



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists  
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## *Marriage in Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785–1848)*

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British utilitarian James Mill published in the *Supplement for the Encyclopedia Britannica* a theoretical account of representative government grounded on utilitarian principles. Mill claims that women's interests (and thus their happiness) are "covered" (coverture) by that of their husbands or fathers.

Irish utilitarian philosophers Anna Doyle Wheeler and William Thompson (1775–1833), in their 1825 co-authored work *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 Governments"*, show that this claimed identity of interest between women and their husbands does not exist, and, even if it were to exist, it is not a sufficient reason to deprive women of rights.

Wheeler and Thompson extend their discussion beyond arguing for political rights for women; they frequently compare marriage for (white) European women to the slavery of the West Indies: wives are required to be obedient to their husband's will at all times. Wheeler and Thompson claim that wives live in a state of slavery due to their husbands' greater physical strength, and by the social and legal restrictions on women's ability to earn and inherit money.

Wheeler and Thompson see marriage through a Benthamite utilitarian lens. The ultimate wrong of marriage for women is that they are limited in the pleasures of freedom. Even if a woman is married to a man who is generous in the amount and type of pleasures he allows her to experience, the very fact the husband controls his wife's pleasures means that the wife will not achieve the maximum amount possible. The institution of marriage also limits the pleasures of the husbands, who forfeit such pleasures as friendship, for the dubious pleasure of control.

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