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The Space Between “Justice” and “Expediency” in Woman’s Suffrage

Speech, 1870-1920

Abstract: This paper explores the rhetoric of the woman suffrage movement from a historical perspective. It maintains that suffragists were making arguments about justice and rights much more often—and for longer--than previous historians believed, and that such arguments appear to have been relatively useful in arguing for suffrage. It focuses on the late 19th through the very early 20th century, a period in which previous historians have claimed the “justice” argument was growing thin.

Paper:

“It all comes back to equality of opportunity and equality of rights.”ⁱ A simple, declarative statement regarding the necessity for women to participate in public life. But it was made by a woman who was willing to frame the woman suffrage movement as a matter of duty to republic, and even as a matter of duty to hearth and “home sphere.” The woman suffrage movement, at the ground level, consisted of an absolute profusion of arguments, some appearing to be directly contradictory. The suffragists and their partisans eventually agreed that women were owed “equality of opportunity and equality of rights,” and for the most part they argued that in both cases equal meant the same, not “spiritually” or “morally” equal, as had previously been assumed. Many scholars have claimed that arguments about rights were fundamentally different from arguments about

duties, or the aid that women could render their families or country by voting. I will argue that, in the end, the advocates of woman suffrage saw little difference in their advocacy of all these goals. In fact, arguments about duties or “expediency”—where the need for women to vote was presented as a benefit to society—protection of the home sphere, increased support for temperance, being a “civilizing influence,” and so forth—were often, if not radical, at least liberal arguments for women’s equality and their right to vote. They were sometimes even explicitly presented as a matter of justice.

It is easy for scholars, in retrospect, to break down arguments by category. But the ways in which speeches (and pamphlets) in favor of women’s suffrage were constructed counterindicates the idea that suffragists themselves perceived any kind of difference between arguments based in “justice” (or “right,” or “human rights”) and arguments based in “expediency.” On a minor note, they jumbled the two together utterly casually, not even transitioning between, say, a “justice” segment and then an “expediency” one. More importantly, they appear often to have seen what modern scholars, for the most part, categorize as “expediency” arguments as being inherently about rights and justice. Carmen Heiderⁱⁱ points out that the home protection argument, as used by the women she studied in Nebraska, was a radical argument about the rights of women within the home sphere, and the need for women to be able to ensure their safety (and the safety of their children) with the backup of the state, if needed. It was an argument about the right of protection under the law—an argument, if you will, about justice.

For an in-depth example of the differences between modern perception and that of the speaker, Mariana Wright Chapman, writing in a pamphlet (which often have fewer entangled arguments) painted women as a “civilizing” force, a pacifying force. She

declared men and women different, and argued that women's strengths were especially needed in legislation in the modern age. These are generally considered by historians to be "expediency" arguments, because a) they present men and women as different and b) argue that women should be allowed to vote *for the good of others*. And yet, she was making an argument about the correct way—the just way—to understand the position of women in society, appeals to the need to have the realm of government constituted as are the realms of church and home, and appeals to God's will. When she used the language of duty and obligation, she was placing the duty of citizenship on both men and women, equally. She was making an argument about the "just" way to construct a society, whether or not modern readers are interested in hearing it.

The history of woman suffrage rhetoric is entangled with the history of woman suffrage itself. Woman suffrage orators presented the predecessors of their movement, the advances made by society towards justice and civilization (often abolition, particularly), as part of their argument for suffrage—these things are part a positive tide, and so are we. Suffragists explicitly argued for their cause by situating themselves in a broader narrative of national (and occasionally personal) self-improvement. They were writing themselves into history, and almost as soon as woman suffrage organizations formed, the history of woman suffrage was being written. Speeches and pamphlets were followed by multi-volume histories, all written by the suffragists themselves. They were created to serve the movement, to re-frame the debate over woman suffrage in the public sphere, to provide suffragists with a group identity and with exemplars, and to provide the legitimization that only a usable past can. The multi-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*ⁱⁱⁱ provides a brilliant example. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was listed as first author,

and the volumes favored her NWSA's (National Woman Suffrage Association) work over that of the AWSA (American Woman Suffrage Association). The *History of Woman Suffrage* tended to frame woman suffrage as part of the natural evolution of the principles enshrined in the creation of the United States as a nation. Partially published before the passage of nationwide suffrage for women, the book was as much a work of propaganda as it was of history.

And indeed it was used as such. Woman suffrage books and pamphlets were practically thrust upon libraries with great enthusiasm—as a matter of fact, the subtitle of one bound volume of pro-suffrage pamphlets proclaims itself “Designed especially for the convenience of suffrage speakers and writers and for the use of debaters and libraries.”^{iv} Historian Sarah Hunter Graham described suffrage histories and the efforts suffragists made to create a history of their own in the face of conventional works excluding them, stating, “[t]hroughout that history runs the recurrent theme of the steady evolution of women toward an egalitarian, if distant, utopia.”^v The history of woman suffrage as written by suffragists during the movement presents their work as a crusade (sometimes literally), part of a slow improvement of women's position in society in time which will eventually lead to an America (or, sometimes, a world) in which men and women are equal.

Soon after the nineteenth amendment was safely ratified, suffrage groups began to disintegrate. Suffragists had widely conflicting opinions on almost every issue except suffrage, and even when they agreed on what to do, they rarely agreed on what the correct order was to do these things in. The NAWSA [National American Suffrage Association], the CU [Congressional Union], and all their comrades slowly fell apart.

Little was written on this history until the 1950s, when Eleanor Flexner published *Century of Struggle*,^{vi} a more critical examination of the woman suffrage movement. Flexner provided a clear narrative of the woman suffrage movement by a nonparticipant. A radical, she fought hard for the inclusion of sections on African-American women and working-class women, whose histories she felt had been badly served by previous scholarship. In *Century of Struggle*, as in the *History of Woman Suffrage*, there was more than a hint of hagiography, a desire to furnish the next generations of (particularly female) activists with templates and heroes to support them in future struggle. Flexner situated the history of woman suffrage as part of a broader movement towards a better world, part of the progressive narrative that suffragists themselves had endorsed and that would be echoed in many later works.

In 1965 Aileen Krador wrote her analysis of woman suffrage rhetoric,^{vii} highlighting rhetoric separate from the rest of suffrage activism for the first time. She made the initial division between “justice” and “expediency” arguments for woman suffrage, distinctions that are still used (if often modified) today. According to this formulation, woman suffrage advocates, in their beginnings as abolitionists and soon after, adhered to the understanding that suffrage was a natural right. It was, like abolition, a matter of justice according to the principles of the (often religious) ideals held by woman suffrage advocates, their relatives, and the broader social spheres they moved in. But over time, “justice” arguments ceded ground to “expediency” arguments—reasons to grant women the vote which avoided the question of natural right completely. These expediency arguments often appealed explicitly to racist and nativist sentiments—the votes of (white, American-born) women would outnumber the votes of foreign (and, in

the south, African-American) men. Due to immigration policies and economic incentive, there were many more male immigrants than female ones, at the time, and in many areas of the south there were more white women than African-Americans of both genders, so this was an accurate and useful argument, despite its extreme bigotry. Kraditor emphasized the role of nativism in the decline of the natural rights assertion that underlay the “justice” argument, pointing out that “rights for all” became a less viable argument when many supporters of woman suffrage no longer, in fact, advocated rights for all. But expediency arguments were not confined to racist constructions of “civilization.” According to Kraditor’s classification, they varied widely, appealing to women’s capability in the home being useful in the public sphere, to women’s need to protect their homes, and to women’s potential help in instilling greater public morality—especially through restricting alcohol availability.

The “expediency” arguments, according to Kraditor, tended to emphasize the difference between women and men, as the “justice” argument had deemphasized it. This is a somewhat misleading formulation, in my opinion. According to Kraditor, there was really only one justice argument in circulation, and it was formulated both to convince the suffragists’ audience that men and women were equal *and* to convince them that that equality meant they should have equal access to political participation. “Expediency” arguments, on the other hand, were diverse and opportunistic. She claimed that by the time suffragists shifted towards expediency arguments, the entire population was convinced of women’s “equality,” though they were divided over whether or not they thought that equality meant women should have the right to vote. Thus, she said, suffragists moved on to trying to convince their audiences that women deserved suffrage

using new framing, as they no longer needed to convince anyone of women's equality. And the new arguments they found increasingly painted women as different from men, in a way that could benefit the nation.

Histories written in the 1960s and 1970s continued to raise up leaders and the movement as a whole, this time as part of a broader strand of "women's history"—an effort echoing the suffragists' own in its desire to construct a parallel history in which women could see themselves and not just the history of men. This history, said Bonnie Dow, creates smoothed-out, temporally organized, explanations of the movement and its self-presentation. These histories were an effort to construct an arc in which there are clear stages of progress and, often, imply the continuation of them in an arc of the universe that bends towards justice, so to speak. They are histories to complement the histories focused on men—straightforward and rather simplistic, but perhaps necessary to fill in the basics that had not been incorporated into "normal" history. When discussing woman suffrage, they were happy to adopt Kraditor's framework, and to build up a history that progresses from one point to the next, everything presented as if there was a sort of inevitability to this. As useful as these factual and straightforward accounts are, these pieces do "necessarily gloss over the texture of specific contexts in which the test they treat are embedded."^{viii} Dow is right to point out that we have had enough of them written, and written well, that scholars can and should (and in some cases did) move on to more critical, emplaced, and interconnected histories.

According to Kristen DeLegard, "critiques of these heroes of the suffrage movement erupted in the late 1970s,"^{ix} specifically focused on their racist and nativist strategies. The seeds had definitely been planted in *Century of Struggle*, but criticism

became more overt with time. However, even the most radical critiques continued to contain the assumption that woman suffrage was a part of a progressive history in the United States, a history still in the making. Ellen Carol DuBois, for example, concluded her book *Feminism and Suffrage* with the words “It is sobering to reflect how long after the inauguration of this movement it took to win the ballot for women, and how much longer we shall still have to fight to win our emancipation. . . . [the woman suffrage movement] is evidence of the ultimate capacity of women to liberate our sex.”^x These writers pointed their readers towards the goals that suffragist claimed woman suffrage would fix, and that are still present. They wanted their readers to read, go forth, and continue the tradition of making the world a better place. Their work was often critical of the suffrage movement, but they continued the tradition of using woman suffrage history as the background and framing for advocating further action.

The real diversification of perspectives (and critiques) on the woman suffrage movement came not with the 70s but with the late 80s and early 90s. The woman suffrage movement had, as Allison Sneider pointed out, “fallen out of favor” by the 1980s as a category of historical research.^{xi} Women’s historians showed an increasing interest in grassroots organization and women’s political involvement outside the sphere of electoral politics, but little interest in the suffrage movement itself. Blended with woman suffrage history, this led to interesting combinations, analyzing the suffrage movement from entirely different angles and avoiding the history of the suffrage movement altogether. Louise Michele Newman carefully detailed the racial and evolutionary arguments for suffrage—and more broadly, as a founding part of feminism—in 1999. The same year Margaret Finnegan framed woman suffrage in terms of everyday life and consumer

culture, discussing the relationship between the movement and the evolving conceptions of consumer identity.^{xii}

Discussion of the rhetoric of woman suffrage in works by historians has remained limited. Rhetoric is not an exciting new category, like consumerism, because it was suffrage rhetoric that has, throughout these histories, been analyzed as the movement itself. Kraditor's work was seminal, and continues to be incorporated into larger or differently-focused treatments of the movement. The overall framing of the suffrage rhetoric has continued to imply a slow but fairly orderly shift from an ideologically pure "human rights" position, through the disgrace (emphasized more heavily in later works) of the NWSA's condemnation of the fifteenth amendment, and finally to a compromised "expediency" argument that incorporated racism and nativism—often presented by historians as not inherent to the movement.

But scholars of rhetoric, philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists have branched out over the course of the 21st century into an understanding of suffrage rhetoric that complicates the assumption of simple change-over-time from justice to expediency. Holly McCammon ran a fascinating statistical analysis on the effect of "justice" versus "expediency" rhetoric in the formation of state associations, determining that only the "expediency" arguments appear to have been significantly correlated with success in forming a state association.^{xiii} Of course, she used the Kraditor definitions of "justice" and "expediency." Donna Harrington-Lueker argued that Stanton and Anthony's paper, *The Revolution*, demonstrated the flexibility in the ways it shaped itself to be attractive to advertisers.^{xiv} Amy Slagell pointed to Frances Willard's careful blending of justice and expediency arguments for the benefits of her more-conservative

WCTU constituency,^{xv} and Carmen Heider argued that framing woman suffrage as a source of home protection was radical, not “expedient.”^{xvi}

Historians have dodged the difficulty of integrating all these new perspectives by no longer writing narrative histories of the woman suffrage movement. However, as Sneider adeptly points out, this has frozen the suffrage narrative as straightforward and relatively uncomplicated, a simplistic progressive history. Suffrage history deserves to be seen from other angles—Newman, Finnegan, and Thompson have demonstrated, among others, that it can show up quite interesting aspects of broader society.

Rhetoric is, I believe, an important to use in studying the way that the woman suffrage movement existed in society. Historians have been to prone to presume that woman suffrage rhetoric contained the personal philosophies of the speaker. They have ignored the relationship between the speaker (or writer) and the audience, the ways in which arguments advanced were efforts to evoke feeling and relationship. Historians have missed the ways in which the rhetoric of the movement is its own specific side-category, worthy of a separate analysis just as much as parades or bazaars. In their desire to find the “real thoughts” of each individual suffragist, and of the movement as a whole, historians have neglected to view rhetoric as a tool in and of itself, and it is that neglect that has led to the construction and perpetuation of the sharp division between arguments about “justice” and “expediency.” This division is an inaccurate presentation of the ways in which suffragists actually disseminated their message. It was always a mixed message, and in fact, historians understand this quite well when it comes to aspects of the movement that have not previously been so central to its analysis. Finnegan articulates

this quite clearly when she's analyzing material culture and plays instead of more "factual" speeches. I merely wish to do the same.

I will discuss the inherent problems in the framing of "justice" and "expediency" arguments as they have circulated for the past several decades. In the end, the categories were messier than that, and many arguments marked as "expediency" arguments by later scholars would have been viewed by the individuals making and hearing them as "justice" arguments. My main counterexamples will come from, first, the "home sphere" argument—often presented as *the* expediency argument, but which is much more complex than that. I will elaborate on "justice" arguments and why some of them are not discussed in the history of suffrage literature, though they are quite present in the primary sources. I will move on to discussing the clash between anti-suffragists and suffragists over the concept of "equality," a relevant category in all suffragist analysis. Education and social evolution, both pro-suffrage staples, will be discussed in their interesting middle-ground between "justice" and "expediency," as will the suffragists' use of and discussions around the schism between the reality of women's lives and the societal construction of "womanhood."

The "justice" and "expediency" categories themselves, even aside from the idea of a smooth temporal transition from one to the other, have distorted the discussion surrounding woman suffrage rhetoric. It is true that there was some progression of rhetoric at the national level over the course of the movement. Arguments—mostly "expediency" arguments—were indeed added over time. The philosophies of national-level leaders tended to be cohesive; Elizabeth Cady Stanton in particular was a goldmine for the researcher. On the state level, however, rhetoric could vary widely. This was made

especially clear in later years in the south, as the southern strategy of the woman suffrage movement meant that national organizations backed away from explicit statements regarding suffrage for African-Americans, leaving the actually racist rhetoric to speakers on the ground. On the other hand, there was no need to talk about the white female vote countering the African-American male vote in states like New York, fearmongering was more likely to be done around immigrant communities. States had different degrees of progressivism to be played upon by suffragists, and suffragists knew to play to their audience. There were efforts in some states to avoid too-close associations with the WCTU in the hopes of avoiding the ire of liquor interests, who tended to presume women would vote in favor of temperance. There were efforts in others to ride in on a crest of temperance sentiment, in much closer allegiance. The variation was wide.

The categories of “justice” and “expediency”—and Suzanne Marilley’s re-definition of the feminism of equal rights, the feminism of fear, and the feminism of personal development^{xvii}—are interesting and useful frameworks. They are, however, entirely post-hoc categories, constructed by historians looking back with a hundred years or more of hindsight. They are not categories that the suffragists themselves would have been likely to recognize. Suffragist speakers did not simply make “justice” or “expediency” arguments alone or in isolation. They rallied a profusion of points to their cause, and blended reasons from both categories extremely casually. Historical analyses have often treated these categories as inherent to the speeches in question, as if we could easily isolate the “expediency” speeches from the “justice” speeches. This is simply incorrect.

Furthermore, the category of “expediency” was vaguely constructed in the history of woman suffrage, and it remains so. It has carried overtones of manipulation, of compromise, of corruption. For example, Kraditor dissected a portion of Carrie Chapman Catt’s speech, and said that “First, she [Catt] was recognizing the validity of claims to the vote other than natural right and justice. Second, the fact that she could ask for the vote on whatever grounds might bring the most favorable response was itself an indication of the triumph of expediency.”^{xviii} Expediency, here, is using a “practical” argument *either* because it is an actual reason the speaker thought women should have the vote *or* because it is what the speaker thought the audience would want to hear. Expediency, by this definition, would also include arguments based on the “justice” of women’s claims to suffrage. If the speaker believed that the audience would be more receptive to speeches regarding the moral or natural right of women to vote, their using arguments predicated on such justice would qualify as making an “expediency” argument. A telling example of just this occurred during the New York Constitutional Convention, towards the end of the 19th century. Here the most vehemently pro-suffrage delegate, as described in a newspaper report, argued that “The State of New York places little restriction on the right of suffrage of males, and he thought it only fair that the right should be extended to females. They were the equals of men in all that means good citizenship. . .”^{xix} Here, rights arguments sounded best. They were the most appropriate for the grandstanding political nature of the venue. And hence, they were used, perhaps expediently, perhaps sincerely. Perhaps both. Trying to distinguish between manipulation and sincerity in such speeches is both methodologically difficult and beside the point, in many instances.

Speeches on behalf of woman suffrage, as delivered to any sort of audience, were rarely allowed only one point of argument. Speakers altered their style and list of arguments based on the audience, twined together “right” or “justice” arguments, “expediency” arguments of varying sorts, with no real consideration for their category. Their speeches often flowed from one argument to the next almost randomly, loosely connected but not inherently bound from one neat thesis. One speech by Mariana Wright Chapman, for example, moved smoothly from the increased quality of women’s education to the current worries over conflict in Turkey, to women’s participation in abolitionism and the Civil War, to the WCTU, to Hull House, to women’s “predilection for details” to women working in public service and continues on.^{xx} The same speaker also appealed in other speeches to the problems of taxation without representation, appropriating the broader conception of right in the United States, and to numerous other “standard” suffrage topics. This diversity of topics threw together standard “justice” arguments (those surrounding abolition) with standard “expediency” arguments (women in public service, women’s special skills). It tied in to the “feminism of personal development” in its positive portrayal of increasingly egalitarian educational structures. These things were assumed go together, and there was no defense put forward for this sort of blending. This style of jumbled-together argumentation was most likely exaggerated by the fact that later on in the movement, NAWSA actually compiled pamphlets that were explicitly marketed for the use of suffrage writers. These pamphlets had fairly distilled, separated, and individual arguments—the expanded home sphere, the good done in countries and states that had already established women as voters, the blurbs from famous supporters on all sorts of bases. But with all those arguments in one

place, it was more than natural that speakers pull from more than one in constructing their own speeches. Woman suffrage speakers saw no contradiction in using multiple, seemingly disconnected, arguments together, even when they encompassed what later scholars categorized as “justice” as well as “expediency” categories.

So these rhetorical categories were thrown together. The categories that Kraditor and all of her successors have made much of do not seem to have been ones that existed in the minds of suffragists. All of the arguments used by suffragists were eventually constructed as justice and right arguments. They may well have drawn upon the use of women’s votes, or the duty of women to harness themselves for the benefit of their families or society. But suffragists used the language of justice and of rights when they talked about duty to the country and safety for themselves and their sisters.

The quintessential “expediency” argument, the one used as an example in several texts, was that of the home sphere. Women needed the vote, in this construction, to protect their home and family from the violence and chaos that was both created and exacerbated by the modern world. One very common and very debated subset of the home protection argument was one for temperance—men who were drunk were dangerous, and the vote could protect women and their children from abuse. Women with the power to vote would insure better (more restrictive) liquor laws, and with them would come increased safety for themselves and their children. When used in front of more “progressive” audiences, the home sphere argument often included pointing out that the boundaries of what used to be considered the “home” were expanding. In industrializing urban areas, women could no longer monitor the quality of milk getting to their children, make sure the space around their house or apartment was clean, or single-handedly

protect her children from the contagious diseases that were particularly virulent in areas with a concentrated population. As Jane Addams put it, “if a woman would keep on with her old business of caring for her house and rearing her children she will have to have some conscience in regard to public affairs lying quite outside of her immediate household. The individual conscience and devotion are no longer effective.”^{xxi} These arguments were often based on the assertion that women had the right to protect their children and their home, to continue controlling all the aspects of home life that had been outsourced.

But these are (and were) presentations of the arguments dissociated from their usual context. Even the most pragmatic of suffragists rarely presented these arguments alone. Frances Willard, president of the WCTU, even blended her pro-temperance-focused, home sphere based pro-suffrage argument with a cry for the justice of equal (identical) public service through voting for both men and women. The arguments that the “home sphere” argument was blended with varied widely, of course, but perhaps the closest in spirit—very close to its inverse—was the argument that women, whether through their upbringing or through “nature’s” or “God’s” will, had a particular skill and attention for those aspects of public life that had previously been a part of the home sphere. Mariana Chapman declared that “[i]t takes no great statesmanship to perceive that women have now an equal interest in brain culture, in physical culture, in moral culture, in sanitation and in good school [sic] housekeeping. . . [which]. . . they are even better fitted [for] than many by centuries of concentration upon household affairs.”^{xxii} Here the argument was blended, again, with the assertion that women were also equal to men as regards intellectual, physical, and moral culture. Women might, this argument went, have

a particular service to offer to the state, but their interests were equal and their participation should correspond.

But Chapman, like many of her fellow-suffragists, was uninterested in having all of her arguments line up so neatly. The same speech then shaded through an argument that women would well-suited to a number of public jobs, and that some women, though not as many as she would like, were already well-employed in such jobs. She pointed to the danger in giving women these jobs without the right to protect themselves and their livelihoods. “Women are a part of the public industrial world and the fact that the smaller salaries in that world belong to them makes it the more important^{xxiii} that they be able to protect their own interests through voting. Suffrage speakers were consistently and directly (if politely) disdainful of the argument that women could work through “influence,” often advanced by anti-suffragists of various stripes. Even when they spoke about women as existing in a sort of expanded home sphere, suffragist speakers acknowledged the number of women employed outside the home, and the fact that without the vote they could have little assurance that male legislators who promised their support would deliver.

But outside of the framework of public employment, many women in the working- and lower-middle classes already had jobs, and had had jobs for quite some time. These were not treated by suffragists as self-actualizing, or as a benefit to society, in the same way female school inspectors (for example) were. But the suffragists were quite willing to argue that these women, too, deserved the protection of a law that was subject to their own participation in the electoral process. “And again, since they [women] are in the economic world and have come there to stay, it is just that they should

have their opinions counted concerning the law makers and officials who govern their world of labor and life.^{xxiv} On the face of it, this is an expediency argument *par excellence*. Women were in the economic sphere, and suffragists said that the public might as well go ahead and accept it. But Chapman did not, in this instance, argue that women needed the vote to protect themselves. Instead, she appealed to the rights of the (male) worker, and argued since women were in the public space already, it was only fair—only *just*—that they be allowed to exert electoral control over that space.

Emily Howland, on the other hand, turned the entire “home sphere” argument directly on its head. She declared “Woman’s sphere is home. Granted, this is a truism requiring no proof. Is it not equally man’s sphere? Are they not natural shareholders and equally interested partners in the good Saxon stronghold, home?”^{xxv} She argued that men in public life, for the most part, have good home lives. Men and women, she said, have the same relation to home life and to each other, and since men do not find there to be any significant conflict between home and public life, women (she argued) would be unlikely to do so.

Furthermore, Howland stated “Enlargement of duties tends to increase the power to do in every department of life. Contraction to [added later: the] decrease of ability of all.”^{xxvi} In short, she presumed that women and men are both well served by work in both the home and public spheres equally. This seems to almost imply a feminism of personal development—women will be more “powerful” and able when provided with more opportunities to demonstrate and develop that ability.

Suffrage speakers were, however, often hesitant to commit themselves to women being the same as or different than men, in various aspects of life. Howland, for example,

initially tried to grapple with the issue, and wrote in one speech “As for inequality of mental powers, [between men and women, as an argument against suffrage] there has been no fair trial to test this, but so far as the intellect of the woman has been permitted cultivation it has proved itself not inferior.”^{xxvii} But later, she added an annotation to the passage, stating that it did “not belong to the discussion of the subject.” It is entirely likely that they found it of little use in their work, and perhaps they themselves—often well-read in evolutionary theory, aware of the quickly-changing understanding of humankind—did not know where to stand.

And so suffragist speakers had a tendency to do as Howland did, and ducked the issue. Chapman pointed out that “The best thought of to day maintains the same standard of morals for girls and boys,”^{xxviii} and heavily promoted education for younger women and female children. She argued that women should be self-improving, and continue to study even if they were beyond the age where college was generally an accessible goal. On the one hand, she wanted equal pay for equal work, but on the other she declared that “of course” it is better that “the economic dependence be upon the husband.”^{xxix} She praised Queens Victoria and Elizabeth in two separate speeches, and then said “But one need not push for women as queens nor as presidents. Let us ask only for the open field and exceptional women, like exceptional men, will find their level.”^{xxx} She often avoided comment altogether.

But suffragists were quite interested in presenting areas in which they knew at least some women were exactly the same as men. Women were taxed, and subject to the law, and these things were both observable and, in America, tied to an expectation of rights. Taxation without representation was one example. It was often touched upon as an

argument, but very rarely was it ever expanded. Juliana Tutt^{xxxii} claims that this is because suffragists did not see tax resistance itself as a very useful strategy. However, I think the more pertinent reason for its lack of expansion in speeches and pamphlets and suffrage literature is because it was an understood and recognized shorthand. No taxation without representation is a phrase that has—and had—a strong and simple political message, an appeal to Revolutionary politics. There was no need to clarify or explain. It smoothly appropriated a standard public discourse of patriotism in service of the cause, in effect functioning somewhat like a biblical proof-text. Throwing it into a speech meant allying the suffrage movement with a progressive history, one where social evolution must necessarily correlate with the expansion of political rights. “No taxation without representation” has been presented as a justice argument since the beginning of the republic, but it has also been presented as an expediency one—or at least one backed by expediency. You could not (cannot) refuse to represent the property-holders, or pull from a population indefinitely without recompense, because eventually things go wrong. Suffragists may have been unwilling to withhold their tax duties, but they were very much not against appealing to righteously military imagery—their carefully-orchestrated parades are proof enough of this.

Unlike taxation, the idea of equality between men and women was discussed so extensively precisely because it was not agreed upon. Both suffragists and anti-suffragists eventually came around to using the language of equality. But when suffragists used the word “equal” they were implying that men and women were functionally the same as (or at least similar to) men, in all attributes relevant to political rights. Anti-suffragists, on the other hand, meant that men and women were “equal in the eyes of God.” They often

claimed that women were superior—different, and hence marked out for a purer existence on earth. Women’s “equality” or “superiority,” in this construction, could only be protected by keeping them from acting in the same [public, political] spheres as men.

Kraditor was rather disingenuous to say that by the 1890s “it was no longer necessary to prove what was now obvious” that men and women were, in some construction of the word, equal.^{xxxii} This, she claimed, is what led to the decline of the justice argument. It was, in her opinion, predicated on the need to convince the audience of the equality between men and women, and with that “proven” it was thrust aside. And, indeed, taking both sides at their word, she would have been correct—the anti-suffragists did tend to frame women as equal or superior to men. However, Kraditor was not interested in taking suffragists at their word—after all, she accuses later suffrage campaigners of hypocrisy—and thus it is difficult to take seriously.

The suffragists themselves were more effective than Kraditor at pinpointing the difference between the ways they themselves used the word “equal” and the way their opponents used it. Emily Howland carefully deconstructed the claims of anti-suffragists to recognize the “equality” or “superiority” of women. As she put it, women exposed to the opinions of men who do not coat their arguments in a film of chivalry “will get an opinion so far from flattering as to reveal the pill in all its bitterness and will be provoked for the moment into violent partisans of their own cause.”^{xxxiii} The anti-suffragist men who proclaimed the unsullied superiority of women were openly scorned by suffragists. Their true disdain was exposed in their willingness to, for example, blame women’s neglect of housekeeping for the drinking and abuse of their spouses,^{xxxiv} and suffragists wasted no time in pointing this out. Suffragists, for the most part at least somewhat

involved in broader progressive goals, were well aware of the ways in which women were already involved in the outside world—in need of power and knowledge to protect themselves. The anti-suffragist image of the woman who was “equal or superior to the man” was dismissed and explained in their writings as imaginary, a phantasm who justified the abuse settled on the shoulders of real women present in the lives of anti-suffragists. Suffragists were more than willing to puncture the illusion, turning back blame with indignation—“this struck me as outrageously untrue.”^{xxxv}

Suffragists emphatically rejected the construction of “equality” that anti-suffragists put forward—and, in fact, anti-suffragists continued (misogynists, indeed, still continue) to frame women as not “equal” but placed-on-a-pedestal superior. For suffragists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, men and women were both equal and, at their core, identical. It is harder, however, to determine how less theoretically-minded leaders understood “equality” between the sexes. Most seemed to frame equality of access as a matter of right and justice, but they often elided the question of equality of skill and/or ability. Chapman claimed that there is indeed a difference between the ways men and women handle data—women were assumed to be occupied with smaller things—but also that this was the product of education. While she pointed out the importance of enfranchising those who actually paid attention to the workings of day-to-day life, she also presumed that the franchise would expand women’s horizons, and that this would also be a positive good for both society and the individual.

And yet, the “expediency” arguments often seem to have presumed that women had special knowledge, focus, or skills. Women were, as many suffragists presented it, better at detailed work than men, more acquainted with the ways of keeping

households—and therefore streets—clean, and more suited to dealing with issues regarding children. But it was also presumed, at least by Chapman, that they would become increasingly capable of functioning in the public sphere on the same level as men. Suffrage, according to many suffragists, would make women more invested in society, would allow them to expand their horizons, would be both the result and the increased encouragement for a more educated and thoughtful female populace. In 1915, Elizabeth Lloyd gave an entire speech which “placed emphasis on the effect suffrage will have upon women themselves.”^{xxxvi}

Education of adult women so that they could join and serve the suffrage cause—and improve themselves for public service and self-realization—was very much present in suffragist’s speeches and private correspondence. While much of this was, of course, education about the benefits of suffrage to society, education of adult women was also a general touchstone for suffrage. According to suffragists, women needed to learn the practicalities of public life for their own safety and security, and to learn about the workings of the modern public works system in order to discharge their historic duties. They needed to learn about the qualifications for public employment, both as potential public employees and as members of the public that interfaced with them. The presumption was that, given the vote, women would slowly but surely enrich their knowledge of things politically connected.

Suffragists framed obtaining this sort of increased knowledge as a matter of justice. The education that would come through public involvement would give women a chance to grow in the ways that they deserved. Though Marilley tended to consider the idea of the vote as self-actualization as a sort of expediency argument—a thing that the

franchise would be good for—that is not all it was. After all, the idea of independence and freedom and the ability to climb the class ladder with work had always been presented as a natural right for men in America’s democratic society, and it was with education that those things would, it was both presumed and argued, become fully accessible to women.

Education of children also served a number of purposes within the movement. The education of children was presented as a central concern of women, and in fact in more than one state school board elections were especially opened to women prior to other forms of election. Though this does not appear to have been a successful wedge tactic in forcing open states to broader suffrage rights for women, or for that matter a proving-ground for women’s interest in the franchise, suffragists certainly framed it as both. Statistics on public education mean that New York suffragists cited girls’ higher average educational achievement as a reason that women should be allowed the right to vote. Education also served as a justification for rather revolting nativism—foreigners were not educated properly in the ways of democracy by their schools and societies, and they were primarily male, hence women should be allowed the vote to counter their influence. Education, above all, was a way that society and individuals could and would change themselves for the better.

Increased education for women was positioned by suffragists as a cause and precondition to understanding the need for suffrage and a partial justification for it. Even better and broader education for women (and in fact for all children) was also framed as an inevitable positive result of granting suffrage to women. This same positive snowballing effect, several suffragist argued, would be present in many other areas of

society—in fact, in society as a whole. Many suffragists were well-educated, progressive women, interested in continuing self-education. As such, they were familiar with evolutionary theory, Social Darwinism, and had a whole slew of ideas about the changes in society that would be “obvious” progress. For many, woman suffrage was both a part and a cause of that societal change—that societal progression. This was sometimes focused around improvements for women in particular, and sometimes for the nation as a whole—just like the arguments surrounding education.

According to several suffragists, it would be just—it would be continuing a righteous trend—for women’s lives to be ever-increasingly safer and more fulfilling. Howland argued that (upper- and upper-middle class) women had been so restricted in their roles that they were no longer much of a benefit to society, caught up doing busywork. Suffrage and the protection it would provide in the public sphere would allow women to finally return to an adulthood that gave them the rights to real thoughts and responsibilities. Chapman gave a whole speech—ostensibly unconnected to suffrage—on the benefits of the trend for gymnastics, for increasingly “healthy” heroines of novels, as opposed to earlier wasteful and dangerous trends for illness and weakness. She repeatedly praised the increasing opportunities for women to become well-educated, and made it clear she expected older women in a position to do so to continue to educate themselves, regardless of what education they had been provided as children.

Howland and Chapman, both of them Quakers, agreed with the Friends’ Equal Rights Association that woman suffrage could reasonably be tied to a broader pacifistic goal of perceived social evolution. They presumed that in the past, women might well have been justifiably kept separate from men. Brute strength could once have been the

basis of a citizen's rights. However, in modern society, increased "civilization" and the peace imposed by stable government, a more efficient economy, and social advances meant that strength was no longer a necessary attribute for success. Women could compete on a more level playing field with men, knowing they did not need to test their physical limits in order to win. Cascading positively, suffrage for women would thus protect the rights they needed as they emerged into the public sphere under these improved conditions, and thus improve them more through the incorporation of additional women. A bit circular? Yes, but apparently convincing enough to be used in varying forms speech after speech, and by unrelated speakers.

Suffragists recognized the mismatch between the societal concept of "women" and the practical realities of women's lives. They argued for the value of speaking to and about women's realities, and shaping the world and societal expectations around the real, rather than an idealized figure on a pedestal. Hagar Kotef^{xxxvii} argues that the idea of the suffragist—the ideal suffragist—as presented by woman suffrage speakers, was white, upper-middle-class, and full of "feminine virtue." This, she claims, was an effort to disembodied women, to place them in the "unmarked" category of white men with regards to the vote. This would be, indeed, tied to a rights argument—the expansion of a privileged category that holds rights. Based on "worthiness," to be sure, but a worthiness that would entitle the holder to rights, not to duties. But this is overly simplistic. Yes, many woman suffrage speakers presented themselves as exemplars in that mold, paragons of virtue. But they also acknowledged the ways their lives and the lives of others did not fit the mold. Suffragists stood up and shattered the image of Woman that their social peers had held in place for decades. They were willing to exploit that image,

and present their own facades, but even when soaringly idealistic it was not an uncommon tactic to demonstrate a solid, homespun practicality. Chapman, for example, had raised children in an extremely societally-approved way, and was, according to all evidence, a doting mother. But she pointed out that children grow, and eventually women must grow too, and do something beyond childrearing. Howland and Chapman and a chorus of other voices pointed out women already laboring in the public sphere, with little protection. They, and other suffrage speakers, tried their best to present the positive changes in society as things that needed to be backed up with legislative clout. They met women where they were, and argued that a little reinforcement of an improved position would get both women and society even further along in this (implied to be somewhat straightforwardly linear) progress.

Suffragists had mixed feelings on the subject of nature—and natural right—altogether. As one pamphlet stated, “Suffrage is not a natural right.”^{xxxviii} This particular pamphlet, devoted to answering the objections of the unconvinced, used the habitual device of appeal to authority. Quoting Dr. James Freeman Clarke, a Unitarian and theologian, it continued “If all women were forbidden to use the sidewalk, and they complained of the injustice, it would be no answer to tell them that it was not a natural or inherent right, but one given by society, and which society might therefore control as it saw fit. A great many rights are given by society, of which, however, it would be manifestly unjust to deprive either sex.”^{xxxix} Suffragists made appeals to the changes that an increasingly urbanized society had wrought in the nature of people. The increased safety of society (and hence the lack of need for brute strength) was of course cited. Urbanization and all of its alterations of family structure was voluminously noted. The

principles of the American constitution were appealed upon quite heartily, and pointed out as themselves a part of the progression of human society.

Well-educated suffragists were loathe to allow their opponents the historical high ground. “Neither is it subversive of first principles or without precedent; for time was when the whole industrial world was women’s, men were given to war and the chase.”^{xi} Woman suffrage—women’s position in public and political life—was indeed framed as grounded in hallowed history and even in God’s will. In speaking to Friends, Chapman declared that suffrage “is a political question only so far as it is a question of right and wrong. Of fair dealing, of morality, of the God-given right of self-government and the opportunity for service.”^{xli}

Note how neatly Chapman tied the idea of right and justice to the idea of duty. She was sometimes dismissive of the language of right—saying, for instance, “when Suffrage is open to all some may consider it a right, and some may not”—as she demonstrated women fit for political duty. Self-government *and* the opportunity for service provides a conflation of what Rosemarie Zagarrie^{xliii} considers to be the Revolutionary-era conceptions of men’s and women’s rights. Men’s rights, she says, were Lockean, predicated on individualism and freedom. Women’s, on the other hand, were based on a Scottish conception of right as tied to—in fact being—a set of duties and obligations. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that early on in the woman suffrage movement women’s rights were claimed based on the necessity of the franchise in the discharge of their duties.

Despite the scholarly assertion that justice and rights discourse faded somewhat with time, suffragists continued to construct a vision of woman’s duty that was not

dissimilar from a man's. In the second half of the 19th century, Emily Howland pointed out the duty of all to preserve a safe and moral home sphere—men and women alike. Towards the end of that century, Chapman declared that “The duties of men and women are now so multiform and of such magnitude that they are beyond statement.” Zagarrie claimed that “[r]ights talk pushed women to exercise their duties—not only in the home but outside the domestic sphere as well.”^{xliii} Bridging the gap, using both together, one pamphlet declared “In short, women want to vote, not only because they are women and want to do the mother work of the world that has, until now, always been in their hands, but because they are human and anxious to do their part in the human work.”^{xliv} Again, we see the refrain that the woman's sphere of work has expanded to the point the franchise is necessary to determine it. But here there was also the broader assertion of similarity in men's and women's duties towards society. This, too, is a sort of justice argument—women deserve to be able to protect both their traditionally-gendered interests and work for the interests of humanity. Again, it was tied into the idea of self-determination, the value of work for society.

Justice, of one kind or another, was at the core of every argument for woman suffrage. When suffrage leaders spoke of the service women could do the nation in voting, it was a matter of justice. When suffrage leaders spoke of the ways women needed to be able to vote in order to protect what was perceived as their historical domain—the home and their children—it was about justice. When suffrage speakers tried to articulate all the many reasons that women voting would be useful, would work better than simply using “influence,” would not (or would) in and of itself alter the nature of womankind—they fell back on arguments of correctness, right, God, justice, and

patriotism. Despite the narrative of shift over time, the woman suffrage struggle was a struggle for justice, and though it achieved a highly limited goal, it was indeed one that its partisans saw as the most proximate available form of potentially wide-reaching, justice.

ⁱ The Position of Women in Regards to Equal Rights, Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

ⁱⁱ Carmen Heider, "Suffrage, Self-Determination, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Nebraska, 1879-1882," Rhetoric & Public Affairs 8.1 (2005): 85-107.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al, History of Woman Suffrage, 6 vols., (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881).

^{iv} Woman Suffrage: Arguments and Results. (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, n.d.)

^v Sara Hunter Graham, Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy. (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1996.), 42.

^{vi} Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996)

^{vii} Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965)

^{viii} Bonnie Dow, "Historical Narratives, Rhetorical Narratives, and Woman Suffrage Scholarship," Rhetoric & Public Affairs 2.2 (1999): 321-340, 325.

^{ix} Kirsten Delegard, “Women’s Movements, 1880s-1920s,” A Companion to American Women’s History, ed. Nancy Hewitt (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 341.

^x Ellen Carol DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America 1848-1869, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 202.

^{xi} Sneider, Allison, “The New Suffrage History: Voting Rights in International Perspective,” History Compass 8.7 (2010): 693-703, 693.

^{xii} Louise Michele Newman, White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Margaret Finnegan, Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture & Votes for Women, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

^{xiii} Holly J. McCammon, “Stirring Up Suffrage Sentiment: The Formation of the State Woman Suffrage Organizations, 1866-1914,” Social Forces 80.2 (2001): 449-480.

^{xiv} Donna Harrington-Lueker, “Finding a Market for Suffrage: Advertising and The Revolution, 1868-70,” Journalism History 33.3 (2007): 130-139.

^{xv} Amy R. Slagell, “The Rhetorical Structure of Frances E. Willard’s Campaign for Woman Suffrage, 1876-1896,” Rhetoric and Public Affairs 4.1 (2001): 1-23.

^{xvi} Carmen Heider, “Suffrage, Self-Determination, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in Nebraska, 1879-1882.”

^{xvii} Suzanne M. Marilley, Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

^{xviii} Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 45.

^{xix} “Woman Suffragists Gain a Point as the Assembly Votes to Submit the Question to Settlement by the People Republican Bosses Did it” *The New York Herald* 15 March 1895: 4. Online.

^{xx} Untitled paper, Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore.

^{xxi} Jane Addams, “Why Women Should Vote,” Woman Suffrage: Arguments and Results (New York: National American Suffrage Association, n.d.), 3.

^{xxii} Untitled, Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore.

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} The Position of Women in Regards to Equal Rights, Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxv} Untitled, Emily Howland Family Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxvi} Ibid.

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} Untitled, Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxix} “A Plea for Simplicity,” Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} Juliana Tutt, “No taxation without representation” in the American woman suffrage movement,” Stanford Law Review 62.5 (2010), 1473-1512.

^{xxxii} Kraditor, Ideas of Woman Suffrage, 54.

^{xxxiii} Untitled, Emily Howland Family Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxxiv} “Read in Lodge 1874,” Emily Howland Family Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxxv} Ibid.

^{xxxvi} “Minutes of Friends’ Equal Rights Association,” Friends Equal Rights Association Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xxxvii} Hagar Kotef, “On Abstractness: First Wave Liberal Feminism and the Construction of the Abstract Woman,” Feminist Studies 35.5 (2009), 495-522.

^{xxxviii} “Objections Answered: Why Should Women Vote,” Woman Suffrage: Arguments and Results (New York: National American Suffrage Association, n.d.), 29.

^{xxxix} Ibid.

^{xl} “The Position of Women in Regards Equal Rights,” Mariana Wright Chapman Papers, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

^{xli} Ibid.

^{xlii} Rosemarie Zagarrie, “The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 55.2. (1998) 203-230.

^{xliii} Zagarrie, “Rights of Man and Woman,” 223.

^{xliv} “Why Women Want to Vote,” Woman Suffrage: Arguments and Results (New York: National American Suffrage Association, n.d.), 12.

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