promote individual agency. Hopefully, this will help readers examine their own comfort level with the kinds of questions our current attitudes toward cross-gender friendship raise about individual agency and exploring possible changes to our own society.

A Closer Look at Annas's Concern

As mentioned above, even while Mill offers an affirmative response to the utilitarian questions he proposes at the end of *The Subjection of Women*, Annas worries that a basic understanding of utilitarianism would call for a negative response. Her concern is this: if utility is a calculation of people's happiness, of, as Mill puts it, the increase in their pleasure and the decrease in their pain, a survey of the population would reveal that Mill's proposed changes would not result in an increase in reported utility. The problem being that the changes Mill proposes would only appeal to a hypothetical audience of persons who *already* believe in the necessity of such changes – but Mill is not facing that audience, rather he faces a majority that strongly believes such changes are not necessary (recall again the poor reception of his book). The majority then would not report an increase in pleasure related to, for example, women's suffrage, a change in women's roles, or women's education. Annas explains:

> [Mill] goes on to list advantages to be gained from the liberation of women. However, though it is clearly an appeal to consequences, the argument cannot be utilitarian in the present restricted sense of taking into account only people's

> actual desires and needs; for what Mill cites as benefits would often only satisfy people already liberated from former attitudes. He first, for example, mentions the benefit of having the most basic human relationship [marriage] run justly instead of unjustly; but if most people in a society are not liberated, they will presumably not see the present system of relations between the sexes as unjust, nor see anything wrong with the attitudes engendered by it (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 190).

That is, according to Annas, utilitarianism is committed to taking into account people's *actual needs and desires* — their experience of utility — the increases in pleasure or decreases in pain they experience or report — not a hypothetical utility they (or others) may eventually experience. Thus, as the majority, it seems, would not actually feel an increase in utility with the proposed changes, it matters little that they (or others) might theoretically be pleased at a future time if the proposed changes allowed them to grow in such a way that they then recognized the benefits of such changes. Put another way, Annas seems to be concerned that it is inconsistent with Mill's utilitarianism or his utilitarian aims to claim that individuals can lack the capacity to adequately recognize and directly report their own utility.[25]

[25] In an attempt to be as charitable as possible: It may be that Annas is raising concerns about the viability of raising justice claims in utilitarian theory. Perhaps she holds, as some of Mill's critics do, that a move away from actual desires is a move away from taking utilitarian calculus seriously as a moral tenet and towards models such as Kant's notion of human dignity or an Aristotelean model of virtue ethics. In both cases the calculus would be so dependent upon acting in certain ways toward human beings (or thinking of human beings developing in such a way) that the actions would become the guiding force, with the calculus (at least practically) taking a second seat. It is not clear to me that this is her concern, however, not intending that my own argument be wedded to utility, I do not think the possibility is concerning to the project at hand.

But is this really a concern for Mill? In order to properly answer that question, we need to examine some of Annas's premises. Further, we will need an understanding of Millian utilitarianism that is rich enough to engage questions of individual agency (including an individual's ability, or not, to report their own utility accurately). And, within that, we will need to understand how Mill would determine an individual's utility, or in Annas's parlance, what constitutes one's *actual needs and desires*.

Outline of Response 2

I will respond to Annas's second claim from three different angles:

a) Mill's theory of higher and lower pleasures

b) Mill's understanding of human beings as progressive beings as advanced in *Utilitarianism*

c) Mill's understanding of human beings as progressive beings as advanced in *On Liberty*

Summary of response: Annas's critique relies on an oversimplified understanding of utilitarianism that does not properly take into account the complexity of Mill's philosophy, particularly his understanding of human beings as *progressive beings*. This is of interest not only in relation to developing a Millian account of agency, such as PHA, but also to our larger project of exploring the subjection of friendship. The details of Mill's theory that are brought out in our response to Annas will help us to understand how our current attitudes and practices regarding cross-gender friendship may be founded

on ignorant or misinformed premises that are perpetuated by our society, how personal relationships and developing our abilities to care for others may be tied to our moral development, and finally, how a rich understanding of human agency may call for increasing space in our society for individuals to imagine and pursue personal relationships, particularly cross-gender friendships, that may be of value to them.

Response 2a - Higher and Lower Pleasures

In responses 2b and 2c we will explore at length Mill's understanding of human beings as progressive beings. Put simply, progressive beings are beings that can grow and develop — that can progress — throughout their lifetimes and also over generations.

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to introduce this notion is to explore the idea of higher and lower pleasures that Mill employs in *Utilitarianism*. Mill claims that in calculating utility not all pleasures are to be given the same weight. In making such a calculation, experience is highly relevant—for only properly informed understandings of utility are given full weight. In the same light, uninformed or misinformed desires or senses of pleasure are not true reflections of utility but rather of ignorance. He writes:

> If I am asked what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except of its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experienced both give a decided

> preference, irrespective of any moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 8).

This caveat to understanding utility has wide implications—it protects utilitarianism from a potential susceptibility to tyranny under an uninformed majority—as those who have experienced alternatives in life can trump majority rule in a utility calculation. For example, even though the majority of women in Mill's time may have reported happiness with their situation, if a minority of women that had in some way experienced alternatives were to challenge that report a utilitarian calculus would need to take the potentially more informed minority seriously. Further, although Mill does not explicitly tell us how to employ the higher/lower pleasure distinction in utility calculations, it's clear that he understands the distinctions to properly affect calculations of utility for societies as they stand. It follows that higher/lower distinctions should also play a role as we evaluate programs of social reform that are likely to alter future attitudes. In fact, as we will see in the next sections, Mill tied the notion of higher and lower pleasures closely to his understanding of human beings as progressive beings. That is, a notion of humans as beings as beings that are able to change and progress, both as individuals, and as societies.

Notably, the ability to progress is dependent on capacities that can be hindered or nurtured. When these capacities are nurtured, humans desire and move toward experiences that support them. Mill writes:

> Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 7-8).

Further, he reminds us that our ability to fully develop is not guaranteed and in fact is dependent upon proper care, "Capacity for the nobler feelings is … vulnerable and must be nurtured" (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 10). We will see soon that the capacities Mill refers to include both intellectual and emotional potential. In the mean time, Keep in mind Mill's claim that life experience, both in diversity and in quality, can affect one's ability to properly understand her own utility as well as the utility of others.

Conclusions 2a

We have preliminary evidence that Mill's *Utilitarianism* would reject a simple calculation of utility based on Annas's notion of self-reported *actual needs and desires*. Further, we have evidence that this rejection would be based on an understanding of human beings as beings that can progress if properly nurtured. We have also seen a preliminary argument for questioning personal reports of utility when we have reason to believe that the status-quo or other influences may be hindering an individual's ability to recognize his or her own utility.

Response 2b - *Utilitarianism* and Progressive Beings

Introduction

We can look to two related arguments Mill offers to delve deeper into his understanding of human beings as *progressive beings*—as the kind of beings that can and should grow, develop and improve throughout their own lives. Development that, in turn, supports the progress of society. In this section, we'll look to Mill's work in *Utilitarianism* (Response 2b) and then in the next section we will look to his related work in *On Liberty* (Response 2c).

Punishment and Justice

In chapter five of *Utilitarianism*, Mill begins a discussion of justice and rights, which he ties closely to his understandings of human nature and human psychology. Perhaps not intuitive to modern readers, Mill begins his discussion with a discussion of punishment. According to Mill, punishment is tied to our understanding of justice and our inclination to punish is fundamental to our ability to identify wrong doing. Mill writes:

> ... we do not call anything wrong unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it - if not by law by the opinion of his fellow creatures; if not by opinion, by the reproaches of his own conscience (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 48-49).

Mill goes on to explain that an inclination towards punishment can serve as a kind of basic litmus test that indicates to us some kind of wrong doing may be taking place. Further, when some assignable person is wronged, that is, when we are inclined to punish

on their behalf, we can say that one of their rights may have been violated—that is, if they have been wronged, there will be a corresponding right they can claim (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 49-50). Even further, if they can legitimately claim a right, then we can understand ourselves as having a duty to said person—they can claim from us that we ought to act or cease to act, as necessary to support their right. Justice then, is connected to supporting these rights and fulfilling these duties. Justice "implies something which it is not only right to do, and wrong not to do, but which some individual person can claim from us as a right" (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 50).

How is this relevant? In a way we might not want to be invested in this argument, at least, not in the accuracy of Mill's portrayal of human psychology. But for my purposes it matters little whether or not Mill was correct about human beings having a natural inclination to punish and/or the role such an inclination might play in our understanding of justice. What is important, however, is that Mill's characterization of justice demonstrates that his understanding of human nature is progressive, and his understanding of our potential to progress is deeply tied to our ability to sympathize—to care—for others. Put another way, our individual wellbeing and development is dependent on our capacity for what Mill calls *social sympathy*.

Social Sympathy

Mill claims that at a basic level human beings have two natural sentiments that are relevant to justice and rights: self-defense and the feeling of sympathy. Together, these two sentiments combine in a sentiment of justice (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 51). That is, our

instinct of self-defense combines with our instinct to care about those close to us such that we have a desire to punish or retaliate when we, or those close to us, are threatened. So our sentiment of justice is a natural tendency to "resent and to repel or to retaliate any harm done or attempted against ourselves or those with whom we sympathize" (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 51). Mill tells us that at this point there is nothing moral in the sentiment of justice—it is much like an animal instinct—and instead of providing a moral compass—it is an impulse that can be correctly or incorrectly applied. The moral guidance for this instinct comes from two other human capacities, which, while no less natural to human beings, are not innate but rather require cultivation. They are natural, Mill claims, in the sense that all human beings are capable of them—but they are also vulnerable to and dependent upon how we are nurtured (or hindered) by society. The two capacities are superior intelligence and a more complex power of sympathizing than the basic innate sentiment discussed above (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 51). In combination, Mill believes that these capacities, if properly nurtured, can lead to social sympathy. That is, human beings can use their superior intelligence and their superior powers of sympathy to recognize the importance not only of applying their sentiment of justice to support their own well being and that of those they are close to, but rather to apply their sentiment to all human beings equally. Intelligence is closely related to social sympathy in that its development allows us to conceive of ourselves not only as individuals with interests, but also as citizens, team members, or more generally as part of the human community. This recognition allows us to further understand that our interests are bound up with the interests of others and with our membership in various social groups. Thus, intelligence

helps us to see the interrelated nature of human lives, and in combination with social sympathy, helps us to better care for ourselves and others. Held together, the two add nuance to our sentiment of justice—which, becomes not a mere instinct, but rather a moral force that has the potential for, and inclination towards, complex reflection on the well-being of all.

For example, our sentiment of justice may alert us to respond to harm—but in order for that response to be moral, we have to properly recognize elements of injustice, e.g. what causes harm, when it is being caused, and what might usefully be done alleviate it. Our intellect and superior power of sympathy can help us to properly discern the who, what, when, where and how of harm and also help us to recognize that we can and should care about the people being harmed and be motivated to act on their behalf (e.g. Mill recognizing and responding to the subjection of women in his time).

For Mill, developing and fostering social sympathy is part of our development or progress as good utilitarians. In combination with our basic sympathy of justice, social sympathy allows us to properly see the importance of considering the utility of others, and thus help us to take on a utilitarian ideal (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 52).

But, the capacities Mill highlights reveal more about his beliefs than simply his commitment to utilitarianism. As mentioned above, Mill's characterization of justice is tied to and reflects his understanding of human brings as progressive: we are the kind of beings that can grow or progress throughout our lives (and as we will see throughout generations as well) *if* our capacities are properly nurtured. Regardless of our commitment to utilitarianism, we can take seriously Mill's messages regarding the

influence of others on an individual's potential. Further, we can certainly entertain questions Mill raises regarding how human potential may be deeply tied to both intellectual and emotional development. If our intellect and our capacity to sympathize are nurtured, we become better people by increasing our ability to sympathize - to care properly - for others. Visually, we might illustrate this with the chart below:

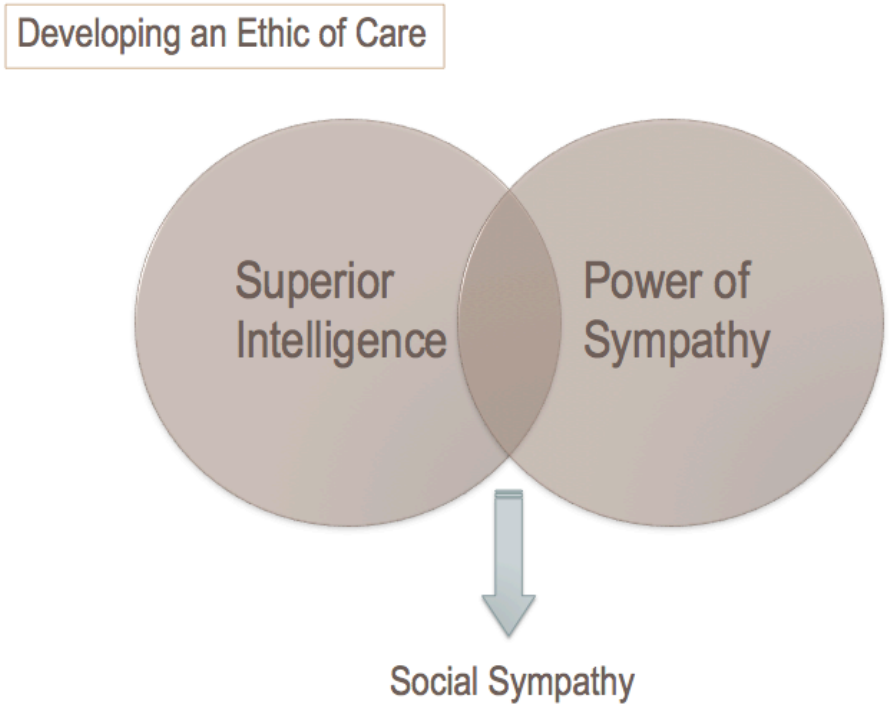

Figure 2-3

Returning to Annas's Concern - Not All Utilitarians are Alike

Now, we should recall Annas' concern about the ability to reconcile Mill's work in *The Subjection of Women* and his utilitarian commitments. Annas wrote, "the argument cannot be utilitarian in the present *restricted sense* of taking into account only people's actual desires and needs" (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 190, emphasis added). Her worry seemed to be that utilitarian commitments require that we take a

person's actual experiences with and understanding of their own utility seriously when calculating utility.

Let's pause to outline basic understandings of *utility* and *utilitarianism*, so as to have a framework upon which we can build more nuanced understandings. A basic way to understand utility is to think of it as human pleasure or happiness. To be a utilitarian or to adopt a utilitarian mentality means adopting a moral commitment to maximizing human utility, or to maximizing human pleasure or happiness. In doing so, the moral character of actions becomes intertwined with whether or not those actions increase or decrease the aggregate utility of the human population. It is important to note that the commitment is *not* to maximize one's own utility or any specific person's or group's utility, but rather to maximize that of a society or, ultimately, human utility as a whole. In fact, utilitarians have a commitment not to privilege any one person over any other, but rather to place equal value on the utility of each human being. To restate, these commitments mean that we recognize the importance of individual human utility in so much as it contributes to the general amount of human utility or, put another way, aggregate human utility in the world. That will be our basic framework.

I see Annas's concern as compatible with this basic framework and as fitting well with an orthodox interpretation of Utilitarianism. After all, the father of Utilitarianism, Bentham, was deeply concerned that moral theory move away from bourgeoisie elitism. For Bentham, this move required recognizing each person's utility—as they experienced it—equally. To properly include the poor and others who had often been overlooked or undervalued, no pleasures could be held as worth more than others. Thus, no one could

argue that one aristocrat's happiness, being perceived as more sophisticated and valuable, could outweigh that of a number of those "less fortunate" with their "less developed" capabilities for happiness. Bentham's notion that all utility would be of the same weight was a push against philosophies that supported a status-quo of discrimination and elitism.

However, while Mill is closely allied with Bentham in his aim to maximize utility, Mill's notion of how to properly understand and calculate utility differs significantly from Bentham's. As we will discuss at length, Mill does not hold all qualities or types of happiness and pleasure equally, and also forwards an understanding of human beings as progressive—as able to develop, as individuals, societies, and as a species. While these departures from Bentham may leave Mill open to other accusations, it is unclear to me how a charitable reading of Mill could lead Annas to believe that Mill's commitment to utility would be divorced from a belief that, for example, societal custom could hinder individual reflection, and would not include a notion of higher pleasures and progress in his calculation of utility. Thus is difficult to understand how Mill could be wedded to *actual desires and needs* as Annas forwards them.

As I will show in the following sections, Millian utilitarianism leaves ample room for people to be mistaken about their own utility and the utility of others. Consistent with the possibility of error, Mill's utilitarianism is not committed to considering only one's actual desires, in Annas's sense of how one would presently experience, understand, or

report them, but rather to maximizing [the potential for] utility throughout a person's life and into the lives of future members of society and the world.[26]

Conclusions 2b

Human Beings as Progressive Beings: Utility as Tied to Agency

The importance and vulnerability of human beings' capacity for social sympathy highlights Mill's beliefs in the power and influence of the societies in which we live, and also allows us to begin to articulate the important role that Mill believes care for others can have in our lives (we will continue this discussion in 2c and chapter three).

Further, regardless of whether or not we accept his account of human psychology and development, the structure and content of the argument reinforces an earlier claim: that Mill was not committed to understanding proper human development in terms of what is innately natural (e.g. if one could leave a baby in the forest somehow to develop alone). But, rather through a sense of what is possible in terms of supporting individuals and societies to progress.

We may also question whether some elements of Mill's vision of human beings as progressive beings (e.g. higher/lower pleasures, commitment to justice, investment in social sympathy) has left Mill open to accusations invoking a non-utilitarian standard: something more akin to a human rights approach or a kind of Kantian dignity. The concern may be something like this: Mill relies so much on the development of human

[26] If one is inclined to take a non-utilitarian stance this section can be read with Kantian undertones (of a kind of categorical imperative decision making process). On this read, increasing utility is about making choices that best support human beings' development as PBs. Which is something akin to supporting the choices one would make if one knew best.

agency that eventually his utilitarian standard becomes somewhat moot—the utilitarian calculus becomes so dependent upon the proper development or treatment of the individual that looking to utility for prescriptive means of how to live dissolves into a call for an account of how to best bolster human agency—but these are large claims for the small examination of Mill we have completed. However, examining the role that Mill saw for personal relationships may help readers to see how Mill believed utilitarianism was coherent with his other works, though I do not believe an investment in utilitarianism is necessary to find meaning in the implications Mill's work brings to the relationship between individual agency and personal relationships.

Response 2c - *On Liberty* and Progressive Beings

Utility is Defined by Human Beings as Progressive Beings

Let's begin with a passage in which Mill clarifies his commitment to utilitarian thought. In the passage, Mill claims to separate himself from philosophers such as Locke or Kant, who rely fundamentally on notions of 'abstract right'. He writes that he does not wish to rely on any such argument *if* said argument is divorced from utility. However, at the same time he issues a warning of sorts: when making appeals to utility, utility *must* be fully understood. Mill then tells us that a full understanding of utility is built upon an understanding of human beings as *progressive beings*:

> It is proper to state that I forgo any advantage which could be derived to my argument from the idea of abstract right as a thing independent of utility. I regard

> utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being (Mill, *On Liberty* 10).

By grounding utility upon an understanding of humans as progressive beings, Mill is, in effect, saying that utility can only be truly understood through an understanding of human beings as the kind of creature that can grow and develop—that can progress. Put another way, utility cannot be properly understood without a recognition that human beings can change (note that, just as a discussion of higher and lower pleasures did, this hints at pushing against Annas's interpretation of *actual* utility being connected to one's present experience of his/her own utility).

So, if the ultimate meaning of utility will find its root in human beings' nature as progressive beings, our next task is to tease out more detail as to what Mill means when he claims that human beings are progressive beings.

Human Beings Are Special

Mill tells us that human beings are a particular kind of living creature that differ importantly from non-living automatons and from other animals. Unlike machines, which are produced by design for a specific purpose and can be replicated, human beings are each unique and are not meant simply to follow the designs or plans of someone or something external to themselves. Instead, human beings, like other living things, ought to grow and develop according to the kind of creature that they are. Mill writes:

> [A human being] is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing (Mill, *On Liberty* 56-57).

However, Mill's tree metaphor is incomplete, for, as mentioned above, human beings also differ from other living things. In a passage that references the Epicureans, Mill tells us that human beings have unique capacities, and that when aware of these unique capacities, human beings recognize that utility is not the simple happiness or pleasure that animals may experience, and that humans, as animals, may also experience. Rather, utility is a kind of happiness dependent upon distinctly human capacities and is not to be mistaken for simple pleasure. Revisiting a passage from *Utilitarianism* can help us to recall this point:

> The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of the beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conception of happiness [utility]. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness [utility] which does not include their [the elevated faculties] gratification (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2:4)

Higher Faculties, Higher Needs?

Human beings then have the potential to develop certain capacities that, once developed, play an integral role in their happiness. As we have seen in our work with *Utilitarianism*, Mill goes on to identify the higher faculties, such as our superior intellect and power of sympathy. Perhaps helpfully, he alternately describes these faculties as including intellect, feelings, imagination and moral sentiments (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2:6). These qualities, in turn, give humans the potential for a host of unique activities such as forming independent thoughts and setting and following life plans. In fact, according to Mill, someone who, for example, lets others overly influence his or her decisions (in the sense of lacking her or his own agency), is not acting in a fully human way. For Mill, a person who fails to use his or her higher faculties and corresponding abilities for independent thought, reflection and action is failing to contribute to his or her own development and the greater project of humanity – that of ongoing human improvement. For it matters to Mill, not only how human beings act, but also why they act as they do:

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his life plan for him, has no more need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties ... It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are in which they do it. Among the works of man, which human life is rightly employed

> in perfecting and beautifying, the first importance surely is man himself (Mill, *On Liberty* 56).

We have seen from these passages then that Mill believes each human being is a kind of living creature that possesses a unique potential to develop qualities that can aid in his or her own decision making, action taking and general improvement. More specifically, progressive beings find happiness searching for what it is that they do or don't value, developing a revisable life plan on this basis, refining and reshaping that plan, pursuing what they value in that plan, and allowing for and supporting similar freedoms for others. In utilizing these qualities, human beings can improve not only their own lives, but also the lives of others. However, this potential can be hindered if one is not able to properly develop her or his own agency. Mill writes as much in *The Subjection of Women*:

> What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 20-21).[27]

[27] Mill's use of the term "natural" and his commitment to naturalness in this passage is mitigated by a discussion that shortly follows on our inability to ascertain what is natural. You may recall the passage from the introduction of this work, "We cannot isolate a human being from the circumstances of his condition, so as to ascertain experimentally what he would have been by nature; but we can consider what he is, and what his circumstances have been, and whether the one would have been capable of producing the other" (JS Mill, The Subjection of Women, 65).

It is clear from this passage that Mill believes that human agency can be deeply influenced by the society in which one lives. So much so that a person can fail to develop or otherwise become alienated from her or his nature as a progressive being. Further, without healthy development of her or his higher faculties a person can be unable to hold a full understanding of her or his own utility (and we can probably safely add, the utility of others). Please note that we will discuss this in more detail in chapter three.

Conclusions 2c

What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us … And Everybody Else

At this point, we have many reasons to reject Annas' restricted interpretation of utilitarianism. First, we have clear evidence that Mill is invested in human beings as progressive beings, whose commitment to utility is not necessarily rooted in one's present sense of utility, but rather in a commitment to a kind of long-term development not only for an individual but also for humanity as a whole. Further, the understanding of human beings as progressive is tied to an understanding of human beings as having special capacities that when properly nurtured contribute to our moral development. Finally, we have evidence from both *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Wome*n that Mill believes that progressive beings must have a level of agency in their lives, one composed of both intellectual and sentimental faculties that allows them, for example, to choose their own life plan. Relatedly, Mill clearly believes that, given one's circumstances, it is possible for a person's agency to be hindered in such a way that she or he is, at least

temporarily, hard pressed to properly recognize what would truly constitute utility for herself or himself as a progressive being.

Claim 3 - Mill is not a naive individualist

Annas offers one more major concern: she argues that as an individualist, Mill would refuse to accept government interference in individuals' lives regardless of potential positive outcomes. Thus, she worries that Mill may not have been comfortable with, and must not have anticipated, the level of government intervention his work implies. According to Annas, Mill did not foresee the immense changes that would be necessary to first convince people of the importance of sexual equality and then to realize said equality in society. Part of this concern clearly stems from Annas' own belief that government-run systems, such as education, must change in order to realize the rich legal, economic and social equality between the sexes that Mill envisioned. Annas writes:

> Our whole approach to education has to be changed if people are not to continue to learn the attitudes which lead to discrimination even where legal disabilities disappear.

> In this respect there is some truth to the accusation that Mill's thinking about sexual differences is shallow. He is not aware of the massive changes required in people's desires and outlooks before sexual equality becomes a reality and its effects are something that people see as beneficial. Consequently, he does not pay

> enough attention to the extensive interference in people's lives necessary to ensure that the liberation of women becomes a real change and not just the same attitudes under another name ... If he had been aware of this, he might, as an individualist, have been disturbed (Annas, *Mill and The Subjection of Women* 191-192).

In summary, Annas believes both that Mill underestimated the immensity of change necessary and also failed to see the ways in which government and other entities would need to "interfere" with individual autonomy in order to support substantive change in society.

Outline of Response 3

I will respond to Annas' third claim in two parts:

a) I will express reserved agreement with her claim that Mill did not adequately predict the breath of societal change, at least not in the way Annas envisions it, indicated by the changes he proposed to women's agency

b) I will examine elements of *On Liberty*, particularly the *Liberty Principle* and *Freedom of Association* through the lens of Mill's investment in interpersonal relationships

Summary of response: If we properly understand Mill's investment in agency — a commitment to human development as deeply tied to both intellectual and sympathetic development — we can reject Annas's notion of Mill's individualism as being too extreme. For Mill, relationships with and care for others was of paramount importance to development. Looking to the *Liberty Principle* and Mill's commitment to *Freedom of Association* will help us to better understand the complex dependence Mill assumes between aspects of PHA such as individual freedom, human relationships, and society. We will see a picture in which individuals develop fully only in relationship to others and only when their social sympathies are strong (this will also be further discussed in chapter three). Further, we can recall Mill's commitment to *perfect equality*, and reflect that calling for immense changes in the power structures of society indicates an additional sense Mill had of the gravity of the situation at hand. Finally, we will see that care for others and investment in their wellbeing, rather than rampant individualism, is strongly consistent with Mill's utilitarian goals.

Response 3a

Mill as Naïve?

Annas makes an interesting point here, as it is worth recognizing that modern society often uses government intervention in an attempt to battle discrimination and inequity. This intervention can involve removing discriminatory laws, as an individualist might envision, but is certainly not limited to doing so. It is common for our society to adopt policies that can be interpreted as "interfering" with individual choice and responsibility

(e.g., school bussing, affirmative action, external review boards for hiring processes, diversity requirements, etc.). Annas, then, is worried that in committing himself to legal, economic, and social equality between the sexes, Mill is inadvertently committing himself to a kind of government interference or coercion with which he would not be comfortable.

It is true that many ways of reading Mill do indeed leave him almost strangely naïve in regards to the breadth of change his theoretical goals imply. Many feminist critics, for example, have noted that it is unclear why Mill would not have seen that if women's rights and education were supported legally, economically and socially, women's lives would then necessarily enter the public sphere to a degree they had not previously. For example, if women had the education, economic mobility and societal support to imagine a diverse set of life plans it seems only sensible to question whether or not the majority of women would still primarily and solely choose to adopt domestic roles as wives and mothers. Or, as we are increasingly seeing in society today, men might want to adopt or share in domestic care-giving roles that had previously been seen as exclusively female roles. Mill fails to explicitly make such observations. However, in her article "Marital Slavery and Friendship" Mary Lyndon Shanley offers one defense of Mill, noting that unlike his deeply held tenets (e.g. perfect equality) Mill would have held his views on female and male roles as open to revision (Shanley, *Marital Slavery and Friendship* 240-243). In *Perfect Equality*, Maria Morales makes a related argument regarding the revise-ability of Mill's claims on this subject, though she is not entirely in agreement with Lyndon Shanley as to the reason. Morales argues that Mill would not

introduce principles that were "independent of experience," and thus we cannot read *perfect equality*, or any Millian principle, as of another order than other claims, in the way suggested by Lyndon Shanley. Morales claims that Mill would indeed "welcome" criticisms to his suggestions regarding divisions of labor in the family as he "refused to be a prophet" for future generations. She further claims that Mill's mistake on the distribution of household roles was to assume that child-bearing and child-rearing go hand in hand, and thus to assume that couples that choose to have children would, to fairly distribute labor, generally include women in the home and men as wage earners. However, she notes his progressive belief that partners can live in a relation of perfect equality while engaging in different forms of labor, which reflects his belief that "how much power one has should never depend on the forms of labor in which one engages" (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 169-174). Offering additional thoughts, Jo Ellen Jacobs, author of *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* presents Mill's claim regarding women and domestic duties as one that would "disappoint" Taylor, and writes that Mill never fully understood the amount of work that Taylor took on in their household. She claims that Taylor took on "double-duty" while Mill did not. She asks,

> Could [Mill] have written all the words in the thirty-three volumes of his collected works had he not had a mother or [Taylor] to secure his daily needs? How much more could [Taylor] have written if she had enjoyed his running ahead to smooth out the bumps of her daily life? (Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* 103).

She adds that neither Mill or Taylor fully appreciated the work that their servants took on. I find Lyndon Shanley and Morales' claims about the revise-ability of Mill's thoughts on this subject to be in line with my own thoughts, though I lean towards Shanley in questioning the flexibility Mill had around fundamental tenents such as his notion of human beings as progressive beings. Put another way, it seems that there is good reason to believe that Mill would be quite open to considering alternate divisions of labor as well as revisions to societal practices if one could pose them as potentially valuable experiments in living (which seems quite possible to achieve). Further, in my desire to open space for alternate possibilities, I further offer the notion that cross-gender friendship, inside and outside of marriage, can work to move us closer to rich equalities in the division of family labor—which still suffers from deep inequalities despite the fact that some of Mill's goals for male and female equality have been realized.

Response 3b

Mill as Concerned with Individual Agency

Annas draws much of her individualist understanding of Mill from his work in *On Liberty*. In *On Liberty* Mill proposes ways in which society can ensure that human beings are most likely to develop properly as progressive beings and, thus, truly know their own utility and contribute to the ongoing development of humanity and aggregate human happiness. In Mill's picture of society, we can perhaps see elements of the individualist beliefs that concerned Annas coming into play. For Mill was, as Annas points out, and as we discussed earlier, concerned that external influences, be they governmental, social or

otherwise, could hinder a person from developing and utilizing his or her higher faculties and, thus, could hinder his or her natural growth as a progressive being. But to say that Mill held all external influence as harmful seems too narrow a view. As we have seen, Mill's understanding of human beings as progressive beings relies deeply on the development of not only the intellect, but also the social sympathies, calling out the importance of interdependence and ethics of care to our moral development. Mill saw relationships with others as part of the way we develop, and also saw caring for others - having advanced social sympathies such that the welfare of others (even those we don't know) is of import to us as of moral import. While his story also includes a strong nod toward individual agency, such agency (I will argue further in chapter three) was tied to social sympathies and thus to relationships and care for others. It seems consistent with his story to explore the idea that various kinds of external forces could, in fact, have a positive influence on individual agency by supporting, for example, their intellectual or sympathetic development. Here we can imagine Mill offering both friendship, in the form of marital friendship, and alterations to the power structures of society via a call for perfect equality. To return to an earlier analogy, it is too simplistic an understanding of Mill to believe he would hold that a garden had freedom to grow simply because, and only if, we did not actively interfere with it. Welfare programs or public schooling may be good examples to imagine here. The important thing to hold is that a call for individual agency is not necessarily a "hands off" message - people need others to grow and develop - we can't abandon babies in the woods and we can't conflate human

freedom with the kinds of hands off individualist leanings Annas claims Mills' work implies.

Further, we can note once again that Mill saw individual and societal development as importantly interdependent. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill was worried not just for the nature of women but for his entire society. Recall that in *On Liberty*, he writes of the intense oppression that affected the ability of all of society's members to develop as progressive beings. Let's look again at the following passage to remind ourselves of Mill's concerns:

> In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others but also in what concerns only themselves, the individual or the family do not ask themselves – what do I prefer? Or, what would suit my character and disposition? Or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play. And enable it to grow and thrive? (Mill, *On Liberty* 58)

According to Mill, to ensure humans are able to develop as progressive beings we ought to do our best to remove external forces *that may unduly hinder* such development. However, as previously discussed, to believe this means we need to remove all external forces seems too narrow a view and incorrectly represents Mill as thinking that social relations are only a negative force on human beings, restraining their inner natural tendencies, which would supposedly flourish if society simply got out of the way. To the

contrary, we've seen that Mill believes our potential as progressive beings, including our sentiments and informed preferences, can only be developed in relations with others—the relations just need to be the right kind.[28] Exploring two of the principles Mill puts forward in *On Liberty* will more clearly demonstrate the relationship between freedom and social relations: The *Harm Principle/Liberty Principle* and *Freedom of Association*.

In *On Liberty*, Mill proposes what has since been called the *Harm Principle* or the *Liberty Principle*. The principle discusses the "nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual." Mill claims that the only time in which a person may rightly interfere with the liberty of another is when he or she is acting for self-protection, or to prevent harm from coming to a third party (Mill, *On Liberty* 9).[29] One could read this as a call for a "hands off" attitude toward society. But then again, we must remember that behind this principle lies Mill's belief in human beings as progressive beings. That is, as discussed in the previous section, human beings as beings with a kind of natural potential that can flourish under the right

[28] For support for this reading of Mill see Chapter 3 of this work and Elizabeth Anderson's 'John Stuart Mill on Democracy as Sentimental Education' especially 340.

[29] Full passage from *On Liberty*: The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to some one else. The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.

circumstances—circumstances that necessarily and positively include interactions with and care for others. If we read Mill's liberty principle as a call for society to be very careful about limiting individual agency we can hold the principle open on the question of how best to support individual growth—which may likely involve both positive support as much as it involves avoiding negative restraint.

Yes, Mill saw the people of his time as profoundly subject to hindering outside influences and thus corrupted. But, in order for society to avoid such a fate, Mill offers not only the harm/liberty principle, but also corresponding liberties that he believes are crucial to humanity's functioning and development as progressive beings. Mill focuses on liberty of thought, of expression, of tastes and pursuits, and of association.

With the other liberties in mind, freedom of association is especially important to recognize in developing a charitable interpretation of *The Subjection of Women*. Notably, freedom of association or "freedom of combination among individuals" is implied by, and is part of, individual liberty:

> [From the] liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived.

> No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever may be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist absolute and unqualified (Mill, *On Liberty* 11-12).

So, why is freedom of association especially important? It seems obvious that Mill was concerned that individuals be able to share their beliefs and thoughts with one another, but it seems that such a simple kind of exchange could be accounted for with a call for freedom of expression or freedom of the press. What can freedom of association provide that individual freedoms cannot?

The answer may go something like this: freedom of association is key to the development of our social sympathies in ways that freedom of expression or freedom of the press may be less reliable and/or effective. Further, if we do not properly develop our social sympathies, we are hindered in our development as progressive beings—in the development of our own agency or PHA. Elizabeth Anderson's work on Mill may help us to better understand the crucial role freedom of association plays in Mill's theory. As we discussed above, Mill believes that as progressive beings, human beings have the potential to develop certain capacities that, once developed, are integral to their understanding of happiness. We saw that Mill identified those higher faculties as the superior intellect and social sympathies, which extend to the development of qualities such as feelings, imagination and moral sentiments (Mill, *Utilitarianism* 2:6). In an article addressing Mill's understanding of human nature, Anderson looks to Mill's work and personal life to examine the profound value that Mill saw in human relationships. It

seems that without genuine and meaningful human relationships, Mill believed that theory could be of little worth. Anderson writes:

> Mill's psychology predicted that the sentiments had to be cultivated if one were to lead a happy life while exercising analytical skills. The impersonal artificiality induced zeal for the improvement of humanity could not survive analysis unless it was reinforced by a genuine, cultivated feeling of unity with other people (Anderson, *John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living*).

I believe Anderson's claim about Mill's beliefs can be understood as follows: human beings are not the kind of beings to be sufficiently moved by arguments toward Utilitarianism (or other theories) *unless* those arguments are supported by their life experiences, in particular by the experience of feeling connected with other persons. In very plain language, people need to genuinely care about one another in order to truly or rightly adopt and practice beliefs that are intended for the betterment of society. Returning to an earlier analogy, caring for others is one of the ways that we can avoid the danger of the our own single story and the single stories that are pervasive in society.

Conclusions 3a & 3b

We have ample evidence to conclude that, much like her take on Mill's utilitarianism, Annas' take on Mill's individualist tendencies was too simplistic and not fully grounded, as we can imagine Mill would require, in an understanding of human beings as

progressive beings. By exploring Mill's potential individualism in the light of the importance of human agency we can see that he offers a complex picture in which our individual agency and freedom are dependent not just on others not interfering in harmful ways, but also on our care for others and on their positive and nurturing presence in our lives (this will be further discussed in chapter three).

Further, while we should take Annas seriously when she questions Mill's recognition of some aspects of societal change that his call for increased women's agency may imply—this does not mean that Mill was blind to the enormity of the problems society faced. We would be remiss to overlook the radical solution Mill does propose: Mill makes it clear in *The Subjection of Women* that our development, as individuals and as a society, is tied to marital friendship. Annas overlooks this kind of freedom of association, much as she overlooks the complexity of Mill's call for perfect equality. Both will be discussed further in the next chapter. Overall, it is clear that Mill believes supporting freedom of association can help us right society by helping us to grow, both intellectually and sympathetically.

Implications and Conclusions

A Brief Summary of Millian Agency

Before moving on, a brief account of the most intriguing implications of Millian agency may be of interest to my philosophical audience. As previously mentioned, PHA reveals and emphasizes: individual wellbeing and development as tied to the wellbeing and development of others; wellbeing/development as importantly different from gaining

societal power; and the value and importance of supporting a diverse range of interpersonal relationships in society.

In more detail, PHA calls us to recognize that individual well-being/development cannot stand alone. PHA implies our individual agency is necessarily connected to the well-being of other members of society, and to the society in which we live. PHA reminds us that agency is not a story of a rational agent alone in the world, and cannot be fully understood outside of its broader socio-historical context.

Second, PHA divorces itself from power structures, showing that agency as related to societal power provides a false understanding of well-being/development. Agency is not and cannot be a story of those who have power and those who do not. As Mill points out, when some members of society have false power, they themselves suffer from a false sense of superiority and an otherwise convoluted sense of self and societal wellbeing. While it is important to recognize that those with power may have significantly more comfortable lives in many ways, it is important not to mistake that power or comfort for genuine agency — full realization of agency requires a recognition of the importance of others that such power disparities deny.

Third, individual well-being and development is also necessarily connected to interpersonal relationships, which are an important way human beings learn and grow. This knowledge can help us to rewrite our understanding of the role and value of such relationships: Interpersonal relationships are not simply a good in life, they are necessary to our well-being and development as individuals, and our growth as individuals and as a society.

In short, PHA reminds us that we are all connected, and that friendship can play an important role in recognizing and utilizing that connection to its fullest potential.

Conclusions

As explicated above, responding to elements of Annas's critique of Mill's work in *The Subjection of Women* has helped us to develop a Millian account of agency. Articulating this response has shown how PHA may be helpfully or informatively read onto Mill's wider cannon. Further, it has helped us to begin to outline the complex relationships between individual wellbeing and development, society, and friendship. Notably, the key role that friendship can play in supporting individual wellbeing and development, and in building a healthy society. All of which supports the claim that friendship is important to individual and societal growth.

Further, I have examined a longstanding philosophical question about the consistency of Mill's work. In agreement with Maria Morales' work in *Perfect Equality*, though with different motivations, I have argued that Mill's canon is compelling and consistent. Much like Morales' understanding of Mill through perfect equality, my work to view Mill's cannon through the lens of friendship demonstrates a consistent and coherent picture of his work and supports Morales' claim that Mill is "not an unsystematic thinker" (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 200).

In another vein, examining Mill's understanding of the position of women in his own time, and the difficulty many women had in imagining that life could be otherwise,

can help us recognize various reasons that we may doubt the ability of members of our own society, including ourselves, to imagine, pursue and enact cross-gender friendships.

In chapter three we will continue to explore the tripartite relationship between individual wellbeing and development (PHA), society, and friendship. However, in chapter three I will move towards understanding Mill's project in its own right. As promised at the outset of this chapter, work in chapter three will amend Thoreau's notion of operation and cooperation, arguing that while operation is indeed key to cooperation, the inverse is also true: cooperation is key to operation. Or, in the terms of the project at hand: friendship is key to individual wellbeing and development.

Chapter 3
PHA, Society, and Friendship

At the beginning of chapter two, I promised that this chapter would support and expand Thoreau's notion of operation and cooperation. Recall that Thoreau claims that operation is a necessary foundation for cooperation. The previous chapter explored what it means to operate in a Millian sense, and began to build connections between operation and cooperation. This chapter will continue to explore operation, and expand Thoreau's notion by demonstrating that cooperation is a necessary foundation for operation. More specifically, applying the analogy, this chapter continues to explore PHA, and expands Thoreau's notion by discussing how friendship contributes to and strengthens PHA, and how both can contribute to and be supported by society.

In order to examine the tripartite relationship between PHA, society, and friendship, this chapter will take a three-part approach to exploring their interconnected and reciprocal relationships. Each part of the approach will examine a notion from Mill's work that provides an example of how we might understand the three elements of the tripartite relationship to be embodied. We will explore something-ness as an example of PHA, perfect equality as an example of a healthy society, and reciprocal superiority as an example of an ideal friendship. For reference, please see the following chart:

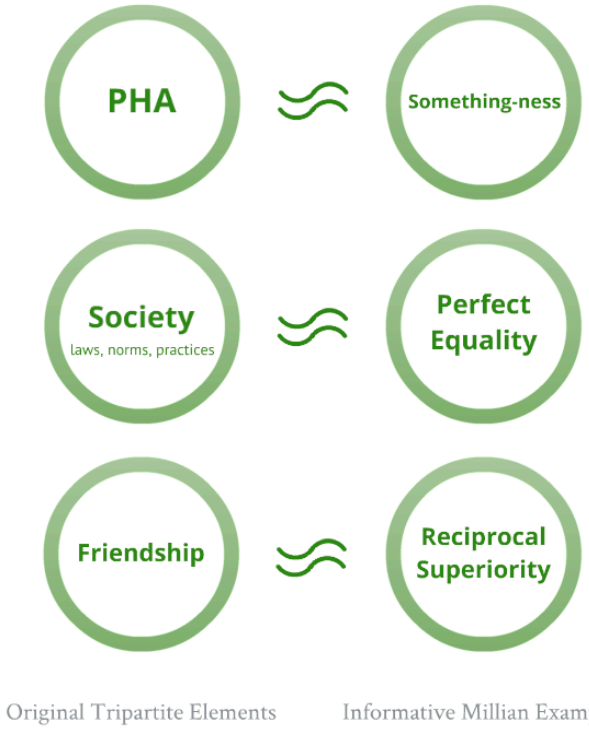

Figure 3-1

The exploration of these examples will provide further evidence of the complex interconnectedness of the tripartite relationship. Additionally, it will allow us to further explore PHA as necessarily tied to the wellbeing and development of others in a society.

Something-ness and Nothing-ness

In this section I introduce the Millian concept of something-ness as a means to further explore PHA. Further, because Mill explicitly discusses something-ness in connection with society and friendship, an exploration of something-ness is an opportunity to further explore the complex relationship between PHA, society, and friendship.

In chapter two, I argued for a Millian conception of agency rooted in his belief in human beings as progressive beings. Correspondingly, I called this conception of agency

progressive human agency or PHA. In her book, *Perfect Equality,* Maria Morales also nods, though more lightly, toward a conception of Millian agency during a discussion of relationships and individual choice. She notes that being able to choose in an agency rich way is connected to our relationships with others. Importantly, the agency of this choice is not rooted in the action of choosing, but in *why* and *what* we choose:

> [Mill] never endorsed the notion that social life is an aggregate of freely-acting, self-willed persons. Moreover, he believed that a good human life depends importantly on forming and maintaining sympathetic, cooperative, and egalitarian bonds with others. For Mill, independent of thick ideals of excellence, the notion of choice is empty. It is not *that* we choose, but *what* we choose that determines whether we are moral agents. Mill thought that framing a plan of life for ourselves by exercising our capacity to choose is a mark of moral agency. However, adequately understanding his conception of moral agency hinges on bringing in the notion of competent preference (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 131).

According to Morales, without ideals of excellence, which include care for others, individuals may be able to make choices, but they may lack the ability to competently make those choices—to choose in an informed way. Recall from chapter two that many women in Mill's time claimed they did not wish for voting rights or other reforms. We can doubt that many of those women had the information and experience needed to choose competently. However, it may be less obvious how expressing a competent preference—choosing well—is connected to "forming and maintaining sympathetic, cooperative and egalitarian bonds with others." Put another way, what does friendship have to do with the development of our individual agency?

To understand how sympathetic relations, such as friendship, contribute to our ability to chose in an informed and competent way, we can further explore the notion of something-ness, which Mill presents in *The Subjection of Women*. In fact, reflections of Mill's interest in what Morales calls "competent preference" are rich throughout *The Subjection of Women*, and are particularly clear when he talks about women and men and their ability, or more often not, to form relationships with one another. In the following passage Mill introduces the notion of being a *something* or a *nothing*, and claims that when human beings are somethings *and* can view one another as such, they are able to influence one another in ways that can lead to growth. He further notes that something-ness-aided exchange often happens in same-gender friendships, and could be common in cross-gender friendship-based marriage, were there not such damaging differences in the customs surrounding how women and men are raised:

> When each of two persons, instead of being a nothing, is a something; when they are attached to one another … the constant partaking in the same things, assisted by their sympathy, draws out the latent capacities of each for being interested in the things which were at first interesting only to the other; and works a gradual assimilation of the tastes and characters to one another, partly by the insensible modification of each, but more by a real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to its own. This often happens between two friends of the same sex, who are much associated in their daily life: and it would be a common, if not the commonest, case in marriage, did not the totally different bringing-up of the two sexes make it next to an impossibility to form a really well-assorted union (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 90).

Recall that in chapter one, I offered the passage above to introduce relationships as a way to learn. When two people are able to form a meaningful friendship, the time they share together and their care for one another combine to support each member of the relationship to grow by adopting the interests, tastes, and abilities of the other (which enhance or modify, rather than replace, their own). Keeping that work in mind, in this section I would like to return to the same passage with a different focus. As mentioned above, at the beginning of the passage, Mill introduces the notions of being a something and being a nothing. When I first engaged with the text, I read his use of something-ness and nothing-ness as an effect of friendship. That is, when you are friends with a person that person is something to you, not a stranger or a non-entity that is not present, or not meaningful, in your thoughts and experiences. But, I now believe that while feasible, that was a misreading or at least of lesser importance than another possible reading. I now recognize that Mill's reference to something-ness and nothing-ness in this passage captures the presence or lack of a certain kind of development. Perhaps Mill thought of nothing-ness and something-ness akin to how we might think of the development of PHA. We can helpfully understand something-ness and nothing-ness as reflective of the thriving or withering (respectively) of PHA. Thus, by exploring Mill's notions of something-ness and nothing-ness we have another opportunity to explore Millian agency and its relationship to society and friendship.

In the passage above, something-ness is presented as a prerequisite to friendship. When persons are somethings, they can engage with others in ways that allow them to "enrich their nature" by taking on interests, tastes, and capacities of the others. That is,

something-ness provides a foundation for a relationship of growth. The passage captures the positive side of this exchange—that is, if something-ness is present, individuals have a lot to gain from the relationships they engage in. Recalling Thoreau, when someone can operate, they have the potential to cooperate. In turn, that cooperation can provide a foundation for learning and growth. Here we see an example of friendship supporting something-ness (or PHA) which, in turn, provides a foundation for more informed and competent interactions with society — interactions that may potentially influence societal growth.

We gain further insight into something-ness through Mill's descriptions of nothingness. In particular, support for something-ness as a prerequisite to friendship is evident in Mill's descriptions of how a lack of healthy development can hinder relationships. For example, the need to be a something fits well with our earlier discussion in chapter two of Mill's understanding of human development—particularly of human beings as progressive beings. As we saw in chapter two, Mill was committed to understanding healthy human development in terms of the development of certain human capacities that he viewed as supporting human beings' potential to progress. The two main capacities were the intellect and social sympathy, but they can also be more broadly construed as moral sentiments, intellect, feeling and imagination. Mill viewed these capacities as tied to the ability to make informed choices about one's own life—to possess personal agency. In *On Liberty*, Mill was concerned that without these elements one was somehow less than fully human. He wrote, "He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his life plan for him, has no more need of any other faculty than the

ape-like one of imitation" (Mill, *On Liberty* 56). Perhaps it is this kind of lack of agency that, for Mill, constitutes nothing-ness. For further evidence of this it will be helpful to consider work from *The Subjection of Women*.

Mill writes extensively of the harm that current societal attitudes and practices, especially the inequality of the marriage relationship, cause to individuals. While Mill does not explicitly define what it means to be a something or a nothing, it is clear that he holds societal attitudes and practices as influential upon a person's development. This influence, when harmful, inhibits something-ness, and can foster nothing-ness. Specifically, there are at least three factors in Mill's writing he poses as contributing to a person's nothing-ness (or, alternately, denying their something-ness): first, lack of development of individually informed tastes and desires for daily or wider life, second, deriving one's psychological existence from another or prescriptively from society, and third, a diminutive or misattributed place in society.

It is important to note that each of the themes, while meaningfully distinct and worthy of separate exploration, reciprocally influence the others. For example, when women are placed in a subordinate, or diminutive, place in society they are given very little space to develop individually informed tastes and desires. Let's now turn more specifically to these concerns.

Lack of development of individually informed tastes and desires for daily or wider life

Recall that the introduction examined a passage from Mill that urged us to examine society to see whether it contains elements that could influence characteristics of the persons within the society. In the passage he writes:

> We cannot isolate a human being from the circumstances of his condition, so as to ascertain experimentally what he would have been by nature; but we can consider what he is, and what his circumstances have been, and whether the one would have been capable of producing the other (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 65).

As discussed, one implication of this passage is that Mill believes society can have an effect on its members. Perhaps more importantly, even if it is only a potential effect, the potential effect of society upon its members must be recognized lest we fall prey to assuming that society and its members "naturally" exist as they do. Such a mistake would make us vulnerable not only to naturalistic fallacy, but also to a false belief that our societal practices have no bearing on the outcomes we witness and experience. In the following chapter of *The Subjection of Women*, Mill builds on this idea, chastising his society for not only alienating women and men from one another, but also for constructing marriage such that men may rarely find satisfaction in it unless they select a woman that is "a nullity," that is, a woman devoid of something-ness:

> It would of course be extreme folly to suppose that these differences of feeling and inclination only exist because women are brought up differently from men, and that there would not be differences of taste under any imaginable

> circumstances. But there is nothing beyond the mark in saying that the distinction in bringing-up immensely aggravates those differences, and renders them wholly inevitable. While women are brought up as they are, a man and a woman will but rarely find in one another real agreement of tastes and wishes as to daily life. They will generally have to give it up as hopeless, or renounce the attempt to have, in the intimate associate of their daily life, that *idem velle, idem nolle* [similar desires, similar dislikes], which is the recognized bond of any society that is really such: or if the man succeeds in obtaining it, he does so by choosing a woman who is so complete a nullity that she has no *velle* or *nolle* at all, and is as ready to comply with one thing as another if anybody tells her to do so (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 89).

In this way, Mill highlights and criticizes a lack of development of individually informed tastes and desires in daily life to be one way in which a person can lack something-ness. Further, he suggests that a lack of something-ness can hinder the formations and development of meaningful sympathetic relationships. Mapping this work onto that tripartite relationship, we've just seen a story of societal forces damaging PHA (something-ness), rendering friendship nearly impossible. Notably, we've also seen that *if* PHA or friendship were better supported, either or both might be able to help mitigate or even alter the harmful societal forces in question.

Deriving one's psychological existence from another or prescriptively from society

Along the same lines, Mill is also repeatedly wary of deriving one's psychological existence from another or prescriptively from society. He worries that his society expects women to live *for* others, understanding themselves through their families, husbands, or children:

> Society makes the whole life of a woman, in the easy classes, a continued self-sacrifice; it exacts from her an unremitting restraint of the whole of her natural inclinations … (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 87).

In this way, women's something-ness is damaged, again inhibiting their ability to engage in meaningful sympathetic relations with others as they live through them, instead of with them.

It is important to note here that these worries do not come from a belief that women cannot meaningfully choose marriage and pursue or value other aspects of life in the domestic sphere. In fact, as noted earlier, Mill fully expected that women might choose to do so. The worry, instead, is that practices in society so unduly hinder women's ability to develop something-ness that they are not able to develop their own tastes and desires or their own rich psychological existence.

The perils of a diminutive or misattributed place in society

Another of Mill's concerns that can be mapped onto nothing-ness is a diminutive or misattributed place in society. For example, recall the passage:

> What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 20-21).

Here we can again see Mill's belief that society has corrupted women's character. In this case, society distorts women's characters such that instead of a genuine development, women are left with a lack of genuine character that corresponds to a kind of nothing-ness. As I have previously mentioned, it is worth noting that Mill did not see this kind of distortion of nature as limited to only females, but also saw it as negatively affecting males:

> Think what it is to a boy, to grow up to manhood in the belief that without any merit or exertion of his own, though he may be the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind, by the mere fact of being born male he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race: including probably some whose real superiority to himself he has daily or hourly occasion to feel; but even if in his whole conduct he habitually follows a woman's guidance, still, if he is a fool, he thinks that of course she is not, and cannot be equal in ability and judgement to himself; and if he is not a fool, he does worse — he sees that she is superior to him, and believes that, not-withstanding her superiority, he is entitled to command and she is bound to obey (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 77).

According to Mill, the false place women are given in society correspondingly brings with it a misattributed, and also damaging, place in society for men. Men are given a role superior to women, and led to believe that they deserve such a role for no reason other than that they are male. This can damage not only men's views on women, but also their understanding of themselves, and their understandings of power. By framing and treating

women as nothings, men's something-ness is also corrupted or damaged. Here we can see development of something-ness (or PHA) is not only important to the individual. Development of PHA, and an ability to recognize it, is important to those who interact with said individual. When society damages the PHA of some, society is in turn damaged, and the PHA of other members of society can suffer as well. Again, we can note that while friendship could be a remedying force, it is nearly untenable without intentional or exceptional circumstances to support it.

Here we begin to see the relationship between PHA and societal power. PHA does not exist within a kind of vacuum of individuality, nor is it simply a story of gaining societal power. PHA is not a story of agency in which some are *haves* and some are *have nots*. In this case, it is not a story of men having agency and women not having agency. The "haves and have nots" story is a misguided story of agency as power. PHA, which I hold as a more genuine story of agency, holds the agency of some as tied to the agency of others. It is deeply tied to a capacity for social sympathy, which requires that we care for others, and that that care is properly informed by others' something-ness. That is, PHA is only properly understood as existing in informed and caring relationships with others. To further explore PHA as a relational understanding of agency, it will be useful to examine Mill's notion of perfect equality.

Perfect Equality

In this section we will explore Mill's notion of *perfect equality*. In our tripartite model, *perfect equality* can stand in for society. Exploring perfect equality will give us further

insight into the tripartite relationship, and particularly into the role that inequalities of power can play in damaging society, PHA, and friendship.

Mill introduces perfect equality in the *The Subjection of Women*. Though perfect equality has broad implications, he specifically presents it as an alternative to the inequalities of power surrounding a societal practice of his time: marriage. He presents inequalities of power surrounding marriage as rooted broadly in society, including not just laws, but also norms and practices. Mill sees replacing this unequal relationship as particularly important given that he sees the inequity of marriage in his time as one of the main impediments to the progress of humanity. He writes:

> That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other [in marriage]—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a *principle of perfect equality*, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mill, *Subjection of Women* 1, emphasis added).

With a foundation of perfect equality, Mill believed women and men would be better positioned to view and experience one another as equals. But, as we've seen, this societal positioning, in itself, is not enough. How would they actually experience one another as equals? As we've discussed, development of PHA, or something-ness, would also need to be supported. Further, perfect equality can only be actualized in the context of sympathetic relationships. To accomplish the change Mill envisions for marriage and

society, he believes that in addition to a societal foundation of perfect equality, women and men need to be able to foster a new kind of relationship, namely marital friendship. Supported by perfect equality, he believes married persons can use their capacities for intellect and sympathy (aka PHA or something-ness) to make genuine connections with one another (marital friendship) and be truly, not just theoretically, able to believe one another to be equal, and to actually *experience* one another as equals. We can see a recognition of this tripartite relationship explicitly articulated in *The Subjection of Women*:

> The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations [marriage] is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 92).

Mapping the tripartite relationship directly onto the paragraph above, we can see that Mill's answer to "fixing" marriage comes in three interrelated parts: married persons must have a foundation of equal justice (perfect equality), experience that equality through the cultivation of sympathetic relationships (marital friendship), with an equal in rights and cultivation (PHA or something-ness). Importantly, we can begin to recognize that none of these elements fully trumps another. The development or damage of any of the three can support or hinder the others.

In the next section we will look more closely at perfect equality to further explore perfect equality's role in the tripartite relationship and corresponding individual and

societal growth. In particular, we will see that perfect equality homes in on the damage that unequal power relationships can do to one's something-ness.

Maria Morales on Perfect Equality

It would be irresponsible to delve further into a discussion of Mill's perfect equality without once again looking to the work of Maria Morales. In *Perfect Equality*, Morales argues that Mill's canon has a theme of valuing certain elements of human life. This reading is very much in line with my own reading, in which certain elements of human life contribute to our development as progressive beings. As her title suggests, Morales specifically focuses on perfect equality, a focus which she believes helps reveal a Millian philosophy in which "sympathetic, cooperative, and egalitarian conditions" lay a foundation for human well-being, including the possibility of perfect equality, and thus are key to a rich human life. She writes:

> I have been suggesting that the central and unifying theme of [Mill's] practical philosophy is the special value to human life of certain goods that can only be enjoyed under sympathetic, cooperative, and egalitarian conditions (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 181).

She goes on to explain that Mill's practical philosophy requires these conditions (sympathetic, cooperative, and egalitarian) not just in certain realms of life (e.g. the political) but in all aspects of life, as a general way of being. At the same time, Mill's focus on these types of conditions throughout all areas of life helps to explain his focus

on perfect equality, as he saw inequalities of power as damaging to these conditions. Morales continues:

> This theme explains his concern with perfect equality, the nemesis of which is power. In turn, this concern explains his commitment to democracy in all its manifestations, that is *as a way of life*, not as a form of political organization (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 181).

As we've seen in Mill's discussion of women and men in his time, his concern with power is, at least in part, due to his conviction that disparities in power make healthy human relationships impossible. In a section aptly titled *The Corrupting Influence of Power*, Morales writes:

> The strongest argument in *The Subjection of Women* is that perfect equality is a central element of the human good. The corrupting influence of power undermines the possibility of human happiness by frustrating the pursuit of key elements of a good life: unfeigned bonds of cooperation, friendship, and love (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 127).

I fully agree with Morales in her claim that perfect equality is important to happiness in that it helps to support our ability to sympathetically engage with one another, whether that engagement is in cooperation, friendship, or love. Conversely, when society supports inequalities in power, sympathetic relationships will be hindered. However, it will come as no surprise if I push back against her claim that perfect equality is *the strongest*

argument in *The Subjection of Women*. Morales is certainly correct that perfect equality is deeply important to Mill's argument, and that understanding the importance of perfect equality is central to understanding not just Mill's work itself, but also the broader import of Mill's work. However, perfect equality is constantly in conversation with, and cannot be understood without, discussions of individual wellbeing and development and sympathetic relationships. Because they are so deeply interdependent, Mill's arguments on something-ness and marital friendship, are of equal weight to that of perfect equality. In fact, while focusing on perfect equality, Morales often speaks of the importance of individual wellbeing and development and interpersonal relationships. Not only in the passage above, but in many others as well. For example, she articulates a Millian claim that when persons are not able to form relationships with others, their prospects of a happy and meaningful life are impeded:

> Human beings cannot be fully happy without relations of sympathetic unity with others. Despotism inhibits the prospect of forming and sustaining such relations. Thus, despotism renders the lives of despots and subjects emotionally barren and incomplete. According to Mill, sympathy plays an important role in self-knowledge and knowledge of others. The despot cannot hope to find in others the confirmation of his own identity and worth that sympathetic associations with them would make possible. Neither can he really come to know another human being. Mill intimated that "thorough knowledge" of someone requires not only intimacy, but intimacy between equals (SW II 279). A superior can inspire awe or fear, but not the trust and security characteristic of close and meaningful human relations (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 127).

Thus a despotic ruler can rule through fear or other forms of manipulation, but cannot form the kind of "trust and security" necessary for "close and meaningful human relations." Further, the ruler's self-knowledge and identity are also damaged. When perfect equality is not present, such as in this case of the despotic ruler and those he rules, the lack of perfect equlity is damaging in part because the ruler cannot form sympathetic relations with others, and thus cannot properly form his own identity. Unable to form such relationships, the ruler then suffers from a loss of the self-knowledge, and societal knowledge, that such relationships make possible. To return to Adichie's work, we can think of the ruler as suffering from a lack of access to anything but his own single-story. Here we can see the interrelationship between PHA, perfect equality, and friendship: perfect equality opens space for friendship, which then feeds PHA in the form of increased knowledge about self and others (and the cycle can continue).

Expanding her example of the despotic ruler, Morales continues to explain that Mill saw women and men of his time as suffering from a parallel loss. Similar to the despotic ruler, women and men suffer from the inequality of their relations to one another, just as the despot suffered from his inequality with his subjects. Women and men are also trapped in a web of unequal power relations, an inability to form meaningful sympathetic relationships, and a corresponding lack of knowledge of self:

> Mill believed that inequality alienates women and men from one another. Genuine friendship between them is impossible if their lives exhibit the yawning gap that they do under the command and obedience ethic. As long as men relate to women

> as master to slave, lord to vassal, or ruler to subject, men will remain isolated in their solitary towers of arrogance and selfishness and women confined to cramped and unfulfilled lives of meekness and selflessness. Power never compensates for the loss of happiness, nor security for the loss of freedom. Human beings are not self-sufficient. The despot's longings for life-affirming relations with others are in vain. Superiority, the condition of being "above" another human being, distances superior from inferior, which precludes any real connection between them (Morales, *Perfect Equality* 127).

Like the creation of despotic rule, Morales reports that Mill saw society as manufacturing inequality between women and men. As we have discussed, this disparity in power was not only damaging to those in the lower position of power (women), but also to those who, like the despot, were falsely placed in a position of higher power (men). Thus, women and men, like the despotic ruler and his subjects, are inhibited by their inability to form meaningful sympathetic relationships, and their inability to accurately gain self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Returning to the tripartite relationship, hopefully it is now more clear how perfect equality can help us to better understand the role of society in Millian terms. Further, it should be clearer that perfect equality is related to, and can support, both PHA and friendship. Finally, we have further evidence of the importance of framing PHA as necessarily relational, rather than as a measure of power.

Let's now turn our focus more specifically to sympathetic relationships, namely friendship, by exploring the Millian concept of *reciprocal superiority*.

Reciprocal Superiority

In the following section we will explore the Millian notion of *reciprocal superiority*. Reciprocal superiority can be read as an ideal form of friendship, and as such, an exploration of reciprocal superiority will allow us to further explore the tripartite relationship through the lens of friendship.

To explore reciprocal superiority we can look to an experiment in living Mill took on with his friend, and eventually wife, Harriet Taylor. To begin to explore their experiment, we can turn to a passage we examined in chapter one. Previously, we focused on the passage as a way to view friendship as a creator of new knowledge. We saw that in writing about his friendship with Taylor, Mill offered a notion of reciprocal superiority to capture the abilities he and Taylor had to look up to one another, to challenge one another, and to engage one another in meaningful ways. Further we saw that reciprocal superiority enabled the friends, together, to discover knowledge in the world that as individuals they may not have come to. Here is the passage again:

> We two possess what, next to community of purpose, is the greatest source of friendship between minds of any capacity; this is, not equality, for nothing can be so little interesting to a man as his own double; but, reciprocal superiority. Each of us knows many things which the other knows not, & can do many things which the other values but cannot himself do, or not so well. There is also just that difference of character between us which renders us highly valuable to each other in another way for I require to be warmed, you perhaps occasionally to be calmed. We are almost as much the natural complement of one another as man and woman are: we are far stronger together than separately, & whatever both of us

> agree in, has a very good chance, I think, of being true (Mill, *Letter to William Bridges Adams 20 October 1832*, emphasis added).

In exploring reciprocal superiority as a way to create new knowledge, we saw that friendship is a way for not only individuals, but also the wider world, to learn and grow, as friends' different experiences and knowledge combine with the care they have for one another to help them come to new truths and understandings which they can then offer to others.

This growth is possible because reciprocal superiority allows a particular kind of exchange, one in which different experiences and thoughts can be brought together and engaged with one another within a context of respect and care that is not always present in our general interactions with others in the world. In this context, the exchange of thought and experience can lead to the discovery, recognition, or creation of knowledge that otherwise may be overlooked.

Importantly, Mill notes that reciprocal superiority is only possible when each member of a friendship can learn from and admire the other. He notes that difference between friends is important, as "nothing can be so little interesting to a man as his own double." Speaking to this point, Mill describes reciprocal superiority as a relationship in which each member can "enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other" (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 92).

If we look at these descriptions and their implications, we can see that, for Mill, it is deeply important that each member of a friendship can hold the other as a genuine equal, and relatedly, be able to contribute to the relationship in ways the other person cannot.

Here, we can see reflections of perfect equality and something-ness (and through them, society and PHA) implied in Mill's descriptions of reciprocal superiority. That is, the ability to care for one another in a sympathetic relationship is connected to an equality of power such that each member of the friendship can be seen as an equal by the other, and further, each member must have sufficient something-ness such that she can contribute to the relationship.

For more evidence of the growth Mill believes is possible in a relationship in which something-ness, perfect equality, and reciprocal superiority co-exist, we can look to Mill's autobiographical writing. In the passage below, Mill recounts ways in which he grows, his understanding of the world grows, and in turn his understanding of work to be done in the world grows, through his relationship with Taylor. Their relationship enables them to not only recognize truths, but also to create new knowledge:

> In this third period (as it may be termed) of my mental progress, which now went hand in hand with [Taylor's], my opinions gained equally in breadth and depth. I understood more things, and those which I had understood before, I now understood more thoroughly … But in addition to this, our opinions were now far more heretical than mine had been in the days of my most extreme Benthamism (Mill, *Autobiography*).

I am particularly drawn to Mill's note that his views became more "heretical" — that something about their relationship, perhaps in drawing together experiences that were

rarely in concert (that of a male and female intellectual, that of a single man and a married woman/mother, etc.), they were able to push away from societal scripts and towards more unique and empowering narratives, thus adding to and strengthening their individual something-ness and ability to recognize and critique societal ills.

However, since we are speaking of a relationship and not a person, we should not take too one-sided a view. For that reason, I will now turn to passages from *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* in which author Jo Ellen Jacobs focuses on Taylor's voice, rather than Mills, with the belief that much of Taylor's voice has been overlooked or conflated with Mill's.

The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill

In *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* author Jo Ellen Jacobs focuses on the perspective of Taylor. In the following passage, Jacobs speaks on Mill and Taylor's experiment in living, particularly how their relationship allowed them to break away from encumbering scripts regarding gender and sex. She also importantly notes that their new empowering narratives did not collapse the something-ness of each of the two friends into one. Rather, they held a relationship of reciprocal superiority, or as Jo Ellen Jacobs puts it, a relationship *in dialogue, not monologue*. Note that Jacobs refers to Taylor and Mill by their first names, Harriet and John, respectively:

> There is much to discover about … Harriet, but the most revolutionary part is this collaboration-in-being that she and John attempted … Harriet was different from John, but she refused the definitions of otherness ("emotional," "woman,"

> "frigid," "bewitching,") that either John or the historians tried to attach to her. John learned from Harriet that he, too, could refuse the labels of "rational," "man," and "undersexed." They discovered that they themselves could be both feminine and masculine, both rational and emotional, both sexy and virginal. They created a new dimension in which to exist, and thought it wonderful enough to recommend to the world.
>
> This new integrated self was not an absorption of either one into the other. Neither John nor Harriet ceased to have a singular voice while maintaining their plural one … Dialogue, not monologue, created their new voice. The danger, as they saw it, was conformity, not distinction (Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* 98).

As Mill and Taylor's experiment in living moved them beyond assigned societal roles or narratives, we see further evidence that a relationship can bolster the individual agency (or something-ness or PHA) of the persons within it. Further, we also see evidence that in engaging with the world, both in being a model of possibility and in direct engagement with others, the members of such a relationship can bring to light truths and also create new understandings. Jacobs continues:

> In "Enfranchisement of Women," Harriet's and John's practical experience of creating a way of living together became the source of Harriet's objection to those who insisted that it was dangerous for women to become interested in politics. Those arguing to keep women innocently at home claimed that if women entered

> politics, then marriage would disintegrate into squabbling. Harriet retorts, "There cannot be a more complete condemnation of marriage." If marriage cannot tolerate political disagreement, then "marriage can only be fit for tyrants and nobodies." In language that reverberates from Harriet's and John's own experiences, Harriet explains that "married people live together in perfect harmony although they differ in opinions and even feeling on things which come much nearer home than politics do for most people." Or, as she said in the outline of this section, "men and women … are entitled to mental independence and marriage like other institutions must reconcile itself to this necessity." Harriet and John did not meld into one undifferentiated whole, nor did they recommend this abandonment of difference to others. Neither partner was a "nobody" (Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* 99).

Thus, Taylor and Mill's relationship itself served as a counter example to popular claims of the time, and allowed them of offer new understandings, arguments, and possibilities to the wider world through their collective writings and other work. In all of this, part of what they modeled and argued for was the strength and possibility of close relationships of dialogue (or we could say reciprocal superiority) to contribute to the members in the relationship and to the wider world. Jacobs continues:

> When the duo of Harriet and John argues, they do not adopt one or other of differing positions; instead, their reconciliation is more subtle, more true, than either of the original views. The members of a collaborative self also need to confront ideas that challenge from the outside … The collaborative self must

> engage in the world to attempt to make the world better and be made better by it (Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* 99).

As I argued earlier when looking at their relationship primarily from Mill's perspective, we again see connections between PHA, society, and friendship. Specifically, a strong implication that a close sympathetic relationship between persons with sufficient agency and equality can challenge societal stories and push society to grow by homing in on truths and creating new understandings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we took a three part journey through something-ness, perfect equality, and reciprocal superiority to reexamine the tripartite relationship between PHA, society, and friendship. In doing so, we saw further evidence of the complex interconnectedness of the three. A visual picture of this exploration follows:

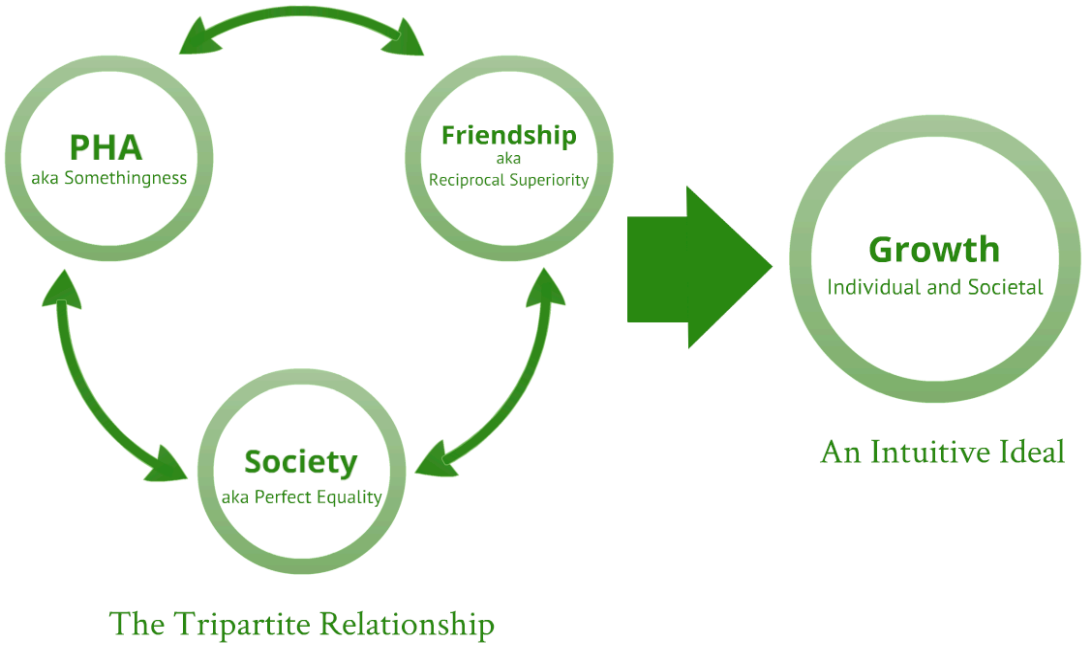

Figure 3-2

Additionally, we explored PHA as a form of agency that cannot and should not be explained as a story of having or lacking power. Rather, an individual's PHA is necessarily tied to the wellbeing and development of others in a society. Relatedly, we saw various ways that PHA, society, and friendship can strengthen one another and lead to intuitively desirable personal and societal growth.

So, what does this mean for our lives today? In the concluding chapter, I will reflect on the tripartite relationship of PHA, society, and friendship in light of my own views and experiences. Ultimately, I will continue to claim that, due to its potential to support individual and societal growth, we must make space for cross-gender friendship in our society. To do so, we must examine barriers to such friendship and creatively imagine ways to better support friendships across difference. Notably, my conclusions explicitly

expand Mill's work beyond marital friendship. Instead of focusing on marriage, I advocate that we make space across society to broadly support cross-gender friendships, within marriage, and otherwise.

Conclusions
Friendship Today

When I travel around the nation giving lectures about ending racism and sexism, audiences become agitated when I speak about the place of love in any movement for social justice. Indeed all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic. Yet listeners remain reluctant to embrace love as a transformative force — bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*[30]

Friendship Today

Where do we go from here? I've included bell hooks above because I see her project, and her concern, as connected to my own. Constructing a tripartite understanding of the workings behind individual and societal growth adds friendship to what was previously a story of the individual and society. Giving friendship a central role in the story demands recognition of the important role that care, including love, has in our development as individuals and as a society. Can we, as bell hooks suggests, embrace love as a transformative force?

I have argued that friendship, especially across difference, is a way for us to support the intuitively desirable goal of growth.[31] Among other benefits, friendship can help

[30] This passage has been edited to appear more cleanly out of context. Please see below for the full text: "When I travel around the nation giving lectures about ending racism and sexism, audiences, especially young listeners, become agitated when I speak about the place of love in any movement for social justice. Indeed all great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethics. Yet young listeners remain reluctant to embrace love as a transformative force" (hooks, *all about love*).

[31] Here I would like to remind my readers that, in many cases, the differences we might hope friendship to span may be entirely socially constructed. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, my use of the term "cross-gender friendship" reflects the reality of the power of societal stories of binary gender and

situate us in a position of epistemic advantage, opening and providing space in which we can better recognize the world around us, learn from one another, and create new knowledge together. It is one of the ways we can avoid encumbering narratives, and engage in experiments in living that create empowering new narratives in our own lives and provide examples of new possibilities for the lives of others.

However, there is good reason to believe that many kinds of friendship are currently undersupported in our society. Recall that Mill argues that the perceived view of his time—i.e., that women entered into marriage freely—was an illusion. In a similar vein, it is reasonable to worry that certain societal assumptions are in fact keeping us, in present times, from exploring pressures that keep women and men from entering freely into friendships. For example, the assumption that women and men naturally choose to segregate close friendships along gender lines, or that cross-gender friendship unduly threatens other things we value (e.g., romantic commitments, marriage, etc.). Stated more directly: we should be concerned that our experience of freedom regarding the friendships we form is in many ways illusory.

After a brief reflection on "cross-gender friendship" to better situate my concluding work, I will return to autoethnographic work. My hope is to further explore both the potential of cross-gender friendship and the challenges it currently faces. My further hope is that such work will give readers a chance to reflect on friendship in their own lives and in our society today.

---

heterocentrism — a reality of the experiences of many, rather than a representation of a fundamental truth of the world.

Reflecting on "Cross-Gender Friendship"

Recall that one of the challenges of this project was to tease out a meaningful phrase for a phenomenon that both engages with and challenges heteronormativity and binary sex and gender. In conceptualizing the term "cross-gender friendship" I struggled to find words that adequately recognized the existence and power of societal narratives, including heteronormativity and binary gender and their *very real effects* on the lives of members of our society, yet still presented the narratives for what they are: constructed realities rather than non-negotiable or unchangeable empirical realities. With this in mind, it is important to note that, in engaging with the dominant narrative, the work that follows is importantly applicable to the lives of many, yet only directly touches on a limited number of identities. Again, words from my friend Ray may be helpful here:

> The thing that I keep catching on when I read your work — which i am actually very interested in, because I think a lot about the ways in which the dominant narrative limits us, especially with regard to gender stereotypes — is that I personally, as the identity that I engage with in my life, don't have a place within your work. By that i mean: if I were to try to answer any of the questions you posed to people, I wouldn't be able to. Either every friendship I have is cross-gender, or none of them are. How I would answer about each friendship depends on whether I'm thinking about my gender in terms of what I was socialized as growing up or how I identify now (VanFox, pers comm., 28 September 2014).

As we move forward, let's keep in mind both the importance and the limited scope of this project. Perhaps we can imagine future work that engages more closely with alternative identities, that supports friendship across different gender identities, and discovers new questions to ask.

My Own Experiments In Living

The first narrative I have chosen gives an account of the support offered by two friends after the birth of my first child. More specifically, I contrast the support offered by a female friend with that offered by a male friend and reflect on how cross-gender friendship opened space for experiences in my male friend's life that would otherwise not have been available. Experiences, which, in turn, he has carried into his own life, relationships, and his understanding of and interactions with the society in which he lives.

Shortly after the birth of my son, Emilio, two of my closest friends came to visit. Having our first child while I was in graduate school left my partner and me two-thousand miles from home and far from the support that is often offered by family at such an exciting and exhausting time in life. We were grateful to have friends to help us as we learned to be a family of three.

The first friend to visit was a woman I have known since kindergarten. An excellent cook and housekeeper, soon after her arrival our refrigerator and freezer were filled with healthy delicious meals, our house was tidy and even the bathroom tile sparkled. She took family photos for us and held the baby while we napped. She washed, changed, dressed and fed our son as we sorted through bills. She did, I would like to note, things that

women have traditionally done, and she did them with incredible care and skill—skills that had been nurtured since childhood, as she helped her mother in the kitchen, played house with her friends and baby dolls and watched her neighbors' children. Her care and talents provided space for my partner and me to rest and to better enjoy our early days with our first child. As a human rights lawyer, one could argue she spends most of her time caring for others, but at the same time, it seems meaningful to note that her life's work and interests are not focused entirely on her home. Rather, throughout her life she has been encouraged to nurture both domestic and public skills. When I spoke to her about her visit she mentioned being pleased to help and that she was happy she was able to offer her domestic skills to myself and my partner. When I asked her if she felt she had learned anything from the visit she reflected that, in seeing a peer with a new baby, she was struck by how "possible" it seemed to have a child. That is, she felt that in seeing me start a family she more closely felt the reality that she might soon wish to start her own. However, she did not feel that she specifically learned any new skills or otherwise had new experiences during her visit.

Then, the week my partner returned to work, a second friend, coincidentally also a lawyer, arrived to help me with the transition—a man I have known since my first year of college. He came with an eagerness to meet the new baby and a desire to help. He also came with humility—he had never held a baby so small before, had never changed a diaper or otherwise cared for an infant. He knew nearly nothing about breastfeeding and what challenges a woman might face after childbirth. Before our son's birth, my partner had been the same. My friend learned by watching and asking questions, as my partner

had. As opposed to the seemingly effortless care provided by my female friend, my male friend arrived with a need to ask, “What can I help with?” and, once the needs were established, “How do I do those things?” I was not at all surprised to find that, like my partner, he was a capable learner. Though he did not come to care for us with the same ease as my female friend, I was deeply grateful to have my male friend visit as well. When we recently spoke about his visit he recalled:

> When I arrived, I was certainly more comfortable giving your dog a bath, or cooking a meal, than caring for the baby. I was amazed to hold him and be near him, but nervous that I didn’t know what to do for him.

I recall also that during his visit we spoke about children and my reflections on the seemingly endless potential of a parent to love. He listened to the story of my son’s birth and the days after as my son learned to breastfeed, and the challenges we were still having. He rooted through the medicine cabinet to find salve for cracked nipples, and helped me, still sore from childbirth and nervous to slip while holding the baby, in and out of the tub. One morning after a difficult night with the baby I began to cry from exhaustion and he sat with me and my son and affirmed my ability to be strong—telling me stories of things he had seen me accomplish over the twelve years of our friendship.

He told me about a week ago that he and his wife are hoping to have a child soon and I began to think back to the time that he spent with my family after the birth of our son. Not only did he learn basic childcare skills during his visit, but he was also able to

witness many of the challenges and joys, physical and mental, of new motherhood and fatherhood.[32] I've no doubt his experiences will be valuable as he and his wife begin their journey as parents. Perhaps the experiences have already been valuable, as he was able to make a more informed decision about beginning such a journey. And, he will be able to begin his relationship with his first child with a confidence that he gained during his visit. He reported:

> When I left, I still didn't feel like an expert [with the baby]. But I did feel more comfortable with Emilio and was proud I could finally tie the sling by myself. I was less nervous holding Emilio and diaper changing didn't seem so intimidating. Also, I was more sure that, even if I didn't really know what to do for him, I knew things to check and to try. I didn't panic if you left the room or took a nap and he started to cry.

Much like my female friend, my male friend also reported an increased sense of parenthood being "real":

[32] I mention both motherhood and fatherhood as my friend witnessed both my own experiences and many of my partner's. However, I would like to maintain that there is a uniqueness to my male friend visiting with the primary intention of being a caregiver to a new mother. While I fully recognize that a man could visit a new father in that capacity, it is not common, nor are new fathers often home as the sole primary caregivers of their children. It was very difficult, for example, for my partner to acquire paternity leave (in fact, we brought a lawsuit against his employer) and he had to return to work much earlier than I did.

> I know that meeting Emilio has sort of normalized having children in my mind. It's like I've always known I wanted to be a father, but now I have the feeling that it is the time and place to do it.

Relevant to the project at hand, the space in which he was able to learn those things was open because he was *my* friend. That is, he was the close and trusted friend of a woman, which opened a space for him to enter a societal role that is traditionally held by female family members and friends—that of supporting a woman and family after the birth of a child. In taking on that role, he had the opportunity to engage with a new baby and a woman who had recently given birth. The relationship, that is, our friendship, opened a space of care that had not previously been open to him in his life. Though he arrived with an abstract sense of respect for such work of care, I believe that he left with an increased understanding of that work and care and also with a new personal identification with the desire and ability to be a parent.

Here, it is worth noting that, though I have no statistics to prove such a claim, I am confident that it is rare for a male friend to come to support a woman after the birth of her child. In fact, again without statistics, I am confident in claiming that few women would identify a man, perhaps especially a cis-gendered heterosexual man, as one of her two closest friends. That is, the chance for a man (who is not her partner) to support a woman with a new child is probably rare, at least in part because close friendship between women and men is rare. I will not spend too much time here speculating as to how the two of us, my male friend and I, were able to become friends and maintain a close

friendship of twelve years. I will briefly offer that I believe the college we attended together was, for various reasons, more supportive of close female-male friendships than many other cultures and institutions in our society are, and that our respective partners, both coming from that same college, are open to and supportive of our friendship.[33]

I share this story to help illustrate how friendship is a relationship that can open spaces for new experiences in our lives, particularly when the friends bring different sets of cultural experiences to the relationship. By being vulnerable, passionate and inquisitive around one another, by feeling safe enough with another person to bring humility to our relationship and experiences, we open a space for learning. And, the things experienced and learned in that space do not stay boxed in. Those experiences seep into our lives, our identities and our interactions with the rest of the world. They are modeled for our families, our children, our friends, our co-workers, and can come to be represented in our political choices (e.g. advocating for the establishment of paternal leave after childbirth or perhaps paid maternal leave). If we make space for friendships across difference, then friendship can be a means for us to grow, and then, in turn, to be able, as individuals, to offer that growth to society.

Threats With Moral Value: The importance of overcoming stigma and fear

[33] For example, the college we attended, Grinnell College, has recently begun to offer gender neutral dorms and now allows students to choose any other student as a roommate, regardless of gender identity or biological make-up.

At this point I will return to the narrative I began in chapter one. By further exploring this narrative I hope to encourage my readers to question the worth, and recognize the danger, of societal narratives that promote stigma around, and fear of, cross-gender friendship.

Since I began writing on friendship, Santi and I have reestablished our friendship. We lost touch for a time, but reconnected several years later when, as the story ended up going, he and his wife divorced. Santi has shared with me that, through work in therapy and support groups, he is beginning the difficult process accepting that his wife may have been emotionally abusive toward him during their marriage. With this news in mind, I have begun to reflect again on the value that continued space for our friendship could have held for him. Perhaps I could have been a resource for my friend, or perhaps my treatment of him, or my relationship with my own partner could have served as references for Santi to better recognize the situation he was in and how he deserved to be treated.

Of course, perhaps this points to ways in which I may, indeed, have been a threat to his marriage. However, we might view this kind of threat as a threat with moral value. For, though we can recognize that many have good reason to value social institutions such as marriage, we surely do not want to accept the value of marriage unconditionally. For example, one potential condition we might place on marriage is that it should not endanger the health and safety of the individuals within it. I wonder, for example, if Santi had had more space in his life to develop friendships with women before his marriage, if he would have also been in a better position to recognize that his experience in this relationship was unhealthy. As previously mentioned, perhaps other relationships with

women could have served as a model for a healthy cross-gender relationship. Or, perhaps because as a society we allow much more space for women to discuss and reflect on emotions, Santi would have been in a better position had he had female friends with whom he could process and recognize his emotional experience with his wife. Of course, it is possible that neither of these things could have been helpful, or that both of them could have happened with men. However, it is important to reflect on their possibility, importance, and value.

Again, the primary worry is that, because of the current subjection of cross-gender friendship, these potentially beneficial relationships were all but closed to Santi without his knowledge or consent. Less stigma around, and support in society for, cross-gender friendship could open cross-gender friendship as a possibility such that individuals could decide for themselves what it is they might want or value.

Rejecting the heteronormative narratives that promote stigma and fear

In the introduction to this work, I asked readers to reflect on the pressures society places on gender identity, particularly the pressures that society's strong attachment to binary gender and "opposite" sex places on children and the way those pressures shape our adult lives. In these concluding remarks, I will focus on related constructions of adult relationships, with a particular focus on heteronormative narratives that attach stigma and fear of attraction to cross-gender friendships.

One of the most liberal contemporary societal stories about friendship, is that women and men can be friends *if* sexual attraction is not present. The story tells us that if

members of a friendship are simply not attracted to one another (e.g. perhaps one member is considered "unattractive") or if they can force away, outgrow, or otherwise eradicate sexual attraction then perhaps their friendship is tenable. If they can truly say— though we might still be suspicious — *She's like a sister, he's like a brother to me*, then perhaps, the societal story tells us, things will turn out ok.

In fact, this is an older story than one might imagine, and Mill makes related comments in his work. For example, in his autobiography, Mill discusses several views that he admired and shared with his father. Among them is hope for a future in which friendship between men and women is more widely realized, and that in such a future, the commonality of such relationships might free the imagination from dwelling on sexual attraction:

> [My Father] looked forward, for example, to a considerable increase of freedom in the relations between the sexes, though without pretending to define exactly what would be, or ought to be, the precise conditions of that freedom. This option was connected in him with no sensuality either of a theoretical or practical kind. He anticipated, on the contrary, as one of the beneficial effects of increased freedom, that the imagination would no longer dwell upon the physical relation and its adjuncts ... (Mill, *Autobiography* 109).

Similarly, in a discussion of the stigma that friendship between women and men carried, Mill expresses frustration with those who cannot imagine a friendship between a woman and a man that does not involve a sexual relationship. Speaking of his relationship with

Harriet Taylor, he describes the societal condemnation of cross-gender friendship, and writes that it was fortunate that Taylor's strong character allowed her to ignore the false conclusions others were bound to draw regarding Mill's frequent visits and correspondence. He writes:

> [Harriet Taylor] and I disdained, as every person not a slave of his animal appetites must do, the abject notion that the strongest and tenderest friendship cannot exist between a man and a woman without a sensual relation, or that any impulses of that lower character cannot be put aside when regard for the feelings of others, or even when only prudence and personal dignity require it (Mill, *Autobiography* 236).

While I agree with Mill's frustration regarding the societal assumption that women and men cannot have platonic friendships, I also think it is important to philosophically separate myself from Mill's understanding of sensual relations. To begin, I would not generally classify sensual relations—which, recall, I will hold to encompass sensual, sexual and romantic experiences—as necessarily either *animal appetites* or as of a *lower character* than other human relations or experiences. I am significantly more comfortable understanding sensual, sexual and romantic experiences as within the realm of healthy human behavior. Further, I hold that the ability to desire, seek, and have sensual, sexual and romantic experiences is not only a human ability, but a valuable one that is integral to what we might describe as a fully human life. To be clear, the claim is not that everyone must have sensual, sexual and romantic experiences to lead a rich or fully human life, but

rather that we could claim that a person who was denied the capability to imagine and seek such experiences, whether that denial was due to psychological, societal or physical impediment, would be denied an important part of what it means to be a human being. What does this have to do with cross-gender friendship? Surely one could argue that one could reserve the sensual for a primary relationship, and still lead a fully human life. In fact, don't many people do so? I suspect so. However, my concern is that barring attraction from friendship across the board may help to perpetuate damaging societal stories (e.g. binary gender, heteronormativity, etc.). These societal stories unduly limit space for individuals to make competent choices about the value cross-gender friendship may have in their lives. So, can we imagine other models that could help us to better support space for individuals to imagine as a possibility and decided for themselves whether or not to pursue cross-gender friendship?

Attraction: Let's decide for ourselves how much we should worry

> I think friendship always involves some kind of attraction. But we don't talk about it that way, because what we are really worried about is whether or not that attraction crosses into sexual attraction. One important thing I have learned [as a heterosexual male] through friendships with women is *to worry less* about sexual attraction.
>
> — James, emphasis added[34]

[34] James' name and identifying information have been altered as per his request. When I spoke with him about including this passage he was encouraging, and reflected that he was somewhat disappointed to find himself requesting that its inclusion be anonymous. Such a request, he believed, pointed to the societal

Although it is not the only reason society stigmatizes cross-gender friendship, concerns about the complications of sensual, sexual, or romantic attraction are deeply rooted in our society's understanding and framing of such friendship.[35] As James notes above, we are implicitly and explicitly taught to worry about attraction, to see it as a danger if we are otherwise committed, and as *the* potential of cross-gender friendship if we are not otherwise committed. However, as James points out, perhaps cross-gender friendships themselves are one way to learn about our own, rather than society's, orientation toward that fear. Some common societal stories of worry around sexual attraction in friendship include: *the friendship will be ruined*, *you won't make good decisions*, *it's unfaithful to your [wife/husband/partner] to even think/experience attraction to another*. More abstractly, the stories can imply a worrying orientation toward the potential to learn from and benefit from our feelings. For example, worries that attraction will leave one unable to make rational decisions imply that: *when you are really thinking it's not with your feelings, rationality is the real way to know things and feelings mess that up*. However, James' reports that those societal stories have become less important to him, as he has had the chance to engage in a kind of experiment in living: He has been able to imagine and pursue cross-gender friendships, to recognize that sometimes attraction is present, and to realize that he can appreciate that attraction without compromising other things that he chooses to value, most notably his relationship with his wife. Perhaps for many,

---

stigma that still exists around cross-gender friendship. He hopes that someday he will feel comfortable making such a statement publicly.

more opportunities to practice cross-gender friendship would allow them to learn "to worry less," as James suggests, or at least to refocus their concern on their own values and priorities, rather than societal stigma and fear.

Since his divorce, Santi and I have had time and space to talk openly about the history of our friendship. We've both agreed that we have recognized and experienced non-platonic attraction at various times in our friendship. Perhaps his former wife recognized this. Perhaps this is what she found threatening. It is hard to say. But this attraction, as it was, or as it is, is manageable in our lives. It does not unduly inhibit our ability to make reasoned decisions regarding our friendship, the feelings of others, or our own notions of personal dignity. It is something that we can discuss and reflect on—something that can even be validating in our lives—it is nice, after all, to know that someone thinks well of you in many ways. The truth of the matter is that our friendship pushes us to grow and that we then take that growth into the other relationships in our lives. For us, any work that managing any sensual, sexual or romantic attraction might take, or any difficulties such attraction might raise in our lives is more than worth that exchange.

Of course, if things change, we can reevaluate. We do not demand that life or its relationships be simple—even though, for the most part, we do not experience our friendship as complicated or complicating. What we want is for our relationships in life, including our friendships, to be meaningful and enriching—to be something that we have

[35] As mentioned earlier, this is a deeply heteronormative concern, and as a future project I would like to explore narratives from queer identified persons that discuss how they have navigated friendship and sexual attraction.

reason to value. In Millian language, we wish our relationships to expand our potential and allow the best and highest in us to thrive.

Santi is not the only male friend in my life— and not the only friend, male, female or otherwise-identified, that I have ever found myself attracted to, or perhaps more relevant, found myself recognizing a mutual attraction with. But I cannot imagine who I would be without those people in my life. I feel it would be a deep loss to exclude from friendship, to exclude from our lives, some of the very people we find some of the strongest and most influential connections with—perhaps some of the people from whom we can learn the most.

This brings us back to the Millian questions we posed quite a bit earlier in this work. We can ask ourselves: What friendships do I prefer? What friendships suit my character and disposition? What friendships allow the best and highest in me to have fair play? What friendships will enable the best and highest in me to grow and thrive?

Human Capabilities: Including the sensual and sexual as a part of human life

To clarify my position on the importance of the sensual, sexual and romantic in human life I would like to borrow from Martha Nussbaum's work on human capabilities. Much like Mill, Nussbaum begins with an examination of what kind of a being a human being is. However, it is worth noting that Nussbaum does not appeal to utilitarian concerns and instead evokes notions akin to human rights. In that way, this section will be a divergence from Millian thinking. However, I believe Nussbaum's work offers helpful reflection on

the roles of the sensual and sexual in human life. These reflections can be carried forward whether or not one chooses to adopt them in a human rights context as Nussbaum would.

To begin, Nussbaum describes human beings as beings with a valuable potential: the power of moral reflection, choice and action. If properly nurtured, human beings are the kind of beings that can, supported by reason and experience, come to think, make decisions and act as moral agents. Put another way, human beings, if properly nurtured, can use their capacity for reason and their observations of the world, to reflect on or imagine what they value, to decide according to those thoughts what they might want in life and then to make a plan for how to pursue the goals they have set. This may sound familiar, as it is similar in nature to the description I gave earlier of what it means to be a progressive being.

Nussbaum further believes that the capacity for moral choice gives each human being, by virtue of being the kind of being she is, an equal kind of dignity or worth. This dignity entitles each human being to a kind of respect in their interactions with others. In her work, *Sex and Social Justice*, Nussbaum writes:

> ... [All human beings], just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society, and [the] primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them, a power that consists in the ability to plan a life in accordance with one's own evaluation of ends ... the moral equality of persons gives them a fair claim to certain types of treatment at the hands of society and politics ... [T]his treatment must do two ... things [:] respect and

> promote the liberty of choice, and ... respect and promote the equal worth of persons as choosers (Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* 57).

With human dignity in mind, Nussbaum's capabilities approach outlines not only the kind of treatment human beings deserve as fully developed moral agents, but also the kind of treatment they deserve and require to properly nurture their potential to develop their moral agency. That is, to develop their full human potential. Or, put another way, to live a fully human life.

So, what do human beings need in order to live a fully human life? What is it that helps human beings live such a life? What hinders their ability to live such a life if it is taken away? In answer to these types of questions Nussbaum has proposed a list of human capabilities. While this list covers quite a broad range, there are two elements on the list that I believe are particularly relevant to understanding the sensual, sexual and romantic in human life as part of a fully human life and not, in contrast to Mill, as dwelling in an animal realm. Nussbaum lists the two as: *bodily integrity* and *emotions*. The description of bodily integrity includes *having opportunities for sexual satisfaction* and the description of emotions includes being able *to love those who love and care for us.*[36]

[36] Women and Human Development - The Capabilities Approach - Nussbaum (78-80)
*bodily integrity - being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign ... having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction
*emotions - being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial to their development.)

That is, part of being human, part of our ability to make competent choices about our lives about the things that we value, is our ability to make decisions relating to our bodies and our emotions, decisions that recognize us as sexual and emotional beings, and allow us to have a kind of genuine autonomy in our physical and emotional lives.

Of course, this does not imply that everyone must make the same decisions. Some may decide not to engage in sexual activities at all. Further, in case it is not clear, I want to be sure to state that in recognizing sensual, sexual and romantic behaviors as a part of a fully human life, it is implied that such behaviors may vary as they are developmentally appropriate, and must be consensual and fully informed. With all of this in mind, I will reiterate my claim that sensual, sexual and romantic experiences should not be considered a lower part of our character, but should rather hold equally with our other human capabilities. Further, given his attitudes regarding experiments in living and higher and lower pleasures, it is worth noting that Mill would likely be open to persons adopting these kinds of attitudes around the sensual and the sexual, such that they could better examine what it is they might have good reason to value.

I see no reason to believe that we can't hold to what I believe is the larger, more critical, message that Mill forwarded in discussing the social censure he and Taylor faced due to their friendship. Accepting attraction as a natural part of human life we can set aside his concerns regarding the sensual and sexual and rephrase Mill's message as: *The strongest and tenderest friendship can exist between a man and a woman and the members of such a friendship can duly regard the feelings of others, prudence, and their understanding of personal dignity.*

That is, we can hold the conviction that women and men (and any persons, however identified) within, and while building, close friendships retain the ability to make competent decisions about the scope and character of the friendship. Further, should sensual, sexual or romantic elements arise or exist, it would not necessarily preclude the friends' ability to make decisions or to properly take into account their own feelings and feelings of others, relevant circumstance or information, or their own sense of dignity. In fact, we could even leave space to imagine that attraction in a friendship could play a positive role in the lives of the friends.

Also, it is worth explicitly noting that while this particular discussion examines a relationship between a woman and a man, the same would hold between two women or two men, or any number or combination of individuals, however gender-identified. The point is not to fall into heterocentrism, or a binary understanding of gender, or to assume monogamy of any relationship, friendship, romance, sexual relationship, etc. The point is that human beings, including a woman and a man who share a non-platonic attraction, do not have their agency rendered incapacitated by such an attraction. Contrarily, the sensual, sexual and romantic are an integral part of human agency. Further, I believe it would have dangerous implications to assume that such attraction would incapacitate human agency. Think, for example, about the implications such an assumption might have on sexual assault laws.

This isn't to say that persons in such a friendship couldn't make bad decisions, but that it is possible to make good ones. Put in less value-laden language, I simply want to note that friends in nearly any situation can make decisions they might regret, decisions

that hurt one another or others. However, that does not mean there is anything privileged about sensual, sexual or romantic attraction that we should recognize as inhibiting our ability to make decisions.[37]

A person in a friendship might decide to limit emotional/physical space in the friendship for any number of reasons, but there is an important difference between saying that an individual *can* make such a decision because of actual present considerations and saying a person *ought* to make such a decision because of pervasive societal assumptions. For example, it would be one thing for Santi and me to choose, upon reflection, to impose boundaries or limits on our relationship because we genuinely did not wish to make his wife uncomfortable. However, it is another, and more worrisome thing to say that, by virtue of my being a woman and Santi being a married man, and for no other specified reason, we ought to impose boundaries or limits on our ability to imagine, pursue, or have a friendship.[38]

What can we learn from cross-gender friendship?

Throughout this work I have argued that friendship across difference can give us a new lens on ourselves and the society in which we live — it can help us to challenge single stories, both our own and those of society. Thus, if we can find ways to make space for

[37] It is important to note here that there are many reasons that a same-sex friendship among heterosexuals might complicate or threaten something else that the members of the friendship may value. For example, a same sex friendship might require a significant time commitment or introduce new opinions and ideas that could challenge a romantic commitment.

[38] It is important to note the possibility that friends could make decisions that might result in others experiencing hurt, and that those decisions could be equally valid and rational. For example, two friends (with other romantic commitments) could decide to pursue a romantic or sexual relationship because they decide that that kind of relationship is more valuable to them than their previous commitments.

and support cross-gender friendship, what are some examples of things we might gain? In the following section I will explore a small sampling of possibilities. I collected these possibilities through an informal interview process of persons currently in cross-gender friendships. Thus, the following is not an in-depth study, but rather a place to begin imagining possibilities for our lives and for the world. These possibilities were offered in response to the question: *What have you learned from the cross-gender friendships in your life?*

In general, the responses fell in two categories, which can be helpfully understood as first order and second order. First order responses involve learning directly about what it is to experience the world as a person perceived of as female, or what it is to experience the world as a person perceived of as male. Second order responses reveal the gendering of various activities in society, and the ways in which cross-gender friendships can open us to activities we may not have previously engaged with. Let's begin with first order responses.

Male respondents reported that cross-gender friendship helped them to learn about the construction of, and societal pressures of, femininity and being female in the world. Many of their responses centered around better understanding ways in which being female can be and feel vulnerable. These lessons included a heightened awareness of how the respondents, as males, might be perceived of as threatening in certain situations, and ways in which they might be able to respect or mitigate that perception:

> I hear from close female friends about horrible experiences they had with men that explained why women I don't know well might be tentative to open up to me

> or be alone with me. Or, I'd be with a friend as she was cat-called on the street. I'm not sure why, but I'd feel the impact of the experience more clearly because she was my friend, maybe even in a different way than if she was my partner.

Female respondents reported learning about the construction of, and societal pressures of, masculinity and being male in the world. Many of their responses centered around a better understanding of societal pressures to be emotionally impervious, to be a protector, to be financially able to provide for others, and to place work ahead of family (although, often this ironically appeared to stem from seeing work as a way to provide stability and care for a family):

> Something terrible would happen [to a male friend] and I'd be like, "Oh my god, how do you feel?" and he wouldn't know. With one friend, his grandmother died, and I asked if he had cried. He said, "I don't know how."

Relatedly, respondents reported cross-gender friendship as a place to learn to process their own emotional experiences differently. For example, women reported learning about recognizing and engaging with anger, while men reported learning about recognizing and engaging with sadness. Further, both male and female respondents reported that learning about societal constructions around what it meant to be the "opposite" gender triggered reflection on their own gendered experience.

I will note that I found two responses especially intriguing. First, as mentioned earlier, a male respondent reported that cross-gender friendship had been a place to learn

"to worry less" about attraction in friendship. He reported that he had initially been uncomfortable with attraction in cross-gender friendship, but over time and through multiple cross-gender friendships, was able to let go of anxiety around attraction, and to have a sense that attraction in a cross-gender friendship did not necessarily threaten other things he held as valuable, most especially his relationship with his wife. Further, that such attraction was not only manageable, but could be affirming.

Second, coincidentally also from a male respondent, cross-gender friendship was reported as a way to learn to relate to same-gender friends differently. Particularly, he reported that friendships with women modeled ways in which he could engage with male friends more emotionally. Relatedly, friendships with women pushed him to reflect upon and challenge the physical boundaries placed on same-gender male-identified friends:

> [Cross-gender friendships] made me more aware that men can't talk about certain things with male friends, or touch male friends in certain ways, like a chest to chest hug, without being read as gay. I don't have an aversion to being read as gay, but I want to be able to physically express affection and offer comfort without it being misconstrued. Even simple things, like giving an actual hug goodbye. Friendships with women made me realize how much these things were missing in my relationships with men and I decided I wanted to change things. I started asking other male friends if they were open to doing the same. Some didn't get it. But others did. Now, we've had a series of men's retreats and made a commitment to changing things. I already feel closer to some male friends, and I can see and feel an emptiness in other relationships with men that I didn't notice before.

This last response provides a very concrete example of the tripartite at work: a cross-gender friendship affected an individual's attitudes about wellbeing and development, and that individual reached into wider society, in this case, other friendships, to begin to effect change. This is a small scale example, but it is easy to imagine such change expanding as the men in the example choose to continue their retreats, or model different behavior for their children.

Respondents also listed a host of second order things they learned had from cross-gender friendship. While these lists are almost stereotypically comical, the respondents noted them as having quite a bit of meaning in their lives, and reflected that without cross-gender friendships they may not have come to imagine they could value or enjoy such activities. Male respondents reported that cross-gender friendships supported learning about: cooking, "nature stuff," flowers, gardening, letter writing, expectations to be communicative, thank you notes, and various arts and crafts. Female respondents reported that cross-gender friendships supported learning about: auto body repair and other automotive skills, science fiction literature and television, philosophy, skate boarding, mountain biking, and computer programming. In one case, the woman had, in fact, become a professional computer programmer and could trace that interest back to a cross-gender friendship.

I hope that these examples provide further evidence of the importance of exploring tripartite story between the individual, society, and friendship. However, more than that, my hope is that these examples encourage readers to reflect upon their own

lives, and to spend time imagining what relationships they might have good reason to value and pursue.

The Possibilities are Endless

In this work, I have engaged with cross-gender friendship as a timely and important case study. However, as introduced in chapter one, and touched on throughout this work, my broader interests include exploring the value of friendship across difference (widely construed). The basic idea is this: if it is possible for two persons to form a meaningful relationship of care, then whatever differences, of thought, experience, etc., that each person brings to the relationship can then be offered to the other. The larger the differences, the more potential exchange, as long as the differences do not breach a theoretical tipping point such that persons encounter so much difference they have trouble forming, or cannot form, a meaningful relationship of care. As previously mentioned, the range of this theoretical zone of potential friendship most likely varies among persons and further depends on available external support for the relationship. However, the general message remains the same: friendship between people with different experiences — friendship across difference — is a way to recognize, create, and foster important knowledge and informed action in the world.

In my wider work, I have begun to adapt this idea to discussions of parent-child relationships and teacher-student relationships. I am confident that these adaptions represent only the tip of the iceberg — the possibilities seem limitless.

Further, in imagining the potential of friendship across difference I want to, once again, take a step away from Mill. Whether it was his intention or not, Mill has a tendency to privilege intellectual development. For example, in writing on friendship in *The Subjection of Women* he claims that friends "must have an initial level of intellectual and moral abilities" (Mill, *The Subjection of Women* 90). However, I see no reason to limit ourselves to friendships with "intellectual equals," at least not simplistically understood. To truly adopt an attitude of engaging in experiments in living, I suggest that we attempt to recognize different kinds of intelligences. In my own life, I find that my orientation toward a person is ultimately much more important to my ability to learn from them than a traditional account of intelligence might be. If I am able to orient myself in a respectful way with an openness to learning, I find it is likely that learning will follow. Early childhood educator and author Tom Hobson offers an understanding of children that I believe captures this respectful and open orientation well:

> It may seem strange, I suppose, for many of us to understand that we, at best, stand on the planet as equals with all other people, including young children. We are each fully formed, fully valid, fully functional human beings no matter our age. Naturally, we have different lots in life, different blessings and challenges, and are on our way to different places, but we always remain, most of all, worthy of being loved for being exactly who we are (Hobson, *Loving Them Just As They Are*).[39]

[39] Along with Hobson, Myles Horton's work has been very influential to my thinking in this area. Notably, his notion of having a "two-eyed view" of persons as articulated in his autobiography, *The Long Haul*.

And again, love is evoked. Can we give friendship a central role in our story? Can we, as bell hooks suggests, embrace love as a transformative force?

Looking Forward: What if we really could pick our friends?

Where do we go from here? This work has addressed the question *Why Friendship?* and has offered numerous reasons to recognize and advocate for increased space for friendship across difference in our lives and in wider society. Recognizing the value of friendship calls on us to follow this work with an exploration of how we can increase space for friendship across difference in our society. Perhaps we can imagine ourselves, for I certainly hope my readers will join me, looking toward the question of *Friendship How?* In what ways can we imagine opening space in society that support friendship? How can we change our own attitudes and practices? How can we reach out to those close to us to examine their attitudes and practices? How can we affect change in the societies in which we live?

I am inclined to believe that previously unimagined work can and should be pursued, but I also strongly believe that related work exists and can be adopted and adapted. For example, I imagine creating *islands of decency* for friendship, as Myles Horton might have advocated. Or, looking to interfaith work for advice on bringing people together. The power, for example of sharing a meal, as advocated by Reverend Robert Traer. If we start to view the world through the lens of valuing friendship, I believe more and more possibilities will become apparent.

To close, I will return to Mill. Mill suggests that human beings are progressive beings, the kind of beings that can grow as individuals and as societies. I am drawn to this idea, though I am doubtful that is it possible, for individuals or for society, to master the art of being progressive beings. However, the attempt seems a worthy journey — one I certainly want to work towards with friends by my side.

Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." TED talk. Web. October 2009.

Anderson, Elizabeth. "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living." *Ethics*, Oct., 1991: pp. 4-26. Print.

---------. "John Stuart Mill: Democracy as Sentimental Education" *Philosophers on Education: Historical Perspectives*. Ed. Amelie Oxenberg Rorty. London: Routledge, 1998. Pp. 333-352. Print.

---------. Personal Communication. 10 August 2010.

Annas, Julia. "Mill and The Subjection of Women" *Philosophy* (April 1977), pp. 179-194. Print.

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera*. San Francisco, Cali.: Aunt Lute, 2012. Print.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999. Print.

Badhwar, Neera Kapur. *Friendship: a philosophical reader*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993. Print.

Baldwin, James. *Collected Essays*. Des Moines, Ia.: Library of America. 1998. Online.

Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty" *Isaiah Berlin Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Bohemia, Princess Elisabeth Of, and Rene Descartes. *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe)*. New Ed ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007. Print.

Brown, Brené. Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead. New York: Gotham, 2012. Print.

Capper, Charles. Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life Volume I: The Private Years. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1994. Print.

---------. Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life Volume II: The Public Years. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010. Print.

Einstein, Zilliah. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman, 1981. pp.133-135. Print.

Eliot, Lise. *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2009. Print.

Ellis, Carolyn S., & Bochner, Arthur. "Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher as subject." *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Densin, K. N., & Lincoln, Y. S. (ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.

Goodall, H. L. *Writing the new ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2000. Print.

Hobson, Tom. "Loving Them Just as They Are." Teacher Tom: Teaching and Learning from Preschoolers. Web. 30 October 2011.

hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. Brattleboro: Harper Paperbacks, 2001. Print.

Horton, Myles, and Judith Kohl. *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*. New York: Doubleday, 1990. Print.

Krouse, Richard. "Patriarchial Liberalism and Beyond: from John Stuart Mill to Harriet Taylor," *The Family in Political Thought*. Jean Bethke Elhstain (ed.). Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. p. 164. Print.

Jacobs, Jo Ellen. *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2002. Print.

Lama, His Holiness The Dalai. *Ethics For a New Millennium*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Mill, John Stuart. "Autobiography and Literary Essays," vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. J.M. Robson, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge; Kegan Paul, 1963-1991. Print.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Elizabeth Rapaport, ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978. Print.

Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women: a critical edition*, Edward Alexander, ed. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2001. Print.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism,* Roger Crisp, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.

"Minnesota Amendment 1." Wikipedia, n.d. Web. 4 Sep. 2014.

Morales, Maria. *Perfect Equality*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996. Print.

Nussbaum, Martha C.. *Women and Human Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

--------. *Sex and Social Justice.* London: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Okin, Susan Moller. *Women in Western Political Thought* . Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013. pp. 226-230. Print.

Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000. Print.

Richardson, Laurel. "Writing: a method of inquiry." *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Densin, K. N., & Lincoln, Y. S. (ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000. Print.

Rogers, Carl. *A Way of Being*. New York: Mariner Books, 1995. Print.

---------. *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. New York: Mariner. 1995. Print.

Ryan, Alan. *John Stuart Mill*, New York: Pantheon, 1970. Print.

---------. *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanity Books, 1990. Print.

Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Rockland, Mass.: Anchor Press, 2000. Print.

Shanley, Mary Lyndon. "Marital Friendship and Slavery," *Political Theory* (May 1981) p. 239. Print.

Slattery, Scott. Personal Communication. 30 June 2010.

Traer, Robert. *Quest For Truth*. Aurora, CO.: The Davies Group Publishers, 2003. Print.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden.* S.l.: Imperia Press, 2013. Print.

Tulloch, Gail. *Mill and Sexual Equality*. London: Longman, 1988. pp. 13–15. Print.

Wallace, John. Personal Communication. 20 October 2012.

Van Fox, Ray. Personal Communication. 25 June 2013.

-----. Personal Communication. 30 July 2013.

-----. Personal Communication. 28 September 2014.