



Labor in Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785–1848)

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Irish philosopher Anna Doyle Wheeler co-authored with William Thompson (1775–1833) a feminist utilitarian argument for the equal rights of women, with equal rights, they believed, leading to equal happiness for women. The *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery; In Reply to a Paragraph of Mr. Mill's Celebrated "Article On Government"* was published in 1825, and it was the first sustained argument for women's suffrage. Towards the end of the *Appeal*, in the "Address to Women," Wheeler and Thompson move from arguing that women *should* have rights to *how* women can achieve rights and happiness.

Wheeler and Thompson propose a system of social arrangements that they believe is the only one that will ensure equality and equal happiness between the sexes: "Association, or of Labor by Mutual Co-operation." In this community, men and women will work together cooperatively for mutual happiness, although Wheeler and Thompson would not require everyone to contribute equal amounts of labor, as people have varied capabilities and talents. The goal, instead, is for each member of the community to contribute what they can.

Wheeler and Thompson's system is a utopian feminist utilitarian system. The community would take care of women's health and well-being, so women would no longer need to live in oppressive marital relationships or to prostitute themselves in order to survive. Within the community, women will have equal rights and happiness, as well as responsibilities.

Unfortunately, however, Wheeler and Thompson do not challenge the traditional gendered division of labor, so they expect women's contribution to this new community to be primarily through women's capacity for reproduction and role as child rearer.

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