

John Stuart Mill - Philosopher and Advocate of Women's Rights

Rarely in history has there been, literally, a philosopher born to match John Stuart Mill. Born in 1806, Mill was himself the son of a philosopher, Scottish historian James Mill. In fact, James associated with some of the most revolutionary thinkers of his time and intended for John to continue his work on Utilitarianism (which he developed with Jeremy Bentham and Frances Place) after he had passed away. To gain this end, John Stuart Mill had a very focused, if somewhat limited, upbringing. He was kept away from other children his age, and his father began educating him quite early (he had learned Greek by the age of three).

Mill's father's plans certainly turned out a first rate mind, but whether or not John Stuart's version of Utilitarianism was the same as his father's is debatable. Certainly Mill supported the theory, but he conceived it in a vastly different form than that envisioned by Bentham and others.

One of the major influences of Mill's life occurred when he was fourteen, when he went to stay in France and began to be exposed to ideas other than those strictly adhered to by his father. In France, he was to become quite involved with members of the Liberal party. Mill's own career would be sharply influenced by Liberal philosophies on issues including slavery, the environment, and of course women's rights.

It would be remiss not to mention the impact of Miller's wife Harriet Taylor in an article on his contributions to women's rights. Stuart married Taylor after a friendship that had lasted for 21 years. Taylor herself was a brilliant thinker, and before her death seven years after their wedding day, helped to solidify Stuart's thoughts and ideas in regards to women's rights.

Stuart's main contributions to the cause of women's rights would come in his publications *The Subjection of Women* and *On Liberty*, as well as his many speeches in Parliament, which chiefly centred on female suffrage. Mill's ideas were largely developed out of his passionate campaign against slavery; he argued that like slaves, women simply could not be subjected to the whims of men if society was to continue develop. He stated that a fear of a "manly woman" would lead to unmanly men, and thus that women should receive all of the same privileges as men.

About the Author

Some classics of early modern [philosophy](#), and a few from the 19th century, have been prepared for uncomplicated reading, making them easier to read while leaving intact the main arguments, doctrines, and lines of thought.

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