

ECONOMICS AND GENDER:  
WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE  
SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WOMEN AND  
MEN IN THE ECONOMY

Vol. 1  
by

ANDREW McDONALD LAING

B. Sc., Architecture and Planning  
University College London, London, England  
(1977)

M. Phil., Town and Country Planning  
University College London, London, England  
(1980)

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

October 1987

© Andrew M. Laing 1987

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to  
distribute copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of  
Author \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Urban Studies and  
Planning

Certified  
by \_\_\_\_\_

Karen R. Polenske  
Professor of Regional Political Economy and Planning  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted  
by \_\_\_\_\_

Langley Keyes  
Chair of the Ph.D Committee

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY

MAR 08 1988

Rotch

ECONOMICS AND GENDER:  
WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE  
SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WOMEN AND  
MEN IN THE ECONOMY

## Acknowledgments

My thanks first of all to the women's movement because it made it clear that asking questions about gender inequality and gender differences was also asking about a revolution, both in terms of economic and social life and in how we think.

Karen Polenske, as Chair of my dissertation committee and advisor, kindly encouraged a male graduate student to pursue questions of gender in the field of economics in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Lisa Peattie confirmed for me that my interest was in the social aspects of economic development. Harrison White showed me that economic sociology and the history of outwork were very interesting. Francois Crouzet taught me everything I know about the English industrial revolution while visiting Harvard in 1983. Metta Sorenson, Mary Stevenson, and Bob Sutcliffe all valiantly read chapters and gave me helpful comments.

My dissertation writers group led me from impossible prose to what, it is to be hoped, is readable writing; thank you to Sarah Kuhn, Lindy Biggs, Cindy Horan, John Accordino, Françoise Carre, Vim Overmeer, Henk Wagenaar, and Brenda Nielsen. Janice Goldman and Patricia McCarney gave me much friendly encouragement. The Urban Land Institute gave me a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship.

Abstract

ECONOMICS AND GENDER:  
WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE  
SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WOMEN AND  
MEN IN THE ECONOMY

by

ANDREW McDONALD LAING

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
on October 15, 1987 in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

How do economists approach and deal with the issue of gender? What is the place of gender in economic thought?

I have discovered that the place of gender in economics is given by the purpose of economics. The goals of economists have been to understand the creation of national wealth and the accumulation of capital through models of market production. Such a definition of the scope of economics has excluded large areas of social life and work activity, in which gender is highly implicated. Economists' methods of abstraction have not been designed to consider the problem of gender. As such, economics represents a system of power to recognise what it wants to know. Economics makes invisible or disregards what it is not concerned with. If and when economists have considered gender, they have conceptualized gender through natural or biological assumptions that ignore the social construction of gender in social relationships. How has economics set itself up as a system of knowledge that ignores or misrepresents the existence of gender in the social organization of the economy?

I investigate the evolution of economic ideas with regard to gender. I present a historical sequence of analyses of major dimensions of the scope of economic thinking, by focussing on key representative thinkers: Smith, Marx, Marshall, and the recent neoclassical and Marxist/feminist economists. I then compare and evaluate the place of gender in these economists' thought through an historical case study of women workers in the cotton industry during the English industrial revolution.

Instead of using a social theory of gender, I show how economists have themselves produced their own understanding of the place of gender in the economy. I discovered both an absence of gender (which suggested a great deal about the nature of economic abstraction) and a presence of gender associated with biological and natural assumptions that I was





When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>This, according to the Historiana Anglicana of Thomas Walsingham (died 1442), was the text of John Ball's speech at Blackheath to the rebels in the peasants revolt (1381). Possibly adapted from lines by Richard Rolle of Hampole (died circa 1349):

When Adam dalfe and Eve spanne  
To spire of thou may spede,  
Where was then the pride of man,  
That now marres his meed?

Brewers' Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (1981)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Economic Approaches and Gender Differences: Problems of Analysis.....10

CHAPTER 2

Adam Smith: The Denial of Gender Differences by Economic Individualism.....33

The Economy as a Natural System Coordinating Self-Interested Individuals.....34

Natural Law, Individualism, and the Absence of Gender.....39

Appendix: the Tradition of Natural Law.....54

CHAPTER 3

Karl Marx: The Elimination or the Exploitation of Gender Differences in Capitalist Economy.....64

Genderless Economic Categories.....65

Gender Differences and the Social History of Individuality.....67

The Declining Significance of Economic Gender Differences .....70

Gender Differences in the Capitalist Relations of Production .....78

Gender Differences in the Valuation of Labor-Power.....85

CHAPTER 4

Alfred Marshall: The Conflict Between Marginalist Economics and the Moral Role of Women.....99

"An Implanted Masterfulness Towards Womankind".....100

Marshall's Economics.....102

Marginalism, Individuals, and Gender.....108

The Unique Factor of Labor and the Special Role of Women.....113

Women as the Margin Between Economy and Society.....122

CHAPTER 5

Marxist/Feminism: The Replacement of Class by Gender.....126

Marx's Contradictory Legacy to Feminism.....129

Engels: The Origins of Feminism in Marxism.....131

The Feminist Replacement of Class with Gender.....136

Patriarchal Domestic Production and Capitalism.....139

Gender Differences in the Value of Labor-Power.....148

The Relationship Between the Natural and the Social...154

How Far Can Feminism Stretch Marxism?.....160

CHAPTER 6

Neoclassical Economic Arguments on Gender Differences: Stretching the Limits of Market Explanations.....169

The Power of Marginalism and the Problem of Gender....173

The Extension of Neoclassical Economics to Include Gender: Gary Becker.....175

Specifying the Boundary Between Economics and Gender..185

Stretching the Limits of the Market Explanation.....199

CHAPTER 7

Factory Workers and Outworkers: Women in the Cotton Trade During the English Industrial Revolution.....204

Why Women Cotton Workers in the English Industrial Revolution?.....208

Proto-Industrialization.....212

The Textile Industry.....217

Rise of the Cotton Industry.....222

Technical Innovations in Cotton Spinning.....228

Transformations in Economic Gender Differences.....231

The Factory System and the Gradual Decline of Outwork.....	243
Transformations in the Social Relations of Women and Men.....	245

CHAPTER 8

Evaluating the Economic Approaches to Gender Differences.....255

Relationships Between the History of the Women Cotton Workers and the Economic Approaches to Gender Differences.....	256
Adam Smith: the Lack of Recognition of Gender.....	259
Karl Marx: Cotton Workers--Proletarians Rather than Women or Men.....	263
Alfred Marshall: Marginalism Versus the Morality of the Women Cotton Workers.....	268
Marxist/feminist: Women and Men and the Value of Labor.....	276
Neoclassical: Women Cotton Workers as Utility Maximizers.....	282

CHAPTER 9

The Limits of Economics and the Place of Gender.....289

The Goals and Purposes of Economics.....	291
The Implications of Gender for Economics.....	295

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....315

List of Tables

Table 1: Imports of Raw Cotton (millions of pounds).....	226
Table 2: Age and Sex Distribution of Cotton Operatives, 1835-1907.....	239

CHAPTER 1  
ECONOMIC APPROACHES AND GENDER DIFFERENCES:  
PROBLEMS OF ANALYSIS

"When Adam Delved and Eve Span, Who was then the Gentleman?" This proverb expresses very well the strange mixture of status and gender that confronted me in trying to compare and evaluate economic approaches to gender differences. The proverb traditionally refers to the social origins of class distinction--in the Garden of Eden, who could have been master and who slave, or who worker and who capitalist? In an ironic way, to my eye, the proverb also asks who could have been "woman" and who "man" in economic terms, when Adam delved and Eve span? According to the proverb, Adam and Eve were both in a division of labor that was associated with their gender, yet it was not one that necessarily implied an economic inequality. How did it come to pass that being a woman or man acquired an economic significance of inequality and thereby also of economic gender difference? Why were women always spinners (thus, the spinster) and why were spinners, as women, thought of in different economic ways to men as delvers (or weavers, or factory workers, as the case may be)?

In order to answer these questions, I investigate the evolution of economic ideas with regard to how they approach and deal with the issue of gender. I analyze the appearance of gender differences in the thought of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Alfred Marshall, and the modern neoclassical and Marxist-feminist economists, within the framework of their

conflicting economic traditions. I then place the economic approaches to gender differences together with an historical account of the work of women in the cotton trade during the English industrial revolution. To reflect on the peculiarities of the different economic ways of thinking of gender, I use a case study. The economic approaches are compared and evaluated as I use them to interpret the historical situation of the women cotton workers in the industrial revolution.

I am, therefore, dealing with three problems, all of which are inter-related: the problem of economics, the problem of gender differences, and the problem of women workers in the cotton trade in the 18th and 19th century.

I begin with the problem of economics and its approach to gender differences, rather than with a general interpretation of the nature of gender differences, as such. My purpose is to allow various economic approaches to reveal their own ways of interpreting economic gender differences, subject, of course, to my own understanding of the social nature of gender. I discovered the most concise expression of my point of view in Sheila Rowbotham "I do not believe that women or men are determined either by anatomy or economics, though I think both contribute to a definition of what we can be and what we have to struggle to go beyond" (Rowbotham, 1974, p. x).

My own interest in the issue of gender in economic



thought arose out of the political discourse of the women's movement and the related gay movement. For me, this movement made explicit the hierarchy of inequality associated with gender differences. (The other arena in which gender and economy had been seriously discussed was in the social-functional theory of the family developed by Parsons and Smelser). My interest is in how this hierarchy of inequality associated with gender is expressed in economic life and how it is understood by economic thought.

My major concern in thinking about gender differences and their economic interpretation has been to recognize the limits of explanations that rely on nature and biology. I emphasize a theoretical understanding of the social organization of gender. That women bear children almost always has been the signal for a supposedly natural responsibility for women's childcare and domestic work, which in economic terms has become a natural explanation of widespread and unequal economic gender differences. Yet, the physical and biological requirements of childbearing and childcare have historically decreased (Chodorow, 1978). Moreover, the social organization of gender is subject to historical change and development. Chodorow maintains "that women have the extensive and nearly exclusive mothering role they have is a product of a social and cultural translation of their childbearing and lactation capacities. It is not guaranteed or entailed by these capacities themselves"

(Chodorow, 1978, p. 30).

These concerns of the limits to biological and natural explanations for the social organization of gender differences color the ways in which I show that the various economists produce or indicate their own understanding of gender differences. Rather than evaluating the economic ideas against an independent theory of the nature of gender differences, I analyze the economists and their methods to determine their own interpretation of gender differences. (I could not find a fully developed social theory of gender differences that could be used for the purpose of testing the economic approaches to gender). My comparison and evaluation of the economic approaches to gender differences occurs here in a way that is concretely linked to the substance of the economic approaches themselves, because I use the economic approaches to interpret the case study of what actually happened to women workers in the cotton trade during the English industrial revolution.

Investigating the evolution of economic ideas, I find that the problem of gender differences was either absent in a striking manner (an absence that revealed much about the economic understanding of gender differences), or else it appeared in ways that were strongly associated with exactly the kinds of biological or naturalistic explanations that served only to justify existing patterns of gender inequality. Often the absence of gender differences in the

assumptions of economic thought masked an underlying ideological commitment to an existing social context in which gender inequality was glaringly evident. The conflict between the absence of gender in economic thought and its prominence in the social relations of economic life is made clear when I use the economic approaches to interpret the historical materials on the work of women in the cotton trade.

The problem of the absence of gender in economic thought, or its appearance in distorted or inadequate forms relying on biological and natural explanations for social and historical relations, raises a larger problem of the purpose of economics, as such. As Gould has argued in relation to philosophy in general (Gould, 1976), the problem of gender in economics refers to the question of how economics can (or cannot) deal with the totality of individuals (women and men) in the economy. The question of economic gender differences grows out of the real historical and social facts of the oppression and exploitation of women, which has in itself served to constitute women as a gender distinct from men.

The problem for economists has been whether, and how, to recognize gender differences. The recognition of gender differences has its own political and theoretical implications. Economists (and philosophers) have tended to regard "real" gender differences as biological, and other gender differences as "merely" social, cultural, or

historical (Gould, 1976). Their lack of recognition of gender differences, on the other hand, also has political and theoretical implications: the definition of universal human nature supposedly incorporating both women and men has masked the fact that the very notion of what is human has been defined in male terms. Thus, by using the abstract universality of "economic individuals," they deny the real historical, social, and cultural process of gender differentiation--even as they purport to include both women and men within their categories.

The widespread and unequal social divisions of gender recognized by analysts within the women's movement do not appear to be adequately reflected in economic thought. I find that the place of women and men in the economy is radically different, and apparently always has been (in different ways): the facts of gender differences in the economy are not very much in dispute. Women and men, by and large, hold different jobs with unequal status, receive unequal pay, and participate differently in the labor market.

I knew that neoclassical economists have developed theories of discrimination (largely referring to the issue of race) and labor market segmentation, and that Marxist-feminists have considered women's domestic work and its effects on gender differences in the capitalist economy, among other issues. I knew that Marx and Engels saw the oppression of women as determined by historical relations of

production, a problem that would ideally be eliminated in a socialist society. What I did not know, and wanted to find out, was: How had economists established a general theoretical system in such a way that they seemed to ignore or misrepresent the existence of gender differences in the social organization of the economy? How could an economic theory of the market, or of the mode of production, have emerged without their paying attention to the radically different social positions of women and men? What was the place of gender differences in economic thought? If gender differences did not appear in economic thought, what was the theoretical mechanism by which they were made absent? How could economists understand the significance of gender differences in the economy?

I could not ask all of these questions without some concept with which to approach the economic approaches, as it were. So as to allow such ideas to emerge out of the economic approaches, such a concept had to be empty of any predetermined theory of gender differences in itself. I needed a term or phrase that would indicate a range of potential problems associated with gender differences in the economy and their representation in economic thought. The term "economic gender differences" was sufficiently loose enough to encapsulate the variety of themes and issues with which I was concerned, and I could use it to refer to the varied types of economic thinking.

I use the term "economic gender differences" to refer to whatever constitutes the different social relations of women and men in the economy and the understanding or representation of such social relations in economic thought. Such a term is useful, because instead of starting to look at economics for specific instances of gender differences, I refer to the underlying assumptions and systems of thought through which such differences are understood. Thus, women and men's different labor force participation, the unequal pay of women and men, or forms of economic discrimination against women, for example, are all instances of gender inequality in the economy that depend for their recognition as social facts upon some prior concept of universal equality among women and men as economic individuals.

My goal, therefore, is to examine how a variety of economists have approached the problem of gender differences, which is a question prior to their interpretation of specific instances of gender inequality. Thus, for example, before a theory of economic discrimination can exist, there must already be a theoretical approach that determines that women and men are fundamentally equivalent as economic individuals. Alternatively, for example, if an economist, such as Marshall, determines that women have a distinct moral economic role from that of men, then the issue of pay equality, or the status of women's jobs relative to those of men, is already subject to a prior distinction of gender

difference.

The problem of economics for this dissertation, therefore, begins with choosing a starting point for the evolution of economic ideas. It would have been possible to go back to Ancient Greece and Rome to study political philosophy and early economics in which the place of gender was very explicit, and from which the philosophical premises of modern economics were strongly derived. However, the economics of the Ancient World was totally different from that which developed following Adam Smith--it was essentially a morality for household and farm management (Sabine, 1973, Finley, 1974).

I therefore begin the analysis of the economic approaches to gender differences with Adam Smith. Smith set up a radically new basis for economic understanding, using a unique interpretation of the philosophy of natural laws and individualism. Smith's economics was also (through Ricardo and others) the foundation for the two major streams of economic thinking that remain predominant to this day--Marxism and the neoclassical school. Thus, Smith represents a keystone in the later evolution of economic approaches to gender differences, which can be seen to descend, to the one side, from Marx to the recent Marxist-feminists, and on the other side, from Marshall to the recent neoclassical economists. These economists are the respective subjects of chapters 2 through 7.

Smith, therefore, also was the first economist with which the problem of economic gender differences, or of seeking for gender in economics, began. In the analysis of Smith, I find that the problem of gender differences in economic thought is largely associated with the underlying premises and assumptions of economic categories--it rarely emerges as an issue in itself. Yet, I am surprised that the issue of gender, once I started looking, emerges so strongly as a feature in economic thought.

In some cases, as with Smith, the issue of gender emerges all the more strongly because of its obvious absence from the categories of his economic thought--the denial of gender differences associated with economic individuals is thus a blatant statement on the lack of significance of gender differences in Smith. With other economists, such as Marshall, the issue of gender also emerges strongly, but within a distinct moral plane that contrasts with the neutral objectivity of an economic technique that ignores gender differences. In Marx's writings, the appearance of gender relates in a contradictory way to a wider historical interpretation of economic development and the nature of the capitalist mode of production. Searching for gender in economic thought, I find both inter-relationships between the evolution of economic ideas and a series of conflicts within and between the distinct schools of thought, all of which affect the ways in which gender differences are considered.



I therefore investigate the issue of gender differences from within the particular assumptions, premises, and categories of economic thought. Gender differences are "produced" by the economic theorists themselves, and I present them in their own terms within the wider context of the evolution of economic ideas. As a means of comparison and evaluation of the relative places of gender differences in the conflicting economic approaches, I introduce the historical account of the women workers in the cotton industry. I use the case study to compare the particular ways in which economists have approached gender differences, but I cannot compare the economic approaches alongside each other, as they all represent completely distinct forms of knowledge. I can only compare, and hence evaluate them, through some other mechanism, namely, a case study.

I begin my analysis of the economic approaches to gender differences with the work of Adam Smith (Chapter 2), showing that Smith's development of a new theory of the market was based on natural laws governing the behavior of individuals. His view of the economy depended on an assumption of basic equality and equivalence among such economic individuals. The natural laws of equality among individuals supported the absence of gender differences in Smith's concept of the economy.

Karl Marx (Chapter 3) turned Smith's idea of a natural market system into an idea of the historical development of

modes of production. I argue that Marx's understanding of capitalist economy was based on the theory of relations of production that ignored the significance of gender differences. Yet, I show that Marx, nevertheless, introduced the problem of gender differences in a contradictory and incomplete way within his theory of historical development and within his understanding of the particular history of capitalist factory machine production. On the one hand, Marx's concept of historical progress suggested that economic gender differences would be eliminated by capitalist development, but, on the other hand, he also argued that the organization of capitalist industry would exploit gender differences in factory production. Furthermore, Marx suggested that gender differences were a factor in his theory of the valuation of labor, but failed to resolve exactly how gender differences were effective within such a theory. I conclude that Marx left a theoretical quandary in which the problem of gender differences was not satisfactorily resolved within his economic approach.

Marshall (Chapter 4) was one of the main economists to develop the marginalist economic approach that founded the neoclassical economic school. I argue that Marshall, like Marx, held a contradictory view of gender differences. His view, however, arose between the abstraction of the marginalist technique of economic analysis, based on the idea of individual utility maximization, which did not refer to

gender differences, and a wider normative framework of the analysis of economic development, in which gender differences were regarded as morally correct and economically efficient. Marshall thought that women had a moral responsibility for the care of children so as to rear them as efficient human capital, which, in turn, affected the economic status of women relative to men. The different moral responsibility of women and men overshadowed the premises of individual equivalence that underlay the marginalist technique. I conclude that it was Marshall's moral axiom that women's primary economic role should be as housewives and mothers that established his perception of gender differences, rather than his economic approach, as such, that remained oblivious to the consideration of gender differences.

With the Marxist/feminist economic approaches (Chapter 5), I argue that a contradictory theoretical legacy from Marx was reworked in the form of a replacement of the concern with class by that of gender. The new theories of patriarchy, women's domestic work, and the social relations of childbirth were used to reformulate Marxist economic theory so that they can explicitly acknowledge and recognize gender differences. Yet, I argue that difficulties remain in correlating the theory of patriarchy with Marx's understanding of capitalism. Marxist/feminists, however, did succeed in redirecting attention towards the relationship between women's domestic work, the value of labor in general, and gender differences

in the value of labor and in patterns of employment in the labor market. There remained a stumbling block, however, between the way in which Marxists measured value (which did not recognize gender) and the gender-specific tasks of housework and childcare. Similar problems arose with the theoretical linkage between the social relations of childbirth and the Marxist understanding of women's economic position. I conclude that Marxist/feminists found it difficult to theorize systematically about the relationships that have been posited between gender, the value of labor, and the placement of individuals in relations of production and divisions of labor.

In returning to the later development of neoclassical economic thinking (Chapter 6), I find that this approach more than any other was capable of unifying the domains of economic gender differences as socially organized between the household and the labor market. It was a unification, however, that depended on an inadequate theoretical understanding by the recent neoclassicals of the social organization of gender differences. They reproduced the ambiguity towards women that was found in Marshall. Again, their marginalist technique of analysis did not refer to gender, yet, these economists held particular views on the natural basis of gender differences or on the right and proper economic roles for women versus men that conflicted with the individualistic premises of their market analysis.

Becker, in an extension of the neoclassical approach applicable to all human behavior, analyzed economic gender differences as the result of individuals maximizing utility. The basis for gender specialization in the economy, however, was given a priori by conservative biological justifications for social relations. Other neoclassical economists found it difficult to specify the boundary between an economic explanation of gender differences by the market and a wider domain of gender differences that could not be so explained. Moreover, they foundered in their market explanations for gender differences on the problems of discrimination and labor market segmentation, which appeared to have origins both "before" and "within" the market.

In Chapter 7, I present the case study of women workers in the cotton trade during the English industrial revolution. I use the case study to abstract elements of existing economic and social histories of the English industrial revolution in order to develop a framework for the intersection of the economic approaches with historical examples of social relations of gender differences in the economy.

The case study refers strongly to problematic themes that are raised by the economic approaches to gender differences: the transition from domestic based industry by households to factory machine production, and the restructuring of capitalist industry over and around

traditional social relations of family life. Nowhere were these central problems of economic gender differences more clearly expressed than in the cotton trade. It was also in this trade that domestic outworking, which gradually came to be a province of exploitative domestic work for women and children, was of major importance--a further key element in the historical formation of economic gender differences. The cotton trade originated in the household as a traditional industry for women and men. The gradual migration of the cotton industry to the factory was a complex process of the social development of economic gender differences.

I use the historical materials on the women cotton workers to reveal that factory industrialization occurred in a pattern whereby men moved "upwards" into work and jobs with more advanced technological means of production, and women replaced them in jobs with "lower" technology in the factory or the home. Yet, this process was dynamic. As new forms of production became established and widespread, jobs and machinery were adapted for the use of women and children. There were dramatic shifts in the gender typing of jobs as technology transformed the means and location of production. The specific status of women in marriage, as mothers and as housewives, had a major effect on the forms of their participation in capitalist industry: women with children to look after worked in outworking in the home, only younger, unmarried, and childless women tended to be employed in large

numbers in the factories. There were constant limitations on the forms of women's industrial participation posed by their childcaring and domestic responsibilities.

In Chapter 8, I bring together the economists' views on gender with the history of the women cotton workers. A glaring disparity appears between the absence of gender differences in Smith's concept of the economy and the significance of gender differences in the divisions of labor of the outworking and early factory systems of the cotton industry. The disparity represents the distance between Smith's form of economic abstraction, where he ignored gender differences, and the historical reality of these forms of production, where gender differences were obvious.

I examine Marx's contradictory arguments on gender in relation to his economic approach in the light of the case study. As with Smith, I find with the history of the women cotton workers a contradiction with one line of Marx's thought, which suggested that capitalist development would eliminate economic gender differences: women and men occupied different places in divisions of labor and in organizations of production of the cotton trade. Yet, Marx's argument was historical. He argued that the economic significance of gender differences would progressively decline--and in some respects the case study supported such an interpretation. The other line of Marx's argument, however, suggested that gender differences would be exploited

in capitalist production. The history of the cotton trade confirmed that over the long-term, as technical innovations became routine and jobs associated with new machinery were deskilled, women were hired to replace men, thus confirming the exploitation of gender differences in capitalist production. Yet, Marx's logic for the exploitation of gender differences was inconsistent with his theory of the valuation of labor-power, because there was no reason why women's labor should necessarily be of lower value than that of men.

Marx ignored in his theory of the value of labor-power what we find to be important aspects of the social organization of gender differences in the cotton trade: women employed in the factories were younger, unmarried, and childless; women in the domestic outwork sector were usually responsible for childcare. Furthermore, there was probably a relationship between the domestic work of women and the process of the valuation of labor-power, a relationship that affected both the ways in which women's and men's labor-power was valued differently and the ways in which they were employed. These relationships had been ignored by Marx.

Marshall's understanding of gender differences emerged as a result of his moral view of women's special role in the development of labor-power, a view that was in conflict with the absence of gender from the marginalist economic technique that he elaborated. He could have used his powerful economic analysis, based on the idea of utility maximization, to



interpret much of the history of the women cotton workers, but he could not use it to explain the social relations of gender differences that the case study displayed. The only explanation that Marshall offers for economic gender differences is based on his moral views. Yet, I find that the case study did not confirm Marshall's ideal of women's exclusion from the labor market so that they could rear efficient male labor in the home--it revealed, instead, the widespread economic participation of women, even as it was colored by their childcaring and housework responsibilities.

The Marxist/feminists took up the unresolved problems of Marx's interpretation of gender differences. The history of the women cotton workers confirmed the general direction of the Marxist/feminist perspective, which suggested that a system of economic gender differences was established between the work of women as reproducers of labor-power in the home and as workers for the capitalist labor market. I find that the case study indicated that a single social organization is involved in the process of inserting gender differences in the value of labor power and in patterns of employment. The Marxist/feminists, however, remained restricted by the Marxist theory of value, which could not be used to unify the domestic work of women with the value of labor in the market.

The modern neoclassical economists did succeed in unifying an interpretation of gender differences between domestic work and the labor market. Yet, in using Becker's

theory to interpret the history of the women cotton workers, I find that his explanation of economic gender differences depended on external biological assumptions. Becker argued that because women have children, they will specialize full-time in childcare and housework. I use the case study to point to the significance of women's childcare responsibilities as a major factor in establishing economic gender differences, but I cannot explain such responsibilities and the associated economic gender differences by the biological facts of childbirth.

Other neoclassical economists than Becker argued that, regardless of biology, there were rational, utility-maximizing reasons for the conventional gender specialization in the economy, they assumed such rationality to show a pre-given institutional structure to the economy that discriminates against women and that makes it difficult for women and men to combine childcare with waged work in the labor market. Furthermore, they assumed that the interests of utility maximization are shared equally among family members--that there is not a conflict of interest between husband and wife or forms of exploitation of labor within the household. I find that the history of women cotton workers did show ways in which families maximized their utility by specializing economic gender roles, but neoclassicals cannot explain the gendered quality of such specialization.

My comparison and evaluation of the economic approaches

to gender differences, through the history of the women cotton workers, indicates some general problems of how economics can understand the social relations of women and men in the economy, these are explored in Chapter 9. Economists gained their strength by a process of abstraction in which they often ignored specific aspects of social relationships--such as gender differences. The limits of the ways in which economists have understood gender hold implications for how we understand the nature of economic thought. Economists have had very strong interests in developing their particular kinds of economic theory. They have been concerned to understand the creation of national wealth and capital accumulation in terms of market production. Such a definition of what is economic has marginalized the issue of gender, and downplayed much of the work that women do outside of the market. Our final question is: what would be the implications for economic thought, if economists were to take seriously the issue of gender? Our conclusion is that the nature of economic thought would be transformed. We find that it is within the very foundations of the economists' intentions and through their different methods of abstraction, that their neglect of gender arose. It was a neglect necessitated by the way in which their ideas of the economy emerged.

## REFERENCES

- Chodorow, Nancy (1978). The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Finley, Moses (1973). The Ancient Economy. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- Gould, Carol, C. (1976) "The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy" in Gould, Carol, C. and Marx W. Wartofsky (Editors). Women and Philosophy, Towards a Theory of Liberation, pp. 5-44. New York: Perigree Books.
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1974). Woman's Consciousness, Man's World. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.
- Sabine, George Holland (1973) (4th edition). A History of Political Theory. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden.

CHAPTER 2

ADAM SMITH: THE DENIAL OF GENDER DIFFERENCES  
BY ECONOMIC INDIVIDUALISM

The absence of gender differences in the economic thought of Adam Smith is the subject of this chapter. We show how Smith's development of a new form of economics was based on a theory of natural laws governing individual economic behavior. Smith's interpretation of such laws led him to neglect gender differences in economic activity.

### The Economy as a Natural System Coordinating Self-Interested Individuals

Adam Smith portrayed the economy as a market system that naturally coordinated the self-interested actions of individuals in relationships of exchange (Smith, 1976). The commercial transactions of the market, in turn, encouraged the development of divisions of labor, resulting in increased productivity and economic growth. In Smith's analyses, differences between women and men in the workings of this economic system--which we refer to as economic gender differences, are absent. An idea of the natural equality of individuals underlay Smith's social philosophy and economics which obscured gender differences as a basic category of his thinking. This natural equality and individualism supported Smith's idea of the homogeneity of labor, so that labor was considered as a category undivided by gender differences.

The influence of the intellectual tradition of individualistic natural law partially accounts for Smith's

neglect of systematic gender differences. This tradition permeated Smith's views on labor and the division of labor, so that these concepts (which are the cornerstone of his economics) do not refer to gender differences. In this chapter, we show how this complex set of ideas worked through Smith's economics in such a way that it excluded the significance of economic gender differences.

Smith's central concern in An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations was to explain how economic development and growth occurred. Smith began from the presuppositions of his social philosophy described in The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Smith, 1966). It appeared to Smith that humankind was endowed with the faculty of reason and with natural propensities of both self-love and fellow feeling. The society that resulted from the interactions of such individuals was not chaotic; it had a natural order that reflected a divine plan. Society was viewed as a "sublime machine which left to itself will tend to maximize social welfare" (Deane, 1978, p. 7).

Smith applied the idea of the natural order underlying society to the economy and found that in this specific realm the motivation of gain and self-interest took precedence over fellow feeling: "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self interest" (Smith, 1976, p. 18). In contrast to the moral sentiments governing

the ideal society, Smith's view of the real economy was more cynical. In The Wealth of Nations, Smith represented the economy both as it was and how it ought to be, at one and the same time. Eighteenth century theorists used the concept of natural law to unite the factual and ideal world: nature (including human nature) was both an object to be studied and an ideal to be brought into existence (Campbell, 1971). Thus, for Smith, the natural individualism of an ideal society is tempered by the existence of social ranks and inequality, the empirical economy of historical England does not match up to the normative ideal.

For Smith, growth was the main economic problem: it resulted from what Deane (1978) has called a natural complex of harmony promoting forces, encouraged primarily by the division of labor. Schumpeter (1954) notes how Smith placed a new burden on the division of labor as almost the only factor explaining economic and technological progress. The division of labor that increased its productive powers, Smith argued, was not the effect of "any human wisdom," rather "It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another" (Smith, 1976, p. 17).

Within the enterprise (in Smith's case the pin factory),



the division of labor<sup>1</sup> also led to the separation and specialization of different trades and employments and to the generalized incidence of market exchange. This natural human quality to seek to exchange thus accelerated the growth of institutions and social relationships that supported exchange--up to the limit provided by the extent of the market.

This process of growth of exchange and specialization was not, Smith argues, the result of an expression of natural differences in abilities between individuals, but rather expressed the commonality of human exchange. Thus, although the division of labor, as such, arose as a result of the widespread natural human propensity to exchange, Smith did not argue that the division of labor represented natural differences between individuals. Smith thought that individual differences, such as those between the abilities of a philosopher and a street porter, were largely the result of "habit, custom, and education." According to Smith, it was the power of exchanging that occasioned the division of labor and not natural or inherent qualities of differences between people. He stated that

---

<sup>1</sup>The three circumstances that increase work as a result of the division of labor are described by Smith as (1) the increase in the dexterity of the worker, (2) saving time in passing from one type of work to another, and (3) inventing machines that facilitate and abridge labor enabling one worker to do the work of many.

the difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education (Smith, 1976, p. 19-20).

The commonality of the propensity to exchange is shared by all and is of greater importance in explaining the division of labor than differences in natural talent.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it appears to Smith that there is a correspondence between the natural propensities of individuals--their self-love, fellow feeling, desire to exchange--and the natural order of the market system. Furthermore, it is the resultant system of division of labor that occasions differences in employments of individuals and not any preordained differences between individuals. The economic system thus combines the natural propensities of equal individuals with the market, resulting in the formation of divisions of labor and the growth of exchange relationships. Underlying this optimistic scenario is the assumption of the natural equality

---

<sup>2</sup>Blaug (1980) does not recognize the equalitarian assumption behind Smith's views on the division of labor and the natural equality of individuals. He comments that Smith neglected to cite the accommodation of different natural aptitudes as one of the advantages of the division of labor.

of individuals and the idea that it is indeed individuals who are the motivated actors of the economy: a complex of ideas that refers us back to the tradition of natural law and individualism as underpinnings of Smith's economics.

#### Natural Law, Individualism, and the Absence of Gender.

Schumpeter, in his History of Economic Analysis (1954), devotes 40 pages of dense text in an attempt to decipher the chameleon-like influence of the natural law tradition upon Classical economic thinking, a tradition that spanned from Aristotle through to the Roman jurists and from the Medieval Scholastic thinkers to the 18th century philosophers.<sup>3</sup> We shall outline the natural law tradition only insofar as it supports the equalitarian individualism of Smith's economics, a support that indicates that Smith did not acknowledge the gender differences of individuals.

Natural law philosophy arose as the Ancient Greek city-states declined and the social hierarchy of the polis collapsed after 300 BC (Sabine, 1937; Anthony, 1977). A new philosophical attention was placed on a universal form of individualism. Individuals began to be considered as part of a common worldwide humanity and to be endowed with a common nature. "Natural" referred both to the commonality between humankind's needs, the necessities of life that all humans

---

<sup>3</sup> A summary of this chameleon-like tradition is provided as an Appendix at the end of this chapter.

share and to the sense of natural as just and reasonable--as in the logical or true nature of a thing. Given that everyone shared a common nature, the concept of natural law arose as a system of law applicable to all people on the basis of an elementary equality between individuals. The concept of natural law came to refer to the set of rules governing the order of society, in both an ideal sense and in terms of the actual or necessary conditions of the real world. Natural law theory was the first attempt at a comprehensive social science, a theory of society.

The development of natural law philosophy by the medieval Christian scholastics combined a doctrine of natural liberty and equality, but, as Schumpeter notes, this was not the assertion of a fact of human nature, but a moral ideal or postulate. The later use of natural law philosophy by economists such as Smith, however, developed the Christian ideal of equality towards what Schumpeter called an analytic equalitarianism, meaning that "man's faculties of mind and body are about equal in the sense that the range of their variations is so narrowly limited as to make complete equality a permissible working hypothesis" (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 121). It was this elementary equality of individuals that supported Smith's individualistic premises.

The influence of the natural law tradition on Smith crystallized in the form of his concept of an abstract individual. Lukes (1973) has explained how this idea relied

upon a view of the individual as having pre-given characteristics and requirements (in Smith's case the natural propensities we have discussed) that social arrangements are held to fulfill. The abstract individual was the bearer of features and attributes to which the state and the society respond. Thus, for Smith, abstract individuals were naturally equal, naturally desired to exchange, and naturally became part of a market system that governed the economic relationships between individuals. They were naturally driven by self-interest in their economic actions and unknowingly contributed to social wealth through the intermediary of an "invisible hand" that coordinated their market transactions.<sup>4</sup> We must emphasize that Smith's abstract individual was not specified as either woman or man. Gender differences do not appear to characterize the nature of the abstract individual, at least insofar as this idea appears within Smith's economics.

Before going further in evaluating the influence of this

---

<sup>4</sup>According to Smith (1976, pp. 477-478), "every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as is many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."

egalitarian individualism upon Smith's economics, we must consider whether this tradition really did presume the equality of women and men. Okin (1979), in a study of the treatment of women in Western political thought, has drawn attention to the fact that even when philosophers have used supposedly generic terms like "man" and "mankind" they should by no means be assumed to have thereby referred to the human race as a whole; women have often been implicitly and explicitly excluded from their conclusions. Aristotle (1984), who was a major influence upon Smith and modern economic thinking from the 18th century, for example, believed that women were naturally excluded from the constitutional rights of the polis and were naturally incapable of achieving high moral and political status. Plato's utopian Republic (1968) only achieved the equality of women in the ideal state by abolishing the family and private property.<sup>5</sup> We must therefore bear in mind Okin's (1979) admonition: "Thus there has been, and continues to be, within the traditions of political philosophy and political culture, a pervasive tendency to make allegedly general

---

<sup>5</sup>The basis for the equality of women in the Republic rested on the abolition of private property and the family--at least for the elite class of rulers--and can thus be seen as the forerunner of the conclusions of Marx and Engels on the potential of socialism to liberate women (see Chapters 3 and 5). Plato also developed a concept of division of labor, which differed from Smith's in that it was based on the assumption of natural or innate differences between individuals.

statements as if the human race were not divided into two sexes, and then either to ignore the female sex altogether, or to proceed to discuss it in terms not at all consistent with the assertions that have been made about "man" and "humanity" (Okin, 1979, p. 7).

In Smith, we find that individualism does appear to include both women and men, even though Smith's language refers to the worker and other economic actors in the conventional terms of "he." There are very few references throughout The Wealth of Nations that refer specifically to different economic roles of women versus men.<sup>6</sup> (Only in passing does Smith refer to women workers in the traditional household industries of textiles). It must, nevertheless, be considered whether the idea of the economic individual that Smith uses was implicitly a concept referring only to men, especially given that women were hardly "individuals" given

---

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 5 "Of the Different Employment of Capitals" of Book 2 of The Wealth of Nations, (1976, pp. 269-275) Smith does refer to "houshold (sic) and coarser manufactures" which accompany agriculture "which are the work of the women and children in every private family" (1976, p. 388), an interesting remark insofar as he specifies this economic gender division of labor as occurring in the backward private domain of the economy. In Chapter 10 of Book 1, on "Of Wages and Profit", Smith also refers to women industrial workers in Scotland: "The spinning of linen yarn is carried on in Scotland nearly in the same way as the knitting of stockings . . . . In most parts of Scotland she is a good spinner who can earn twenty pence a week" (1976, p. 131). In other parts of the book where Smith refers to the textile industry, an industry that favored the employment of women, Smith does not remark upon the gender of workers in these trades--as in "Effects of the Progress of Improvement upon the real Price of Manufactures."

their lack of civil status in 18th century England. Yet, Smith does not ever suggest that women are theoretically excluded from his analysis--a point to which we shall return.

There is, furthermore, a fundamental theoretical justification for the argument that Smith's individualism did include both women and men on an equivalent basis: Smith separated its constitutive parts from the traditional context of the moral and political order in which they had previously been conceptually embedded. In this process of disembedding of economics, the traditional context of gender differences was abandoned. The different (and unequal) place of women and men is not assumed as a starting point; the idea of individuals is without reference to gender differences. As Bell argues, economics for the first time was distinguished from its traditional context, whereby it became "a set of activities that could be judged in purely instrumental terms." He maintains that "human beings were to be regarded as individuals detached from family, clan, class or nation, as independent, self-determining beings, each the judge of his own actions; a corollary of this tenet was that the rules regulating the relations between individuals were to be procedural, not morally substantive . . . in economics, each man properly pursued his own self interest" (Bell, 1981, p. 71).

What was the relationship between this general disembedding of economics and the genderless quality of



Smith's economics? Illich (1982) has argued that the genderless quality of Classical economics was associated with a profound cultural and intellectual transformation that occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries, in which the human subject of philosophical discourse (and hence of economics) was designated in genderless terms. The abstract individual was not specified in terms of gender differences.

Furthermore, Illich argues, the genderless quality of the subject of philosophy was a theoretical requirement for the systems of thought that developed at this time: "the loss of gender creates the subject of formal economics" (Illich, 1982, p. 9). Illich's argument is best given at length:

An industrial society cannot exist unless it imposes certain unisex assumptions: the assumptions that both sexes are made for the same work, perceive the same reality, and have, with some cosmetic variations, the same needs. And the assumption of scarcity which is fundamental to economics, is itself logically based on this unisex assumption. . . . The subject on which economic theory is based is just such a genderless human . . . . I argue that a second characteristic is equally constitutive of the subject of modern social theory and practice: the possessive individual is genderless, anthropologically construed as a merely sexed neuter. Logically, as I shall argue, only the individual who is both possessive and genderless can fit the assumption of scarcity on which any political economy must rest. The institutional "identity" of Homo Oeconomicus excludes gender. He is a neutrum oeconomicum. (Illich, 1982, p. 9-11, emphasis as in Illich)

In contrast to the fundamental gender inequality characteristic of some of the influences on Smith's economic thinking--especially Aristotle, Illich argues that the "individual" of 17th and 18th century thinking was fundamentally genderless and "determined by basic needs under the assumption of universal scarcity". Common to all of these philosophical or ideal individuals was an equivalent possessiveness. Following Macpherson's (1979) study of the possessive individualism of 17th century political theory, Illich argues that the corollary to this theory of the individual was that all such individuals were thought of in genderless terms.<sup>7</sup>

How was it possible for economics to set itself up in such a way that it could be disengaged from the traditional context in which theoretical individuals had been subject both to moral and political constraints and had been thought

---

<sup>7</sup> Macpherson summarizes the characteristics of possessive individualism as follows (and always uses the masculine gender): (1) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others. (2) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest. (3) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society. (4) Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour. (5) Human society consists of a series of market relations. (6) Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can be rightfully limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for others. (7) Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations between individuals regarded as proprietors themselves (Macpherson, 1979, pp. 263-264)

of in terms that radically distinguished their gender? Dumont (1977) argued that this separation of economics from a traditional context was accomplished by imbuing economics with its own normative postulate: an orientation to the good of humankind. Economics required this "benevolent surmise" as a justification for its intellectual immunity from the interference of the state, politics, and the moral order. Dumont explains why the surmise was necessary (1977, p. 37), "For supposing it was shown that the inner consistency (of economics) worked for evil, then again it would have required the politician and the statesman to intervene."

The benevolent surmise that economics worked inherently for the good of humankind paved the way for its radical form of individualism, an individualism that in Smith's economics included both women and men. Nowhere was the benevolent surmise more in evidence than in Smith's "invisible hand," which spontaneously orchestrated the myriad market transactions of self-interested individuals in such a way that the public at large benefitted from increased national wealth.

In fact, the philosophy of natural law suggested to Smith that individual self-interest naturally harmonized with the system of market prices. The "invisible hand" mediated between individual's economic actions and the wider system of exchange. As Schumpeter suggests, Smith's principle of natural liberty supported the analytic proposition that the

free interaction of individuals produces not chaos but an orderly pattern that is logically determined. For Blaug (1980), this coincidence of individual's behavior with the natural order of the market system provides a key relationship for Smith's economics. He states that "(the) obvious and simple system of natural liberty, which is said to reconcile private interests and economic efficiency, turns out upon examination to be identical with the concept of perfect competition; the "invisible hand" is nothing more than the automatic equilibrating mechanism of the competitive market" (Blaug, 1980, p. 59).

With the growth of the market, Smith argued, then more and more individuals (women and men) are supported by the network of exchange relationships and their self-interest leads them to specialize their occupations in a division of labor. He stated that the society becomes progressively commercialized and "every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society" (Smith, 1976, p. 26).

The new form of commercial society represents the fourth type of historical economy and society that Smith outlined in a logical-historical sequence of ideal-types, previous economies being hunting, pasturage, and farming. Each represented differing types of productive activity, forms of subsistence, and property relations (Skinner, 1983). The new

commercial economy drew people away from the household with its archaic divisions of labor, often associated with gender differences, and placed the labor of women and men equivalently in the commercial market place. Billet (1978, p. 93) argues that Smith saw the freedom of the market as having liberated individuals from old-fashioned forms of dependency and domination; that is, "the natural human ability to exchange one's labor and its products has become the instrument for gradually freeing mankind from arbitrary dependence upon others for subsistence, i.e., from slavery and feudal institutions."

Smith, by analyzing of the nature of the new commercial society, moved from the idea of the division of labor, increased productivity, and widespread individualized exchange relationships, to the question of the creation and distribution of economic value. In this regard, Smith began by distinguishing the use-value and exchange-value of goods, and the natural (or real) and market prices of goods. Smith suggests that the market price may be above or below the natural or normal price of a good. We see that the natural price of a good refers us back again to the concept of a natural law or order that regulates the ideal economic system. Naturalistic language abounds in Smith's writings.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, in the section on the Natural Progress of Opulence, within only five pages, Smith refers to the natural inclinations of man, the inversion of the natural course of things by the policies of modern states, and the natural order of things in general (Smith, 1976, pp. 401-406).

The natural prices of goods were argued by Smith to be their cost-of-production. In a rudimentary simple economy, in which laborers produced goods by themselves with their own means of production, and in which land was free, the labor cost of production would be equivalent to the value and natural price of a good. In the modern commercial society, this primitive labor theory of value is overturned by Smith's argument that the actual or market prices of goods were composed of the wages component paid to labor, the profit paid to the stock put forward by the "undertaker," and the rent due to the landlord. Thus, within the individualistic and natural order of the market system, there were three distinct social orders or ranks of society that corresponded to the three distinct factors of production of land, labor, and capital, and the three forms of monetary return with which Smith deals (rent, wages, and profit) (Skinner, 1983).<sup>9</sup> The appropriation of land in the form of private property and the accumulation of stock in the form of private wealth and ownership of capital means that the produce of labor no longer belongs to the laborer. The landlord and stockholder must take their share of the produce.

So too, then, does labor have a natural price and a nominal (or market) price, so that its real (natural) price

---

<sup>9</sup>Book 1 of The Wealth of Nations is titled: "Of the Causes of Improvement in the Productive Powers of Labour, and of the Order According to which its Produce is Naturally Distributed among the Different Ranks of the People."

"may be said to consist in the quantity of the necessaries and conveniences of life which are given for it; its nominal price, in the quantity of money" (Smith, 1976, p. 38). The money price of labor varies with the price of the necessaries of life. Smith also takes into account in the price of labor the additional costs associated with hardship or superior skill, and he was a precursor of modern human capital theorists.<sup>10</sup>

Smith remarks on the different levels of wages and profits that accrue to individuals engaged in various occupations. In the natural market system with perfect liberty, individuals will choose occupations most advantageous to them. Inequalities of rewards to individuals result from the nature of the type of employment itself and not from any inherent quality of individuals (such as gender differences). Smith suggests that economic reward will vary according to the degree to which work is agreeable, easily and cheaply learned, the constancy of employment, the degree of trust involved, and the probability of success. Inequality of reward is not associated with gender differences. According to Smith, the rewards of the market

---

<sup>10</sup> Referring to the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of society, Smith comments that: "The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expence, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, so do they likewise of that of the society to which he belongs" (Smith, 1976, p. 298).

do not theoretically pay heed to the gender of the individual.

In dealing with the value of labor, Smith does not make explicit any inherent differences in the value of male or female labor, even though the particular roles of women as housewives and mothers are acknowledged when Smith makes it clear that wages must cover the costs of reproducing labor over generations. Smith argues that the wages of men and women are intended to support an entire family, but the variation in the composition, distribution, and value of such wages between men and women is not drawn to any systematic conclusion with regard to gender differences:

A man must always live by his work, and his wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him. They must even upon most occasions be somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family, and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation . . . . Thus far at least (it) seems certain, that, in order to bring up a family, the labour of the husband and wife together must, even in the lowest species of common labour, be able to earn more than what is precisely necessary for their own maintenance; but in what proportion . . . . I shall not take upon me to determine (Smith, 1976, pp. 76-77)

That Smith did not confront explicitly the difference between male and female labor is consistent with his achievement in putting forward the general category of homogeneous labor. In so doing, Smith moved political economy towards a concern with the production of exchange-



values in the market system and the creation of wealth by living labor in the domestic economy. This was in contrast with the previous Mercantilist concern with the gains of international trade, and they opposed the older idea that wealth was the product of nature and the land.

Smith's distinction between natural and market price is associated with his idea of the market as a natural system that is automatically self-equilibrating. Natural price is the central price to which the prices of goods gravitate. In the perfect liberty of a natural market system, unfettered by government restrictions or monopolies, a balance of supply and demand will naturally result. Associated with this ideal of a natural market system is the strong sense of the natural equality of individuals that runs through the basic framework of Smith's analysis. This natural equality of individuals precludes the possibility of gender differences being considered a significant attribute of Smithian economics. As with other aspects of the ideal natural market system and its conditions of perfect liberty, there may have been historical restrictions or policies that prevented or obstructed the natural equality of individuals and which gave rise to inequalities, such as those associated with gender differences. If this were so, Smith made no statements about them. Smith assumes that a fundamental equality existed among economic individuals, derived from his ideas of natural law, which allows him to neglect gender differences.

APPENDIX: THE TRADITION OF NATURAL LAW

Schumpeter (1954) argues that the origin and early history of all the social sciences is to be found in the tradition of natural law. The awareness of social science as a discipline with its own problems was founded in the philosophy of natural law. Schumpeter distinguishes between the natural law tradition as an ethico-legal concept and as an analytic concept.

The concept of natural law has been traced back to Aristotle. Aristotle distinguished between the "naturally just" and the "institutionally just," that is between a law according to nature common to all humanity and a positive law of a particular society. He used the term natural to refer to several different meanings, including the idea of something immanent in the primordial constitution of humankind; as something that develops with the development of human society, as a cooperation between creative mind and instinct; and as something inherent in the final development of humankind as a final cause or purpose (Baker, 1957). These senses span an idea of natural law that is "a vision of an historically developed law which has both a positive quality and a root in the nature of man" (Baker, 1957, p. xxxv.) Natural justice described forms of behavior enforced by the general necessities of life. What was perceived as natural became understood as a normative principle. Natural law referred to what was both necessary and just.

Aristotle also believed that women were of a different nature than men, although not necessarily inferior, but that they could not stand in the same relationship of equality as could exist between men (that is men of the aristocratic class) (Sabine, 1973). Thus what was perceived as natural was translated into social convention or law.

After Aristotle, Greek philosophers focused on the problem of the individual as unconnected to a life of politics as it had been provided by the social organization of the city-states (the polis). The gradual collapse of the city-states led to their concern with the problem of the individual in a universal context. The idea of the individual as part of a worldwide humanity emerged, endowed with a common nature (Sabine, 1937). A new concept of equality arose, so that philosophers thought of natural law as a universal law applicable to all people. Natural law suggested there were ideally universal rights and binding rules of justice that applied equally to all.

The Stoic School (300 BC onwards) considered natural law as a reflection of the perfection of nature in the form of a true moral order for human society (Anthony, 1977). There was a moral parallel between human nature and nature at large. Right reason was thus a law of nature: "Nature was synonymous with Reason and Reason was synonymous with God" (Baker, 1957, p. xxxv.) Previously, philosophers had restricted the idea of equality to a privileged elite, but

now they proclaimed an elementary equality between human individuals. As Baker (1957, p. xxxvi) noted "its principles were ideal principles. Among these ideal principles was that of equality. By nature, and as reasonable creatures, all human beings were equal. By nature the woman was equal to the man, and the slave to the master."

The Romans took over Aristotle's and the Stoic's development of the idea of natural law and used it to develop legal rules. They also developed the sense of natural law to refer to "the nature of a case" or the nature of a thing.

St. Thomas used Aristotle's idea of natural law, but he developed it in the direction of a body of law that was historically variable, that conformed to social expediency or necessity. For St. Thomas, the concept of "justice" became related to "adjustment" to what was supposed to be good. The Christian thinkers tended to distinguish between an absolute law of nature that had existed in the state of primitive grace before the Fall and the relative state of nature that was adjusted to the change in humankind's nature that occurred after the Fall (Baker, 1957). This was in contrast with some later interpretations of natural law that assumed that it was outside of historical reality.

Molina (1535-1600), a Jesuit, identified natural law with the dictates of reason, so that natural law became that which obligates us by virtue of the nature of the case. Molina married natural law to rational diagnosis (Schumpeter,

1954) with reference to a Common Good of both individual contracts and social institutions. In Molina we find that natural law "embodies the discovery that the data of a social situation determine . . . a certain sequence of events, a logically coherent process or state, or would do so if they were allowed to work themselves out without further disturbance" (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 112.) The just became equated with the natural, and the natural with the normal. Natural law was both normative doctrine and analytic theory.

Natural law analysis in the 17th century was developed by the secular philosophers, such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694). These philosophers aimed at a comprehensive social science, a theory of society in the form of systems of jurisprudence. The legal and political principles they outlined were thought of as generally valid because they were natural, that is derived from the general properties of human nature. These principles were therefore in contrast to the positive law associated with the particular conditions of individual countries. The Christian Scholastics, such as Molina, had developed the ideas of natural liberty and the natural equality of humankind:

With them, however, this natural equality was not an assertion about facts of human nature but a moral ideal or postulate . . . . But Hobbes, when explaining the conditions that produce his original state of war of all against all, asserted as a fact that man's faculties of mind and body

are about equal in the sense that the range of their variations is so narrowly limited as to make complete equality a permissible working hypothesis (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 121)

This attitude, that Schumpeter calls philosophical equalitarianism, was common to all philosophers of the time, and became a characteristic of the development of economic analysis.

The 18th century philosophers often took an idea of natural law to refer to primitive conditions. As in Adam Smith, an imaginary early state of society is presented in order to develop the idea of a particular social institution. The imaginary early state of society is thought of as natural and as governed by natural laws. This sometimes meant that primitive conditions became identified with what was just--as what was natural was also supposedly just. There was also a relationship between the scholastic interpretation of natural law and the Rights of Man.

At a more fundamental level, however, the 18th century thinkers used the idea of nature and natural law to hold together the factual and ideal world (Campbell, 1971). Thus, nature (including humankind) was an object to be studied and an ideal to be brought into existence. This same ambiguity went back to Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Roman law, and the medieval scholastics. Campbell (1971, p. 53) notes that the idea of the law of nature denoted both factual generalizations and moral or legal imperatives, so that "the

resuscitation of natural law theory in the 17th and 18th centuries was part of an attempt to establish a theology which was independent of revelation and a morality which was independent of religion."

A further characteristic of the 18th century development of the ideas of natural law was their stronger emphasis on what the earlier Scholastic thinkers had termed the common good or social expediency. The pleasures and pains of individuals were weighted equally and quantified into a social total that is identified with the common good or welfare of society. Schumpeter emphasizes that this utilitarianism was nothing more than another version of the natural law theory, in fact its final form: "The program of deriving, by the light of reason, laws about man in society from a very stable and highly simplified human nature fits the utilitarians not less well than the philosophers or the scholastics" (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 132.)

In the 18th century, the close association between natural law and jurisprudence was broken, natural law became Moral Philosophy, especially in Scotland and Germany. This new Moral Philosophy dealt with the social sciences as we now understand them, while Natural Philosophy arose to deal with the natural sciences. It was under this rubric that natural law was taught to Adam Smith by his teacher Francis Hutcheson at the University of Glasgow--and it was a Moral Philosophy that Smith expounded in The Theory of Moral Sentiments before



he wrote The Wealth of Nations.

## REFERENCES

- Anthony, P. D. (1977). The Ideology of Work. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Arendt, Hannah (1958). The Human Condition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle (1984). The Complete Works. Volumes One and Two, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Baker, Ernest (1957). "Introduction" to Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500-1800 by Otto Gierke. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bell, Daniel (1981). "Models and Reality in Economic Discourse," in The Crisis in Economic Theory. Edited by Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol. New York: Basic Books, pp. 46-80.
- Billet, Leonard (1978). "Justice, Liberty, and Economy," in Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations. Edited by Fred R. Glahe. Boulder, CO: The Colorado Associated University Press, pp. 83-110.
- Blaug, Mark (1980, third edition). Economic Theory in Retrospect. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, T. D. (1971). Adam Smith's Science of Morals. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Deane, Phyllis (1978). The Evolution of Economic Ideas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dumont, Louis (1977). From Mandeville to Marx, the Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gierke, Otto (1957). Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500-1800. (Including a lecture on "The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity," by Ernst Troeltsch). Translated with an introduction by Ernest Baker. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hirschman, Albert (1977). The Passions and the Interests. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Illich, Ivan (1982). Gender. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Lukes, Steven (1984 reprint). Individualism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

- Macpherson, C. B. (1979). The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Okin, Susan Moller (1979). Women in Western Political Thought. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pierce, Christine (1971). "Natural Law Language and Women" in Woman in Sexist Society, edited by Vivian Gormick and Barbara K. Moran. New York: Basic Books.
- Plato, (1968). The Republic of Plato. Translated with Notes and an "Interpretive Essay." New York: Allan Bloom.
- Sabine, George Holland (1937, 4th edition). A History of Political Theory. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A (1954). History of Economic Analysis. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Skinner, Andrew (1983). "Introduction," to The Wealth of Nations, by Adam Smith, Books 1-111. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Smith, Adam (1976). An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. Edited and with an Introduction by Edwin Cannan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Adam (1966). The Theory of Moral Sentiments. New York: Augustus M. Kelly.
- Spiegel, H. S. (1983). The Growth of Economic Thought. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Tribe, Keith (1981). Genealogies of Capitalism. New Jersey: Humanities Press.

CHAPTER 3

KARL MARX: THE ELIMINATION OR THE  
EXPLOITATION OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN  
CAPITALIST ECONOMY

The problem of differences between women and men in the social relations of the economy--what we refer to here as economic gender differences--appears in two conflicting ways in Marx's writings. The purpose of this chapter is to unravel these conflicting lines of thought which Marx did not bring to any complete resolution, but which have, nevertheless, remained the basis for the widespread and far reaching development of Neo-Marxist thinking on the problem of economic gender differences.

#### Genderless Economic Categories

First, Marx suggests that economic gender differences will be progressively eliminated in the historical development of modes of production. Capitalism, in particular, marks the first step towards the liberation of individuality from traditional forms of inequality associated with natural differences, such as those of gender. The individualism characteristic of capitalist economic relations is a movement away from traditional roles for women and men: both women and men are made theoretically equivalent by the social structure of capitalist economy; both are subject to class relationships based on the institution of private property and private ownership of means of production. Marx notes that "the emancipation of society from private property . . . is expressed in the political form of the emancipation

of the workers . . . (which) contains universal human emancipation . . . every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation (of private property)" (Marx, 1982, Economic and Philosophic, p. 118).

Second, Marx suggests that, contrary to his idea of the decline of economic gender differences in capitalist development, and contrary to his idea that their significance could be reduced to the primary problem of private ownership of means of production (the class division), the organizers of capitalist production will seek to take advantage of natural and social differences between genders so as to increase the surplus value (and thereby profit) extracted from the labor force. More specifically, Marx suggested that the value of women's labor is lower than that of men's. This meant that gender differences emerged within the crucial concept of the valuation of labor-power, the center piece of Marx's theory of value and of his economics as a whole.

Thus, at the level of philosophy of history, of the sequence of modes of production, Marx suggests that traditional, naturally based, social divisions, such as those associated with sexual differences, will decline. For Marx, human social progress implies the control of nature and the overcoming of naturally based social divisions. In fact, Marx argues that historical progress is a movement from what

is natural to what is human in social relations<sup>1</sup>. In the place of traditional social relations, some based on natural differences, such as those of gender, or on kinship, or tribal associations, a new form of individualism in capitalism has arisen, organized through the equal exchange system of the market and structured by economic and social classes based on ownership of means of production.

In the economic analysis of this form of society, Marx develops categories that appear to ignore the significance of gender differences. Yet, in describing the detailed operations of the system of production relations, especially the problem of the valuation of labor-power, Marx does refer to the particular qualities of gender differences in the capitalist economy.

#### Gender Differences and the Social History of Individuality

For Marx, gender differences are an aspect of the social realization of individuality that occurs through the labor process, which is understood as generalized human activity. The change and development in the social relations of labor, that is, in the mode of production of society, is also the production of human individuality. According to Marx,

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Hobsbawm (1977, p. 12) "For Marx progress is something objectively definable and at the same time pointing to what is desirable. The strength of the Marxist belief in the triumph of the free development of all men, depends not on the strength of Marx's hope for it, but on the assumed correctness of the analysis that this is indeed where historical development essentially leads mankind."

Labour is in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature . . . . By this acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 173).

Thus, human individuality is historically created through the change and development of social relationships of laboring and production. Marx argues that "the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labor" (Marx, 1982, Economic and Philosophic, p. 145).

Marx broke away from the natural law concept of individuals used by Smith. Although Smith suggested in his natural law theory that all individuals were inherently equal (including women and men) and that it was only economic conditions (especially the division of labor) that encouraged the differences between individuals, Smith did not suggest that the nature of individuality, as such, was subject to social and historical transformation.

Marx, in contrast, examined the historical transformation of individuality through changing forms of labor. Marx, thus, agreed with Smith in arguing that human potentiality was only limited by social conditions, but he also went further in specifying that these conditions were historically created. Slave, serf, and wage labor, for



example, all appear to Marx as forms of external forced labor and not the voluntaristic self activity of the free will of the individual. In this sense, even the progressive social relations of capitalism appear to remain partly in the realm of what he called natural necessity and are not the free expression of individual wants and needs.

For Marx, laboring is the essential means of human self-realization. Laboring is most liberating when individuals can posit their own aims and objectives in how they work and produce things. In capitalist and earlier societies, laboring always appeared as "repulsive, always as external forced labour; and not labour, by contrast, as freedom and happiness" (Marx, 1977, Grundrisse, p. 611).

Even in capitalist society, the workers' creation of objects proves the creative consciousness of humanity, although the products of labor are estranged from the laborer. For Marx, the estrangement of the laborer from the product of labor is also the estrangement between individuals. These relations of production between the worker and the capitalist are centered in the institution of private property, which is according to him, "thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself" (Marx, 1982, Economic and Philosophic, p. 117).

In centering the analysis of modes of production on forms of property, and thereby on relations of production,

Marx concluded that capitalist social relations were the most historically removed from nature. As such, gender differences of individuals appeared to have declining historical significance.

#### The Declining Significance of Economic Gender Differences

In the progress of different modes of production, from precapitalist society, through feudalism, to capitalism, Marx observes a tendency for the economic significance of gender differences to decline. In contrast to many pre-capitalist societies, in which gender differences and kinship relations were often principle forms of organization of economic life, it was clear to Marx that modern capitalist society does not create an absolute division between the economic activities of women and men. On the contrary, Marx thinks of both women and men in capitalism as universal individuals: they are the precursors of a new form of individuality that could be completely realized in a communist society. These universal individuals have overcome natural differences, such as those of gender, and are themselves the products of communal social relations. They are historical not natural products, which Marx describes as

(these) universally developed individuals, whose social relations, as their own communal relations, are hence also subordinated by their own communal control, are no product of nature, but of history. The degree and the universality of the development of wealth where this

individuality becomes possible supposes production on the basis of exchange values as a prior condition (Marx, 1977, Grundrisse, p. 162).

The development of individuality thus proceeds through historical stages characterized by differing forms of the social organization of labor and production--to which correspond differing degrees of importance of gender differences in the economic life of society. Marx observes an inherent tendency in these stages of development for the significance of naturally based social divisions, such as those of gender differences, to decline progressively.

For the purposes of our argument, we contrast Marx's ideas on an early primitive society with his ideas of capitalism. In a discussion of early societies, Marx begins from the premises of real individuals, from the physical characteristics of the natural human species and their relation to the rest of nature (Marx, 1972, German Ideology). In so doing, Marx emphasizes that human history begins from a natural basis, but is modified in the course of history by the actions of human society. Again, we find that Marx sees the unique quality of society (as opposed to animal existence) as human consciousness, which enables humans to produce their means of subsistence. This mode of production is more complex than merely the reproduction of physical existence: it is a definite form of activity, a mode of life. According to Marx, "As individuals express their life, so

they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production" (Marx, 1972, German Ideology, p. 114). The gradual development of productive forces encourages a division of labor, a division that is associated with different forms of ownership. The division of labor determines the relations of individuals to one another and to the context of the laboring activity.

The first and historically earliest form of ownership that Marx describes is that of a tribal society.<sup>2</sup> In this underdeveloped stage of production, people live by hunting and fishing; they rear beasts and later develop agriculture. Marx indicated that the division of labor in this early stage of economy "is still very elementary and is confined to a further extension of the natural division of labour existing in the family. The social structure is, therefore, limited to an extension of the family; patriarchal family chieftains, below them the members of the tribe, finally

---

<sup>2</sup>The second form of property ownership Marx refers to as constituting a distinct mode of production is the Ancient Communal and State form, which combined communal and private property and rested on slave labor. The third is the Feudal or Estate form based on the rural community, with a class division between serfs and landed owners. The fourth form is Capitalism, centered on the class division between capital and labor, based on private property in means of production. Elsewhere, Marx also describes an Asiatic mode of production combining centralized state control and large-scale irrigation. Hobsbawm (1977) provides an excellent discussion of Marx's various modes of production.

slaves" (Marx, German Ideology, 1972, p. 115). He notes that the society of the family itself, as the only social relationship, was historically and analytically prior to even the tribal society. This micro-society, Marx argues, is later subordinated to other created social relationships associated with the emergence of new needs. According to him, the original division of labor in tribal society emerged directly from that within the family:

. . . there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops spontaneously or "naturally" by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength), needs, accidents, etc., etc., Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears (Marx, German Ideology, 1972, p. 122-23).

It was this original division of labor, based on gender differences within the family, that Marx argues was the first form of property, which confirms his argument that it is the form of property that constitutes the basis of the mode of production and division of labor. He maintains that this original form of property was the ownership by the husband and father of his wife and children as slaves:

with the division of labour . . . (which) is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one

another, is given simultaneously . . . the unequal distribution . . . of labour and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form, of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property. (Marx, 1972, German Ideology, p. 123)

Property is the means of disposal over the labor-power of others and originated within the family. Thus, the original division of labor in tribal society was, indeed, based on what Marx calls the natural differences of age and sex--so that gender differences were inscribed in the foundation of the economy. In a later discussion of the origins of division of labor, Marx again refers back to gender differences within the family as the source of the problem:

Division of labour in society, and the corresponding tying down of individuals to a particular calling, develops itself, just as does the division of labour in manufacture, from opposite starting points. Within a family, and after further development within a tribe, there springs up naturally a division of labour, caused by differences of age and sex, a division that is consequently based on a purely physiological foundation . . . . On the other hand, as I have before remarked, the exchange of products springs up at the points where different families, tribes, communities, come into contact . . . . In the latter case, the social division of labour arises from the exchange between spheres of production, that are originally distinct and independent of one another . . . . In the former, the physiological division of labour is the starting point.

(Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, pp. 332-333)

Economic gender differences are simply presented as natural differences between individuals in what is, in a sense, also a natural economy.

Thus, while the division of labor within the primitive tribal society was presumed by Marx to have its starting point in the natural and physiological individual differences of age and sex, the later development of the social division of labor was based on the exchange of products between communities. Marx goes on to distinguish between the social division of labor in general, and the division of labor in manufacture, and he argues that it is in the latter that differences among individuals, including natural physiological differences of age and sex, form the basis of division of labor.<sup>3</sup>

Marx emphasized that capitalist relations of production are utterly different from those of a primitive tribal society. In capitalism, a landless and propertyless class of workers emerges who are sellers of labor-power in a commodity form in exchange for a wage. The social forms of wage labor and capital becomes dominant. The individual is no longer internally related through the natural ties of kinship and community but through the external relationships of the

---

<sup>3</sup>We shall return to Marx's argument on the gender differences associated with the division of labor in capitalist manufacturing later in this chapter.

market. This was the commercial society that Smith described, but in which Marx emphasizes the social division created by unequal ownership of means of production. Marx, nevertheless, comments that political economists, such as Smith, had made a breakthrough in describing the "civil society" in which "every individual is a totality of needs and only exists for the other person, as the other exists for him, in so far as each becomes a means for the other" (Marx, 1982, Economic and Philosophic, p. 159).

For Marx, however, the individual equivalence of this market exchange system was underscored by a fundamental relationship that Smith neglected: the development of division of labor and the system of exchange that Smith described depend essentially upon private property. In so far as it is the relations of production of labor that enable the division of labor, and the spread of exchange relationships, so it is also labor that is the heart of private property. Division of labor and exchange are embodiments of private property. The division of labor is the economic expression of the social character of labor: a form of labor that is created by relations of property that estrange the laborer from the object and means of production.

In capitalism, as Marx described it, relations of production are not basically organized around the principles of gender differences; rather, they are organized around the principles of private ownership of the means of production



and the sale of labor-power by workers. In other words, the class division defined around ownership of means of production and the sale of labor-power as commodities is analytically more significant than the question of gender differences. The capitalist economy has created a new form of individuality (in which gender differences are not important) by means of the generalized system of market exchange and the sale of labor-power as commodities. According to Marx,

Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labour beyond the limits of its natural paltriness, and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of a natural one (Marx, 1977, Grundrisse, p. 325).

For both Smith and Marx, the social connection of individuals through the exchange of commodities releases people from the older ties of blood or personal dependency. Relationships between individuals thus appear to Marx to be universal and social, unbounded by community or nature, so that "the reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection" (Marx, 1977, Grundrisse, p. 156). Individuals

are related through the impersonal network of commodity transactions in the market place. In Marx's famous dictum, the social relationships between individuals now appear as the relationships between things: the fetishism of commodities.

Yet, for Marx, this alienating form of social relationships is far preferable to the forms of natural or communal relationships that characterized earlier forms of society--and in which gender differences played a key role. He states that "certainly, this objective connection is preferable to the lack of any connection, or to a merely local connection resting on blood ties, or on primeval, natural or master-servant relations" (Marx, 1977, Grundrisse, p. 161).

As with Smith, Marx's economic individuals, now distributed in an opposition between capital and labor, are not necessarily specified by gender differences. Thus, one major line of thought in Marx's economic framework remains connected to the idea of the individual in class relationships, but this individual is not thought of as either male or female in the fundamental categories of the theory.

#### Gender Differences in the Capitalist Relations of Production

As we have seen, when Marx presented individuals in capitalist social relations as genderless, he dealt with the

overall historical tendencies of development of different modes of production. When we now turn to the examination of the detailed relations of production of labor in capitalist economy, and particularly to the problem of the valuation of labor-power, we find that gender differences emerge as a quality of the economic relations of labor.

When Marx first introduces the concept of labor in Capital, he does not refer to gender differences. In a way, Marx is saying that the capitalist does not care whether workers are male or female, all the capitalist wants is labor-power. The gender of that individual unit of labor-power is not important. Marx takes pains to emphasize that the concept of labor is an abstraction representing the homogeneity and exchangeability of labor-power as a commodity. In developing the concept of abstract social labor, Marx ignored what he called individual differences in labor, such as gender, age, or skill. Social labor therefore represented the average capacity of units of labor-power given then existing conditions of production.

The key analytical development Marx is making is to show that the laborer, in selling labor-power for a period of time to the capitalist, must work under the control of the capitalist. Labor-power becomes the property of the capitalist in exchange for a wage. As a general social relation, this form of exchange does not refer to gender differences of the individual worker. This process of

exchange allows the capitalist to appropriate the value produced by the wage laborers in the form of surplus value, through the private ownership and control of the means of production and the labor time of the workers. Part of the value produced by each worker under such conditions is returned to the worker in the form of the wage, while the remainder is appropriated by the capitalist.

However, in contrast with the undifferentiated, homogeneous concept of social labor, Marx also analyzed how the development of machinery incorporated the human worker in the labor process, and how this process involved gender differences as an aspect of the detailed division of labor in the factory. He now begins to show a specific concern with economic gender differences.

Marx distinguished between the social division of labor in general and the detailed division of labor at the level of production.<sup>4</sup> By social division of labor, he meant the division of social production into major sectors and branches, beginning with distinctions between agriculture, industry, and commerce, and their sub-branches of activity. We have already seen how Marx suggested that detailed divisions of labor in production originated with natural

---

<sup>4</sup>Rattansi (1982) notes that Marx's ideas on the division of labor evolved in his various writings. In the early writings Marx conflated the concepts of class and division of labor, so that abolition of property would also entail the negation of division of labor. In later writings, (from Grundrisse on) the concepts of class and division of labor are separated.

individual differences of age and sex within the family, while the social division of labor originated with the exchange of products between communities. Marx argues, furthermore, that the detailed cooperation of labor under the direction of the capitalist took two distinct forms. Labor could be organized by bringing together various different handicrafts, or it could be organized by collecting all laborers together to perform similar tasks. The former organization Marx called detail labor and the latter he called collective labor.

The capitalist division of labor within the workshop or factory is a result of direct control of the labor process and means of production by the capitalist. Marx said that "the division of labor in the workshop implies concentration of the means of production in the hands of one capitalist; the division of labour in society implies their dispersion among many independent producers of commodities" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 336). Thus, the social division of labor is common to many different forms of economy, but the division of labor within the factory or workshop is specific to capitalism.

In the division of labor of capitalist manufacture, the collectivity of workers becomes "a form of existence of capital" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 340) in that the labor time of numerous workers is possessed by the capital advanced for their wages. The organization of labor

is based on a hierarchy of activities resulting in workers becoming "mere appendages" of machines. The individual laborer is emasculated.

Suddenly, we see that Marx moves from the abstraction of the social relation of labor in general, to the reality of individual differences between workers. Workers are divided between those with desirable skills and those without. Marx (1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 346) argues that manufacturing divides up workers, and "adapts the detail operations to the various degrees of maturity, strength, and development of the living instruments of labour, thus conducing [sic] to exploitation of women and children, yet this tendency as a whole is wrecked on the habits and the resistance of the male labourers." Immediately, abstract social labor has been transformed and broken into skilled or unskilled, strong or weak, female or male characteristics of individual workers. The actual labor of capitalist relations of production is highly differentiated, and gender differences are a fundamental aspect of this differentiation.

Marx makes frequent reference to the political struggles that went on between women and men over their respective roles in the world of work. He notes that in England before the Factory Acts (which limited the labor of women and children under the age of 10 years) "women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is

an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus population is below all calculation" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 372).

As the above remarks suggest, Marx made a very specific argument about the introduction of machinery and the nature of economic gender differences. The introduction of factory machine production is argued by Marx to weaken the traditional hierarchies of skill associated with adult male laborers in the division of labor. He says that the use of machinery has "become a means of employing laborers of slight muscular strength, and those whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose limbs are all the more supple. The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought for by capitalists who used machinery" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 372).

Marx goes on to argue that the introduction of machinery allowed capitalists to enlarge the pool of available labor by incorporating all members of the family regardless of age or sex:

We have seen that the development of the capitalist mode of production and of the productive power of labor--at once the cause and effect of accumulation--enables the capitalist, with the same outlay of variable capital, to set in action more labour . . . . the capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour-power, as he progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 595)

This waged labor of women and children "usurped the place, not only of children's play, but also of free labour at home within the moderate limits of support of the family" (Marx, Capital, Volume One, p. 372). In a footnote to this passage, Marx describes how "capital, for the purposes of its self expansion, has usurped the labour necessary in the home for the family" (1977, p. 372).

The introduction of factory machine production made the division of labor less hierarchical and more homogenized. Because less skill and physical strength was required on the part of workers, Marx argued that the new machine production encouraged the employment of women and children in the place of skilled adult males, implying that women and children were considered as unskilled cheap labor. The traditional economic relationships of family life were overturned. He said that

modern industry, in overturning the economic foundation on which was based the traditional family, and the family labour corresponding to it, had also unloosened all traditional family ties . . . . However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, pp. 459-460)

A fundamental question remained excluded at this point:



why was it assumed by Marx that the historical conditions of labor were such that female labor was inevitably cheaper and less skilled than male labor? In Marxist economic terms, why was the value of female labor-power inevitably lower than male?

### Gender Differences in the Valuation of Labor-Power

In Marx's theory of the value of labor-power, the problem of gender differences was recognised, but he finally explicitly excluded it from his approach.<sup>5</sup> Marx developed the theory of labor-power as a commodity. His theory of the value of labor-power is therefore generally the same as that which he applies to the value of all commodities. The value of a commodity is given by the labor time embodied in its production, assuming the expenditure of a uniform or homogeneous quality of labor-power:

The total labour-power of a society, which is embodied in the sum total of the values of all commodities produced by that society, counts here as one homogeneous mass of human labour-power, composed though it be of innumerable individual units. Each of these units is the same as any other, so far as it has the character of the average labour-power of society, and takes effect as such; that is, so far as it requires for producing a commodity, no more time than is needed on an average, no

---

<sup>5</sup> In discussing the Marxist theory of value, we shall only examine Marx's idea in so far as it relates to the valuation of human labor-power, avoiding the wide-ranging controversy over the labor theory of value in general.

more than is socially necessary (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 46).

Thus, the value of the commodity is provided by what Marx calls the socially necessary labor that should go into its production, given the average degree of intensity of labor and average skills in production of the given historical level of development of techniques of production. As we have already seen, by using the concept of socially necessary labor embodied in the value of a commodity, Marx assumes that differences in individual units of labor-power have been averaged out. He excludes individual differences of labor-power associated with gender, for example, from this concept. The same principle applies with his theory of the valuation of the commodity of human labor-power.

Human labor in motion creates value, but is not itself value, according to Marx. This is why he distinguishes between human labor-power and the individual, as it is the potential for human labor, or labor-power, that is sold as a commodity to be used for a limited period of time by the capitalist, rather than the laborer as such. The consumption of labor-power in the process of capitalist production is the embodiment of labor in the produced commodities and thereby a creation of value. Labor-power, as such, is the capacity of the individual laborer to labor, an aggregate of mental and physical capabilities. There may be natural differences in the quality of individual units of labor-power, and Marx

certainly implies that female labor-power is naturally less physically strong than male labor-power. He states that the sale of labor-power as a commodity, however, is an historical, rather than a natural, condition, specifying that "nature does not produce on the one side owners of money or commodities, and on the other men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no natural basis, neither is its social basis one that is common to all historical periods" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 166).

Thus, the value of labor-power, as a commodity that is sold in the wage labor market, is given by the socially necessary labor that goes into its "production." According to Marx,

the value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. So far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it. Labour-power exists only as a capacity, or power of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes its existence. Given the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a given quantity of the means of subsistence. Therefore the labour-time requisite for the production of labour-power reduces itself to that necessary for the production of those means of subsistence; in other words, the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the

maintenance of the labourer (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 167).

As we have seen, the idea of socially necessary labour implies an average intensity of labor, of average skill, using normal techniques of production. In transferring this concept to the "production" of the commodity of human labor-power itself, Marx is thereby indicating that, as with other cases of "socially necessary labor," the distinctions of gender, age, or skill involved in its production have been averaged into an homogenous quantity. Furthermore, Marx is defining the value of human labor-power only as accounted for by the accumulation of values of commodities that have gone into its "production," or creation. This means that the value of human labor-power excludes the inputs of non-commodity values, all those other goods or services, or forms of training and education, that are not provided for by the capitalist market in the form of commodities or exchange values. The idea of the value of labor-power therefore also excludes all those noncommodity forms of development of labor-power provided by the work of parents in their homes, including the domestic work of women in rearing children and reproducing labor-power.

At this point, Marx's makes no mention that the value of labor-power necessarily includes provision for the support of a wife, or, indeed, that the commodity labour-power, as such, is necessarily a male attribute. (It does not seem valid to

assume that Marx's reference to the generic laborer in male terms, such as "he," implies that the concept refers only to male workers, especially since Marx has remarked on the fact that capitalists were eager to employ women). Neither does the concept suggest that the laborer's wife and family must do unwaged housework in order to maintain and reproduce commodities of exclusively male labor-power. All Marx suggests is that the value of labor-power will be given by historical circumstances; the standard of living of workers will vary according to culture, customs, and moral ideas around a physical minimum of subsistence.

Although Marx did not explicitly show gender differences in his concept of the value of labor-power, he did indicate the need for the wage to cover the costs of supporting the children of workers: "the sum of the means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the labourer's substitutes, i.e., his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its appearance in the market" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 168).

Furthermore, Marx makes it clear that the value of individual units of labor-power will vary according to the degree of education and training, and consequently skills, that have been acquired by the individual. The specialization of labor-power will cause its value to be increased as "a special education or training is requisite,

and this, on its part, costs an equivalent in commodities of a greater or lesser amount . . . . The expenses of this education . . . enter pro tanto into the total value spent in its production" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 168). Thus, so far, Marx has not varied the value of individual units of labor-power according to gender differences.

It is only when Marx comes to analyze the effects of the introduction of factory-based machine production on the valuation of labor-power that the idea of gender differences is made explicit. The development of the division of labor in factory production, led by the introduction of machinery, was argued by Marx to have caused a general revaluation of labor-power. Marx now appears, for the first time, to assume that the value of labor is generally that of an adult male laborer and is sufficient to support a wife and a family, while the new valuation of labor-power occasioned by the new factory machine production is individualized and based on the average values of men, women, and children. He says that

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour-market, spreads the value of the man's labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour-power . . . now the capitalist buys children and young persons under age. Previously, the workman sold his own labour-power, which he disposed of nominally as a free-agent. Now he sells wife and child. He has become a

slave dealer (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 373).

Later, in the first volume of Capital, Marx acknowledges this problem of historical change in the role of gender differences in the valuation of labour-power, but he decided to ignore it by stating:

The value of labor-power is determined by the value of the necessaries of life habitually required by the average labourer. The quantity of these necessaries is known at any given epoch of a given society, and can therefore be treated as a constant magnitude. What changes, is the value of this quantity. There are besides two other factors that enter into the determination of the value of labour-power. One, the expenses of developing that power; . . . the other, its natural diversity, the difference between the labour-power of men and women, of children and adults. The employment of these different sorts of labour-power, an employment which is, in its turn, made necessary by the mode of production, makes a great difference in the cost of maintaining the family of the labourer, and in the value of the labour-power of the adult male. Both these factors, however, are excluded in the following investigation (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 486).

These "other factors," which Marx excludes from his general analysis, both involve gender differences: first, in the straightforward assertion that the value of labor power naturally varies by gender; and second, in that gender differences are implicated in the expenses of developing labor-power. This second aspect arises in so far as the

development of labor-power occurs, at least partly, in the family environment, which must be supported by the wage. The wage for the adult male, however, has been devalued by the addition of female and child labor-power into the labor market with the development of factory machine production. Furthermore, if the male wage were assumed to support a wife and family, but no longer does so, and the wife and children were also waged workers, then the whole question of the reproduction of labor-power is left unanswered.

Marx has in fact left us in a quandary. Marx's general philosophical historical approach led us towards the idea that gender differences were absent from the categories of his economics. We see this both as a theoretical result of the analysis of the functioning of capitalism, in that this form of economy did not fundamentally differentiate economic individuals according to gender, and as a progressive historical development of social relations away from the dictates of natural or biologically based social divisions. Then, in reading Capital, we find that beneath the abstract categories of Marxist economics the impetus of gender differences emerges. But the way in which he deals with gender differences is itself contradictory.

Thus, Marx argues, on the one hand, that the introduction of machinery into the factory has removed the natural basis to the gender differences of labor. The recruitment of labor can occur regardless of gender, as



neither traditional male skills nor the on-average greater physical strength of men any longer deters the employment of women (and children). On the other hand, Marx takes the argument further and twists it in another direction, in suggesting that women and children will actually displace male workers. They will be employed rather than men on the assumption that the value of their labor is inherently less than that of men, so that, in fact, factory machine production has not removed the basis of gender differences of labor. Factory machine production has encouraged a new form of economic gender difference in which the lower value of women's labor-power is preferentially employed to that of men's.

Thus, Marx used an assumption of the valuation of labor-power that implicitly was that of an adult male laborer whose wage was designed to support a wife and family; and that the entrance of women and children into the labor pool, facilitated by the development of machinery, transformed and individualized this generic valuation of labor-power. Yet, we have seen that Marx explicitly excluded any inherent gender differences from his general explanation of the valuation of labor-power.

In defining the value of labor as the labor time necessary for its production, measured in terms of the commodities required for its maintenance and reproduction over time, Marx had no a priori reason to value women's

labor-power less than that of men. Regardless of gender differences, the value of labor can vary according to the degree of skill it has acquired, accounted for in terms of the additional commodities in the form of education or training that have gone into its "production." With this premise, Marx could have argued that women's and children's labor is historically of lower value than adult males because it has been less invested in as human capital (we would still want to know why this has been the case historically). With such a logic, Marx could then have explained the substitution of women and children for skilled adult males that occurred with the introduction of factory machinery. Such machinery, Marx argued, had caused the deskilling of factory jobs, making them suitable for less-skilled workers. But the less-skilled workers could just as easily have been unskilled males as unskilled women or children. Therefore, there has to be an historical explanation, which Marx does not offer, for the relative lack of skills acquired by women relative to men.

Marx also needs to explain why, regardless of skill differences, women's labor appears to be of less value than men's, unless we are to assume that Marx has reverted to the argument of natural differences between the value of women's and men's labor. Yet, the whole thrust of Marx's thinking has been away from using natural differences to explain social relations, especially in capitalism. Marx has made

explicit that modern machine production has made physical differences between women and men more or less redundant in the valuation of labor-power.

Marx therefore leaves us with an historical fact that is unexplained by economic theory: the value of male labor is assumed to support that of women and children. This means, perhaps, that women's and children's labor-power was cheaper because Marx assumed they did not have to support wives and families, or that, indeed, part of the costs of their own reproduction would be supported by their husbands or fathers. The result is a situation where the gender differences in the value of labor-power have become entirely dependent upon assumptions of who is supporting whom according to historical circumstances.

We find, finally, that there is a problem of interpreting what the value of labor-power is assumed to cover versus how the value of labor-power is to be determined. The coverage of the value of labor power--that is who is supposed to support whom--is argued by Marx to vary historically according to the particular circumstances of moral and cultural conditions, the level of political organization of the working class, and the types of forms of production--such as factory machine production that encourages the employment of unskilled women and children. This historical variation in the coverage of the value of labor-power can obviously include gender differences, such as

whether adult male wages are sufficient to support wives or families, or whether women's wages are lower than men's because Marx assumed that women are generally supported by the wages of men. As with the gender differences in the generic value of labor-power, these variations are contingent on historical social circumstance and are not explained by Marx's theory of the value of labor-power, as such. His theory only explains that the value of labor-power in general is determined by the socially necessary labor that goes into the commodities that are used up in the creation of individual labor-power. His theory therefore does not refer to gender differences.

Thus, we are left with a paradox: the philosophical-historical approach of Marxist theory led towards a genderless conceptualization of economics and of the social relations of capitalism, but in the detailed operations of this historical economy, Marx acknowledged the significance of gender differences even within key concepts, such as the value of labor-power. This acknowledgement, however, remained contradictory and was largely removed from the overall conceptual arrangement of Marx's economics.

## REFERENCES

- Clarke, Simon (1982). Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Dobb, Maurice (1973). Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deane, Phyllis (1978). The Evolution of Economic Ideas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elson, Diane (1979). Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. London: CSE Books, Ltd.
- Gould, Carol, C. (1980). Marx's Social Ontology, Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1977). "Introduction," to K. Marx, in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, edited by E. J. Hobsbawm, New York: International Publishers.
- Lichtheim, George (1965). Marxism, an Historical and Critical Study. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.
- Marx, Karl (1970). "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in Marx, Engels, Selected Works. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl (1972). "The German Ideology," in The Marx Engels Reader, edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels (1972). "The Communist Manifesto," in The Marx Engels Reader, edited by Robert. C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Capital, Volumes One, Two, and Three, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Grundrisse. Harmondsworth: Penguin Publications.
- Marx, Karl (1982). Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. New York: International Publishers.

Meek, Ronald, L. (1977). Smith, Marx and After. London:  
Chapman and Hall.

Rattansi, Ali (1982). Marx and the Division of Labour.  
London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.

Tribe, Keith (1981). Genealogies of Capitalism. New Jersey:  
Humanities Press.

CHAPTER 4

ALFRED MARSHALL: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN  
MARGINALIST ECONOMICS AND THE MORAL ROLE OF WOMEN

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the nature of the conflict and ambiguity of Marshall's ideas on economic gender differences. First, we sketch the nature of Marshall's economics in relation to classical political-economy; second, we discuss how the marginalist technique provides a theoretical link between abstract individuals and social groups in the market system--a link in which gender differences are not apparent; third, in turning to Marshall's treatment of labor, we find that women nevertheless occupy a special role in the economy governed by their maternal responsibilities. Thus, behind his abstract analysis of the system of market prices, Marshall held strong normative judgments on what the respective economic roles of women and men should be. Women occupy an ambiguous position in Marshall's economic thought: on the one hand, Marshall asserts that women should be partly excluded from the labor market; on the other hand, Marshall treats women and men equivalently in his economic technique of marginalism.

"An Implanted Masterfulness Towards Womankind"

In a memorial to Alfred Marshall, John Maynard Keynes wrote that "an implanted masterfulness towards womankind warred in him with the deep affection and admiration which he bore to his own wife, and with an environment which threw him in closest touch with the education and liberation of women"



(Keynes, 1982, p. 7-8).<sup>1</sup> Marshall's complex attitude towards women is reflected in the economic principles that he is famous for having elaborated: women were placed in a moral sphere where their virtue depended on their duties and obligations to their families and children; their work in any other field was deemed secondary and subordinate. In Marshall's economic terms, the role of women as breeders and rearers of high quality labor was theoretically and morally paramount over their participation as economic individuals equivalent to men. Women thus appear on the margin of an economy defined as a system of market prices. They are of great importance for such an economy, but their participation is morally and practically affected by their roles and responsibilities in the home.

Marshall led a new school of neoclassical or marginalist economics that dominated economic thinking until at least after the Second World War. Marshall redirected economics away from classical political economy, but at the same time insisted on a wider social and ethical framework for the new technical and mathematical methods of economic analysis. In so doing, he also introduced a conflict between the abstract and genderless quality of the marginalist economic method and

---

<sup>1</sup> Keynes' comment on Marshall's attitude towards women is revealing. Marshall actively opposed the award of degrees by Cambridge University to women. Keynes suggests that Marshall never overcame the influence of his father who wrote a tract entitled "Man's Rights and Woman's Duties". Keynes' memorial to Marshall originally appeared in the Economic Journal, Vol. 34, Sept. 1924, pp. 311-72.

his own deeply held beliefs and values concerning the ethical, social, and economic roles to be performed differently by women and men. According to Levitt (1982 p. 422), "on the one hand, he [Marshall] constructed . . . a powerful 'engine of analysis' that was analytically pure and unforgiving as the mathematics on which he based its essentials. Yet it was also infused throughout with an effluvium of moral maxims, ethical prescriptions and public-policy insistences."

The problem of economic gender differences in Marshall's thought thus parallels a wider conflict between the vestiges of classical political-economy, with its regard for qualitative social relations and the underlying determinants of the market system, and the a-social marginalist method, the efficacy of which depended on its abstraction from the social context of the market. This conflict provides the basis of the ambiguity of Marshall's treatment of gender differences, and sets the stage for the later neoclassical treatment of the issue.

### Marshall's Economics

Marshall defined economics as the study of humankind in the ordinary business of life, so that economists study "that part of individual and social action which is most closely connected with the attainment and with the use of the material requisites of wellbeing" (Marshall, 1961, p.1).

All individuals share the need and desire for goods in a world of scarcity. All individuals experience diminishing returns in satisfaction from additional increments of each good. This idea of diminishing marginal utility allowed the marginalist economists to present a new (relative to Smith and Marx) theory of value that could cover the whole terrain of economic thought.<sup>2</sup> Individual consumers maximize utility; individual firms maximize profits. Both forms of maximization are subject to the marginal principle--which was that the marginal alteration of any economic resource will be most efficient if the gain from the change will just equal the loss.

Marshall differed from both the actual originators and later developers of marginalist economic theory in seeking to link the new form of economic analysis to the tradition of classical economic thought. Marshall remained concerned with the classical problems of growth, development, inequality, and poverty, and sought to graft the marginal method onto these concerns. He maintained a classical awareness of the historical context of economic development.

For Marshall, the growth in political rights for

---

<sup>2</sup>As many commentators have noted, Marshall did not originate the so-called Marginal Revolution in economics in the late nineteenth century. Menger in Austria (1871), Jevons in England (1871), and Walras in Switzerland (1874), all more or less simultaneously introduced remarkably similar ideas on marginal utility and general equilibrium. Marshall's Principles was not published until 1890. For discussion on the origins of the Marginal Revolution see Blaug (1980), Cooke (1982), Deane (1978), and Schumpeter (1954).

individuals, the demise of traditional customs governing social life, and the expansion of productivity with the Industrial Revolution, gave a new prominence and definition to economic conditions in modern society. By this, Marshall meant that economic actions, as such, could now be recognized and analyzed more clearly. The predominance of the market supplied a fertile field for the new economics, as it meant that all forms of economic activity could be treated with the marginalist calculus.

Marshall acknowledged that the classical economists of the 18th century, such as Smith and Ricardo, had developed key ideas for understanding the market economy. These economists, however, remained caught in a view of the economy in which natural laws governed the rates of reward for the three factors of production (land, labor, and capital); so that each was conceptualized differently. Land rent was determined as a surplus from marginal costs of cultivation; wages were derived from the long-run costs of production of means of subsistence; and the rate of profit on capital was a residual (Blaug, 1980). The classical political economy had been concerned centrally with the constitutional order within which capitalism could best develop to the advantage of the nation as a whole and with the relationship between classes that was proper to such a development (Clarke, 1982). The classical economists had tried to penetrate below the features of market exchange to discover underlying

determining relationships. They came up with a labor theory of value and a theory of distribution of the economic surplus between various social ranks or classes.

Marshall and the marginalists moved the central concern of economics to the question of the rigorous determination of prices, as a way of understanding the optimum allocation of resources between individuals and firms through the exchange processes of the market. This development of economic thinking meant that the question of distribution in terms of social class was by-passed. The new individual subjective theory of value based on utility ignored classes and any underlying determining relationships of market exchange (Meek, 1977). The marginalist analysis thus released economics from many issues and focussed it more generally and uniformly upon the issue of prices.<sup>3</sup>

Marshall, therefore, sought through the price mechanism to place the discipline of economics on a wider systematic foundation than it had previously held. Economics referred to the material basis for social well being, but its means and methods were given by the measure of money in the form of prices. Marshall maintained that prices are the core of economics because they alone provide it with the exactness of a science. Economics cannot be an exact physical science, however, because it deals with the "changing and subtle

---

<sup>3</sup>As Blaug comments, "An unkind critic might say that neoclassical economics indeed achieved greater generality, but only by asking easier questions" (Blaug, 1980, p. 314).

forces of human nature" (Marshall, 1961, p. 15). Although price is the cornerstone of economics as a proto-science, according to Marshall, it is nevertheless merely the measure of "desires, aspirations, and other affections of human nature, the outward manifestations of which appear as incentives to action in such a form that the force of quantity of the incentives can be estimated and measured" (Marshall, 1961, p. 15).

Marshall thought that if economics could be defined only in terms of prices, then it could have ideological neutrality. Economics could be a science of price determination. He was aware that such a "pure" economic theory would be a useful abstraction at best. His focus on prices did, however, mean that he was concerned with the efficient allocation of resources by the market. With this focus, the neoclassical economists retained the classical basis of economics in individualism and laissez-faire, but by-passed its concerns with value and distribution.<sup>4</sup>

By defining value as individual subjective utility (for both consumers and producers), the marginalist economists avoided the problematic issue of the objective meaning of value that plagued Smith, Ricardo, and Marx. Instead of

---

<sup>4</sup>As Deane explains: "the problems of value and distribution which had preoccupied the Ricardians were solved, or, more accurately, one might say swept under the carpet, by simple process of definition." (Deane, 1978, p. 101).

socio-economic relations, the starting point for the marginalist economists became the psychological relationship between individuals and goods: the utility preference.<sup>5</sup> They diverted attention away from the problem of the intrinsic value of goods by defining value in terms of utility as expressed in the exchange relationship. Thus, they developed a theory of exchange rather than one of value (Deane, 1978). The marginalists, including Marshall, showed that it was the marginal increment of utility on which the exchange-value or price depended.

Marshall succeeded in combining the revolutionary implications of defining value as utility in the relation of exchange with the classical notion of value as cost-of-production. He introduced a famous metaphor of a pair of scissors, with supply and demand as its blades, to illustrate the unity of value as both utility in demand and as cost-of-production in supply. Thus, he based the theory of demand on the marginal utility to the individual and the theory of supply on the marginal productivity of the firm. He used prices as the signals of the interdependence of the whole economic system, with the equilibrium price in the competitive market being the intersection of the demand and

---

<sup>5</sup> Ironically, this was exactly what Marx referred to as the fetishism of commodities: relationships between people are experienced and expressed in capitalist society as the relationships between things or commodities: "a definite social relation between man, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, 1977, Capital, Volume One, p. 77).

supply curves. Keynes summarized Marshall's achievement as "the general idea, underlying the proposition that Value is determined as the equilibrium point of Demand and Supply, was extended so as to discover a whole Copernican system, by which all the elements of the economic universe are kept in their places by mutual counterpoise and interaction" (Keynes, 1982, p.37).

Marginalism, Individuals, and Gender.

The individual, as the bearer of subjective utility preferences and as a rational maximizer of utility or profit, is assumed by Marshall to be the atom of economic action. The marginalist economic technique was developed by Marshall to model the economic actions of such individuals; it was, however, a model of economic individuals that excluded gender differences.

Although Marshall modelled individuals, he was also concerned with aggregations of individuals to the extent that this overcame or counterbalanced the "peculiarities of individuals". Economics could not work if it had to take into account every peculiarity or idiosyncrasy of the individual. Marshall therefore aggregated individuals into groups, such as all adult males in a certain trade or all families. Thereby, the differences among individuals were averaged. Other aggregations of individuals used by Marshall are those of income, where he refers to the rich, the middle



class, and the poor.<sup>6</sup> Marshall sometimes appears to distinguish men and women as specific aggregations for economic analysis, but his general approach was to ignore gender differences as qualities of individuals. The purpose of the aggregations was to enable economists to work with a measure of human motives on a large scale. He stated that "economists study the action of individuals, but study them in relation to social rather than individual life; and therefore concern themselves but little with personal peculiarities of temper or character" (Marshall, 1961, p. 25).

The aggregation of individuals in groups also enabled Marshall to develop his well-known "partial analyses"--economic analyses of small sectors of the economy. These groups have a characteristic homogeneity, a unity of form, that allows for the general analysis suitable for economic reasoning.

Marshall's development of the idea of marginalism provided a means of extrapolating between individual demand and the wider system of market prices, and thereby between

---

<sup>6</sup>By referring to income groups, Marshall arrays individuals along a homogeneous continuum defined by prices (money income). This approach reveals the radical difference between marginalism and classical political economy in their definition of social groups and classes; the classical approach was to define social groups in terms of their particular socio-economic relationships, as owners of land, as sellers of labor, as undertakers or stock holders of capital in production, for example--all qualitative references to social structures that are absent in the marginalist analysis of income aggregation.

the idiosyncracies of individual desires and tastes and the aggregation of social groups. Individual's wants may be endlessly varied, but each separate want will be limited, so that with increasing amounts of a particular good the incremental utility from each additional unit will decrease. As Schumpeter described this phenomenon, "as we go on acquiring successive increments of each good, the intensity of our desire for one additional "unit" declines monotonically until it reaches--and then conceivably falls below-zero" (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 910). Marshall himself described it more simply as "the marginal utility of a thing to anyone diminishes with every increase in the amount of it he already has."

The idea of diminishing marginal utility then became the basis for a new theory of value-in-exchange based on the use or utility value of goods to consumers. By looking at the combination of all individual's economic behavior in terms of marginal utility, the marginalist economists found that a picture of the total economy emerged. The economic rationality of individual utility maximization covered the behavior of households as well as firms, consumption as well as production, demand as well as supply.<sup>7</sup> The efficient

---

<sup>7</sup>Meek (1977) notes that this logic of rational economic choice can be applied to any kind of human behavior governed by the principle of maximization of utility. This praxiology, or logic of human action, provided the basis for Gary Becker's radical extension of the domain of economics to cover everything from the choice to divorce, commit a crime, or have a baby (discussed in Chapter Six).

price (determined at the margin) equilibrated between demand and supply. Allocation of resources in production and pricing of goods in distribution could be unified within a single method of analysis. For the first time, economists saw the supply and demand of goods as part of a single interdependent mechanism of market activity--as the twin blades of Marshall's scissors. Furthermore, they found that the laws of exchange resembled those of equilibrium in mechanics as derived from Newtonian physics (Deane, 1978). With the aid of calculus and myriad simultaneous equations, they could model the whole economy in terms of priced transactions. Marginal utility analysis "created an analytic tool of general applicability to economic problems . . . pure economics thus finds itself unified in the light of a single principle--in a sense in which it never had been before (Schumpeter, 1954, p. 912-913).

Parallel and complementary to the idea of marginal utility, Marshall developed the idea of diminishing marginal returns from Ricardo's analysis of agricultural productivity. Marshall broadened the problem to express the efficient allocation of any resources of production to yield better results--to get the greatest marginal return. Furthermore, Marshall argues that the tendency for additional "doses" of varying combinations of labor and capital to lead to diminishing marginal returns is counterbalanced by increasing productivity, greater volume of production, and growth in the

supply of better, more vigorous, and more efficient labor. Increased wealth facilitates a greater increase of wealth. Economies of scale of production promote increased wealth. Thus, Ricardo's idea of diminishing marginal returns in agriculture (associated with the finite supply of fertile land) is countered by Marshall's optimistic assertion that highly developed industrial organization can lead to increasing returns. He said "in other words, we say broadly that while the part which nature plays in production shows a tendency to diminishing return, the part which man plays shows a tendency to increasing return" (Marshall, 1961, p. 318).

A given historical situation of economic development can then be seen to be subject to economic laws, or tendencies. For Marshall, such laws were the monetary price measurement of conduct that may be defined as "normal," that is conduct that can be expected in the long run under certain conditions. By using the term "normal" Marshall did not refer to undisturbed free competition nor to what may be morally right; on the contrary, he intended economics to measure and refer to what actually exists. Economists present the facts of the world as they are. Marshall (1961, p.26-7) said that "in all this they deal with man as he is: not with an abstract or "economic man"."

By focussing on price and by aggregating individuals in groups to avoid their "peculiarities," Marshall however

avoided a specific consideration of gender differences. The marginalist method tended to abstract from the social or historical context of individual's lives, and thereby also from the significance of gender differences as an aspect of individuality. The starting point of the marginalist analysis was a utility-maximizing individual, endowed with given tastes, skills and resources, making rational choices in conditions of scarcity. But the marginalists moved away immediately from the concrete quality of any specific individual and away from differences between women and men as attributes of individuals in general. Yet, Marshall consistently referred to a special role that women must perform in the economy. We shall see that it is a role that falls largely outside of the scope of the marginalist economic analysis and leaves women marking the boundary between what is defined as economic versus what is defined as social. There is a conflict between the asserted goals of a neutral economic science based on the marginalist technique and the wider normative structure that Marshall derived from the classical political economists.

#### The Unique Factor of Labor and the Special Role of Women

Although Marshall emphasized the substitutability between "agents" and "appliances" of production, and therefore equates labor with other factors of production, he was careful, nevertheless, to acknowledge the unique

characteristics of human labor. The supply of labor was actually segmented between what Marshall referred to as hand-workers and brain-workers and between different "classes" and "grades." In discussing distribution, Marshall followed Smith's break away from a "natural" subsistence theory of wages, recognizing that the condition of the market, itself, regulated the levels of wages at a given historical period. With the development of advanced industrial processes, Marshall argued that high wages increased the efficiency of labor and led to the intergenerational growth in the supply of efficient labor. Marshall's idea of distribution combined the individual reward of labor with its distribution within families and over time between generations. It is within this complex of relationships that Marshall began to refer to the specific roles of men and women in families and in the labor market.

Marshall argued that the necessities of life required to support labor will vary historically and from society to society. The necessities of life for the laborer are defined by what is required to determine the efficient supply of labor by type. A certain level and quality of consumption is necessary for specific grades of labor to be able to work efficiently and also to ensure the supply of efficient labor in future generations. Wages must be considered in relation to the costs of rearing, training, and sustaining the energy of efficient labor. Thus, he explained that the necessities

of life to enable the efficient market supply of unskilled labor entails the economic dependence of a housewife on the male laborer, stating that

(if) we consider here what are the necessaries for the efficiency of an ordinary agricultural or an unskilled town labourer and his family, in England, in this generation. They may be said to consist of a well-drained dwelling with several rooms, warm clothing, with some changes of under-clothing, pure water, a plentiful supply of cereal food, with a moderate allowance of meat and milk, and a little tea, etc., some education and some recreation, and lastly, sufficient freedom for his wife from other work to enable her to perform properly her maternal and her household duties (Marshall, 1961, p. 69)

Without these "necessaries" unskilled labor will be less efficient.

Given that efficient labor required a domestic system of support that depends upon a gendered division of labor (essentially the existence of a housewife), Marshall argued that economists would do well to consider the whole problem of distribution in terms of families rather than individuals. he said that

in estimating the cost of production of efficient labor, we must often take as our unit the family. At all events we cannot treat the cost of production of efficient men as an isolated problem; it must be taken as part of the broader problem of the cost of production of efficient men together with the women who are fitted to make their homes happy, and to bring up their children vigorous in body and

mind, truthful and cleanly, gentle and brave  
(Marshall, 1961, p. 564)

Marshall acknowledged, however, that while it is the economic function of families (and especially women) to prepare the supply of labor, the actual relationships of the labor market remain individualistic and are not based upon the organization of the family.

Marshall saw the role of women in the family as of vital importance. He argued that the inter-generational effects of family life upon the distribution of income are very great. Well-off families invest in the future labor-power of their children and cumulate benefits for the next generation. Marshall saw housewives and mothers as the major factor in increasing the value of future labor. Without the mother's full-time support, the next generation of workers will be less efficient and will remain in poverty. He stated that

if we compare one country of the civilized world with another, or one part of England with another, or one trade in England with another, we find that the degradation of the working classes varies almost uniformly with the amount of rough work done by women. The most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings, and of that capital the most precious part is the result of the care and influence of the mother, so long as she retains her tender and unselfish instincts, and has not been hardened by the strain and stress of unfeminine work (Marshall, 1961, p. 564)



Or again, in commenting on how the sons of artisans are more likely to succeed, Marshall noted that "His parents are likely to be better educated, and to have a higher notion of their duties to their children; and, last but not least, his mother is likely to be able to give more of her time to the care of her family" (Marshall, 1961, p. 564).

It therefore seems that women are an unacknowledged problem for economic theory: should their unpaid domestic labor be counted as part of national income? As housewives, should their labor be counted only as part of the necessities of life required by efficient adult male labor? Can women be counted in the aggregations of individuals into groups by income, or by trade? Perhaps women should be aggregated into a group by themselves?

Several comments by Marshall indicate that these issues were not resolved clearly, so that the position of women in his economics remains ambiguous. For example, in a footnote referring to the economic value of immigrant labor, Marshall commented that

so far we have not taken account of the difference between the sexes. But it is clear that the above plans put the value of the male immigrants too high and that of the female too low: unless allowance is made for the service which women render as mothers, as wives and as sisters, and the male immigrants are charged with having consumed their services, while the female immigrants are credited with having supplied them (Marshall, 1961, footnote on p. 565).

A similar problem arose with counting the labor of domestic servants in national income, where Marshall said "there is however some inconsistency in omitting the heavy domestic work which is done by women and other members of the household where no servants are kept" (Marshall, 1961, p. 80).

Sometimes Marshall argued that women are indeed included within the forms of economic aggregation. He said, for example, that "in large markets, then--where rich and poor, old and young, men and women, persons of all varieties of tastes, temperaments and occupations are mingled together,-- the peculiarities and wants of individuals will compensate one another in a comparatively regular gradation of total demand" (Marshall, p. 98). But if we disaggregate the groups, Marshall suggested we shall find differences in their demand curves, for example, between the rich, middle class, and the poor. Yet, Marshall did not indicate whether the demand curve of women will be different from that of men.

The theme of gender differences is further developed in a discussion on the changing pattern of earnings. Marshall argued that the development of modern industry means that individual's work experience is less of an advantage, so that older men earn less than young men in many cases. The wages of children have risen relatively to those of their parents, and machinery displaces men in favor of boys. Customary

restrictions that excluded boys from some trades are giving way, while boys and "even girls" can "set their parents at defiance and start life on their own account." The increased participation of women in paid employment, however, contradicts their primary moral and economic duty towards the home and the family, that is, as suppliers of efficient labor to the economy as opposed to being laborers themselves.

According to Marshall,

the wages of women are for similar reasons rising fast relatively to those of men. And this is a great gain in so far as it tends to develop their faculties; but an injury is so far as it tempts them to neglect their duty of building up a true home, and of investing their efforts in the personal capital of their children's character and abilities (Marshall, 1961, p. 685)

Thus, women occupy a contradictory position in Marshall's economics. To the one side, the labor of women appeared subject to the marginalist laws of the market along with that of all other individuals, and could be aggregated by income or grade of occupation and type of work, accordingly. On the other side, however, was a moral and economic efficiency argument in which Marshall insisted that women should remain partly excluded from the labor market because of their vital role as producers of vigorous labor. At certain points, but not consistently, Marshall argued that women's labor is a priori of less value than men's, as when

he suggested that a minimum wage policy should set a lower wage rate for women than for men, although he goes on to argue that such a wage policy would be ineffective because it does not deal with the familial context of income. Marshall confirmed that the economic position of women cannot be separated from their family position. The social function of women's family work was seen as the key determinant of their economic roles and of the value of their labor in the market.

When Marshall considered the growth of population, and therefore the overall supply of human labor, he made explicit the degree to which gender differences are a fundamental aspect of the basis of the economic theory. Marshall was concerned with industrial efficiency, with the muscular strength and vigorous character of labor that is produced by families for use in the economy. According to Marshall (1961, p. 195) the role of the full-time housewife is to produce the most vigorous labor for the economy. He said that "Much depends on the proper preparation of food; and a skilled housewife with ten shillings a week to spend on food will often do more for the health and strength of her family than an unskilled one with twenty." He noted that mortality rates are higher in the towns "especially where there are many mothers who neglect their family duties in order to earn money wages" (Marshall, 1961, p. 198).

The argument that women should work primarily on rearing and supporting the best workers for the labor market, rather

than becoming such workers themselves, is supported in a general sense by Marshall's views on the correspondence between the principles of growth in nature and those of the economy. Marshall argued that there is a fundamental unity between the physical laws of nature and those of the moral or social world. Thus, the division of labor and the progressive integration of functions that accompany it are analogous to the differentiation of the species in nature and their evolutionary development. In this sense, Marshall was a Social Darwinist.<sup>8</sup>

In Marshall's understanding of the economy, the natural tendencies of differentiation, specialization, and evolutionary growth are realized in the division of labor between different classes of workers and by the allocation of responsibility for childcaring and rearing to women and not men. These domestic duties, as the proper province of women, not only remained largely outside of the market basis of marginalist economics, but served in Marshall's eyes to limit practically and compromise morally women's participation in the labor market.

---

<sup>8</sup>Parsons (1982) makes explicit that the "other side" of Marshall's utility theory was a theory of social evolution involving a normative idea of the improvement of human character through the rigors of the free enterprise system. This qualitative side of Marshall's economics, closely associated with his affiliation to classical political-economy, has been largely ignored by the later neoclassical economists who only took up his development of marginalist technique. On this theme see also Levitt (1982).

## Women as the Margin Between Economy and Society

Marshall placed market price at the center of his economics, so that it provided the link between individual economic action and the aggregation of social groups. Marshall thereby used prices to generalize the economic approach to a social level. Yet, underneath the generalizing approach provided by prices, Marshall referred to specific aggregations of individuals, such as those associated with income--the rich, middle class, and the poor, as well as other aggregations, such as the workers in particular trades and individuals in family units. Furthermore, we saw that Marshall referred to a wider social whole, involving the problems of long-term growth, development, and demographic change. These elements of a wider social whole also had their corollaries of distribution, welfare and the ideas of progress--strong willed vestiges of classical political-economy that Marshall never relinquished entirely to the abstract neutrality of the marginal analysis.

Within such a wider scope of economics, Marshall made clear that gender differences were in fact a fundamental aspect of his economics. Women played the key role as mothers in "producing" strong and vigorous laborers. Women were therefore preferably employed as full-time housewives. In fact, the definition of the necessities to be bought for out of the male laborer's wage included the economic dependency of a housewife. The laborer was consistently

referred to as male. Yet, women were nowhere explicitly excluded from the categories of economics, nor were they definitely included in them. Women thus appeared to straddle the boundary between the domain of economics (the world as measured by market prices) and a wider society in which their role as housewives and mothers was understood to be of great importance for the economy, but which was nevertheless considered only partly of the economy, as defined by Marshall.

## REFERENCES

- Becker, Gary (1976). The Economic Approach to Human Behavior. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Blaug, Mark (1980, third edition). Economic Theory in Retrospect. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, Simon (1982). Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Deane, Phyllis (1978). The Evolution of Economic Ideas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jevons, W. Stanley, (1871, 1970). The Theory of Political Economy. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd.
- Jha, Narmadeshwar (1973). The Age of Marshall, Aspects of British Economic Thought 1890-1915. London: Frank Cass.
- Keynes, J. M. (1982) "The Life of Alfred Marshall, 1842-1924," in John Cunningham Wood, (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm. (Originally published in the Economic Journal, Vol. 34, September 1924, pp. 311-72)
- Levitt, T. (1982) "Alfred Marshall: Victorian Relevance for Modern Economics," in John Cunningham Wood, (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.
- Marshall, Alfred (1961). Principles of Economics. London: Macmillan.
- Marshall, Alfred, (1975). The Early Economic Writings of Alfred Marshall, Edited by J. K. Whitaker. New York: Free Press.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Capital, Volumes One, Two & Three. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Meek, Ronald, L. (1977). Smith, Marx and After. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Menger, C. (1871, 1950). Principles of Economics. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.



- O'Brien, Denis, P. and Presley, John, R., (Editors) (1981). Pioneers of Modern Economics in Britain. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books.
- Parsons, Talcott (1982). "Wants and Activities in Marshall," in John Cunningham Wood (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.
- Parsons, Talcott, (1982). "Economics and Sociology: Marshall in Relation to the Thought of his Time", in John Cunningham Wood (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.
- Schumpeter, Joseph, A. (1954). History of Economic Analysis. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walras, (1874, 1954). Elements of Pure Economics. Homewood, IL: Richard D Irwin Inc. Translated by W. Jaffe. (1926, Elements d'Economie Politique Pure (Theorie de la Richesse Sociale), 5th edition, Paris and Lausanne).
- Wood, John Cunningham (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.

CHAPTER 5

MARXIST/FEMINISM: THE REPLACEMENT OF CLASS BY GENDER

In order for Marxism to prove useful as a revolutionary weapon for women, we have to encounter it in its existing form and fashion it to fit our particular oppression. This means extending it into areas in which men have been unable to take it by distilling it through the particularities of our own experience (Sheila Rowbotham, 1974, p. 45)

The international eruption of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought a new wave of women into the orbit of Marxist thought. It was a strange meeting of two very different experiences and traditions, both of which claimed to speak for each other but which never seemed able to achieve a conversation based on shared understanding. The relationship between Marxism and feminism is, of course, ripe for analysis in the metaphorical terms of love and hate between women and men: an approach best exemplified by Hartmann's account of "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" (1979). Some feminists proclaimed women as a revolutionary class opposed to men (Delphy, 1984); some Marxists asserted that women's oppression was subsidiary to that of the working class and could be explained by the nature of capitalism.

The feminist tradition within Marxist thought had been largely forgotten and ignored. Socialist-feminist women were subject to ridicule and abuse by men in leftist organizations (Mitchell, 1971). The particularity of women's experience of

their own oppression had been hidden and invisible ("the problem without a name" described by Friedan in the 1960s). The emergence of a new shared consciousness in the women's movement occurred in ways that were outside the forms of discourse and ways of thinking of traditional Marxist theory and socialist political activity.

The reinterpretation of Marxist economic thought by the recent feminist movement is to be found in theories concerned with understanding the oppression of women as a totality. The issues of economics are important but subsidiary. Our study of Smith, Marx, and Marshall (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) started from the opposite perspective: economists' theories of gender differences were found within their major concern with the economic totality. This replacement of the primary concern of the theory mirrors our interpretation of how the feminist theory has dealt with the Marxist economic concepts: the basic concern with class has been replaced by that of gender. Our purpose in this chapter, however, is not to explain the development of feminist theory in general, but to evaluate its specific development of the Marxist understanding of economic gender differences. If we searched for gender in Smith, Marx, and Marshall, here we search for economics in the Marxist/feminist theories of women's oppression.

## Marx's Contradictory Legacy to Feminism

In analyzing Marx's theories, we outlined two conflicting lines of thought regarding gender differences and the economic and social position of women (see Chapter Three). One thought was that the evolution of economic and social development resulted in the elimination of gender differences: capitalist economy would use the labor of women equivalently to men, which, in turn, would eradicate traditional patriarchal relationships in the family and society as a whole. Corresponding to this historical tendency, the basic structure of Marx's economic concepts do not refer to gender differences.

Contradictory to this line of thought was Marx's second line of thought: factory machine production did eliminate natural physiological differences between the labor-power of women and men,<sup>1</sup> but resulted not in the equivalent employment of women and men, but in the displacement of men by women and children. Instead of women receiving the same wages as men, women were preferentially employed because their labor was cheaper. The value of women's labor-power was inherently lower than that of men. Instead of the technological

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Marx, factory machine production at least removed those physiological gender differences associated with average differences of muscular strength between women and men; Marx does not comment here on the continued natural gender differences with regard to childbirth and the implications that domestic childcare had for women's economic participation.

progress of capitalist factory production equalizing the value of labor-power on an individualistic basis--regardless of gender--women were paid less than men. Marx's theory of the value of labor-power, however, explicitly excluded gender differences from the way in which the value of the commodity labor-power was formed. Yet, paradoxically, Marx also maintained that the traditional value of labor-power was assumed to be that of an adult male wage--the family wage--which was expected also to support a wife and family.

The legacy of Marx to recent feminist thought is therefore contradictory and confusing. It is also a legacy filtered through other Marxist theories of the nature of women's oppression and their specific economic situations. The process of filtration tended to by-pass the complexity of Marx's ideas on gender differences and to simplify the problem in the direction of one side of his ideas: the argument that women's social position in capitalist society would tend to become equal to that of men, because their labor-power was equivalently exploited in capitalist relations of production.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Given that Marx's thought on economic gender differences is contradictory and paradoxical, it may seem pedantic to criticize later Marxists for their simplifications. However, the one-sided focus of interpretation on the equalization of gender differences with capitalist development results in a distortion of Marx's thinking. Without seeking to rehabilitate a dogma, we find it useful to dwell on the complexity of the issue as it appears in Marx's writings and to move forward on the basis of that complexity.

The genderless concepts of Marxist economics reflect what appeared to Marx to be the crucial structure of the capitalist economy. We concluded that, for Marx, this structure was not fundamentally organized in terms of gender differences, however important such differences appear in the detailed social relations of this type of economy and society. For the feminists, the question has become: how useful is such an approach for an understanding of the oppression of women? Our own question must be: how useful is such an approach for understanding economic gender differences?

The consideration of gender differences was not precluded by Marx's economics, neither was it facilitated. Rather, a hierarchy of social relations of inequality was proposed, in which class divisions on the basis of property ownership of means of production was privileged over the inequalities and distinctions of social relations associated with gender differences. The feminist tradition in Marxist thought has attempted to reconcile the disparity between a genderless economics and the historical circumstances of economic gender differences. The first development in this direction was the work of Engels.

#### Engels: The Origins of Feminism in Marxism

Engels used Marx' and his own theory of history and social change to develop an historical anthropology of the

family (1972).<sup>3</sup> The oppression of women was considered through an analysis of the family.

Engels argued that inequality between the sexes was the first form of oppression and antagonism in human society and was based on the relative physical weakness of the female of the human species. Patriarchy, according to Engels, had arisen on the basis of the paired monogamous family system, which had established the certainty of paternity upon which the patriarchal system of power depended. Knowledge of paternity, combined with male primogeniture of inheritance, enabled the establishment of secure property rights and their transmission through families to male heirs. Women became private servants of men through the institution of monogamous marriage. This was what Engels called "the world historical defeat of the female sex" (Engels, 1971, p. 68), the end of prehistorical matriarchy. Women became second-class citizens. The patriarchy was integrated into the rise of the state and the growth of civil society during the feudal and early capitalist periods.

Engels' (and Morgan's) analysis of the social relations of pre-capitalist "primitive" societies showed them to have been organized predominantly around gender differences associated with kinship relations and the family. With the development of feudal and capitalist societies, however,

---

<sup>3</sup> The anthropology used by Engels came from Morgan (1974) and is now widely regarded as inaccurate.



Engels argued that the social relations associated with gender differences were displaced in importance by those of property ownership of means of production. Property ownership remained associated with gender differences in certain respects--as in the patterns of male primogeniture and the economic dependence of women upon their husbands.

This trend of social evolution, which displaced the importance of gender differences as a basis of social relations, was in accord with Marx's own views on the historical development of forms of the division of labor, as we have seen in Chapter 3. Engels drew these tendencies to their logical conclusions for the relationship between the sexes: the age of capitalism signalled the end of the era of male domination,<sup>4</sup> "since large scale industry has transferred the woman from the home to the labour market and the factory, and makes her, often enough, the breadwinner of the family, the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation" (Engels, 1972, p. 77).

Women's entrance into the industrial labor force will ensure their liberation. Engels maintained that "the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded

---

<sup>4</sup>It remains unclear in Engels' writing whether or not women's liberation can be achieved before socialism. Women can enter social production in capitalism (which is his prerequisite for their liberation), but housekeeping and childcare remain privatized, so there remains a contradiction in the double burden assigned to women.

from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social, scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree" (Engels, 1971, p. 152).

Engels (and Marx) never make exactly clear how housework and childcare are to be accomplished when wives and mothers are all supposedly liberated by entering the capitalist labor market. They never explicitly suggest that men should do this work, or that it should be shared with women, or that it could be entirely taken over by the capitalist market. Women must either earn money wages and neglect their families, or vice versa. Engels notes that "when she (the proletarian woman) fulfills her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in public industry, she is not in a position to fulfil her family duties" (Engels, 1971, p. 81). The situation under socialism will be disarmingly simple: "Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry: the care and education of children becomes a public matter" (Engels, 1971, p. 83).

The individual family will be abolished as the economic unit of society, as all individuals, whether they are women or men, will each earn according to the value of their labor-power--a value that is not predetermined by natural

differences. Engels explains that "the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry . . . (which) demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished" (Engels, 1971, p. 82). The conditions in which patriarchy had arisen and was sustained were being destroyed by capitalism.

It is important to notice that Engels' analysis of patriarchy united the problem of gender differences and the issue of property rights: the patriarchy created the possibility of the secure establishment of property rights and thereby the basis for the rise of capitalist relations of production that required private ownership of means of production. The unequal status of women in relation to men was inscribed within the very basis of capitalist relations of production. Yet, the development of capitalism tended to destroy the basis of the gender inequality from which it had arisen. The auto-destructive power of capitalism reappears here in the guise of the removal of the basis of patriarchy by modern capitalist social relations.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>A recurrent theme of Marxist thought is the auto-destruction of capitalism--expressed in various forms as the contradiction between the forces and relations of production; the tendency for the rate of profit to fall; or, the genesis of political consciousness by the working class leading to revolution. Here, auto-destruction takes the form of capitalism devouring the patriarchy, its own father, so to speak. This kind of social parricide also entails a further contradiction: that between the social aspirations of women who have entered the labor market and their discovery of both discrimination and the double shift of domestic work and waged

We must also recognize that Engels' analysis of patriarchy, of the unequal status of women to men, did not suggest that this inequality was the basis for a class division. As Coward (1983) has analyzed, the key to Engels' argument here is that inequality associated with gender differences in the marriage relationship did not express an economic class division. The division of labor and the inequality between women and men in early forms of society did not amount to a class division between the sexes. Marriage was a unitary social relation between the sexes, and, as such, it could not be thought of as expressing an antagonistic class relationship.

Whatever the conflict between the idealized and the actual circumstances of the employment of women, Engels confirmed the Marxist tradition of insistence on the priority of class defined by relations of production outside the family over gender. This priority would not be overturned until the Marxist/feminists replaced class with gender in the 1970s.

### The Feminist Replacement of Class with Gender

A problem for the modern feminists working within the Marxist tradition has been the obvious tenacity of the inequality between women and men in capitalist economy and

---

labor. This contradiction is itself an example of Marx's idea of the reproduction of contradictions on new levels as the older ones are resolved.

society--whether women are of the working class or not. The entry of women into the labor force did not remove inequality; it was restructured into new forms. But this resistant inequality forms only part of the feminist understanding of the oppression of women. The traditional Marxists tended to see the cause and solution to inequality in terms of relations of production, or labor force participation; the feminists present a picture of gender antagonism that reaches far beyond the confines of the capitalist labor market.

In contrast to the civil rights and reformist orientation of the earlier feminist movements, the analysts of the modern women's movement question the whole foundation of social and economic organization in terms of the relations between women and men:

By giving expression to the hitherto silent frustrations of women who spend their lives in unrecognized labour in the home, who are helpless in pregnancy and childbirth without a man, who carry subordination within their souls from the earliest memory of childhood, this revolt has unleashed a new species of social passion (Rowbotham, 1974, p. xiv)

The most startling and yet obvious feminist reaction to the Marxist optimism regarding the equality of women and men in capitalism was to replace the whole established hierarchy of inequality between economic classes with one of gender differences. The Marxist concept of class, defined in terms

of ownership of means of production, has been replaced so that it is the antagonism between women and men that is seen to form the basis of the class division in capitalist society. This replacement has taken several distinct forms, which have their particular ways of relating to, or contradicting, the previously established Marxist economic and social categories.

An astounding array of theoretical invention of the relations between gender inequality and capitalism has emerged. Three ways that feminists have coped with the Marxist legacy in interpreting economic gender differences can be identified as broad categories.<sup>6</sup> First, the concept of patriarchy has been used to identify a realm of women's domestic or reproductive work that parallels, supports, and maintains the economic activity of capitalist production. The traditional Marxist focus on production has been redirected to the reproduction of capitalist social and economic relations and to the activity of women as unpaid domestic laborers. Second, the analysis of women's domestic work has provided an entrance into a way of reformulating the problem of the valuation of labor-power so that it

---

<sup>6</sup>There is now a large literature on feminist economics, and even on explicitly Marxist or socialist-feminist economics. The following arguments can only refer to major types of analysis in general terms. The focus is necessarily on the formulations of the nature of economic gender differences by means of the development of Marxist feminist analysis.

acknowledges gender differences. The work of women in the home has been analyzed as a domestic mode of production that affects the value of labor-power and that has its own specific relationships to the capitalist mode of production. Third, the family has been analyzed as the center of ideologies that form the gender differences between individuals, as the site of cultural forces that constitute women and men as gendered beings. The question of biological differences between women and men, especially women's ability to bear children, has been re-considered in terms of a relationship between what is natural and what is social.

These three theoretical links between Marxism and feminism structure the way in which this new discourse has conceptualized economic gender differences, the ways in which women and men enter into the social relationships of the economy. In examining these links in the following sections of this chapter, our concern is to evaluate whether the new approaches have resolved the confusions and paradoxes of Marx's legacy to feminism. How successful has been the attempt to infuse Marx's economic concepts with gender? How is it possible for the value of labor-power to be re-formulated so that it can acknowledge gender differences?

#### Patriarchal Domestic Production and Capitalism

Delphy (1984) has been the most explicit in appropriating the structure of Marx's analysis of modes of

production and applying it to the analysis of women's oppression.<sup>7</sup> For Delphy, women are subordinated to men in a patriarchal domestic mode of production (Delphy, 1984, p. 18). The unpaid labor of women in housework and childcare is appropriated by husbands through the marriage contract. Women constitute a class defined by their common oppression as a social group in relation to men.

Delphy argues that there are, therefore, two modes of production in capitalist society: the domestic mode in which women produce goods and services under specific relations of production and the capitalist industrial mode as analyzed by Marx. The work of women in the home does not produce value in the Marxist sense, as it is outside the market exchange process. She argues that this work performed by women is only not paid for when it is done within the context of the family (as such services as childcare, food preparation, or washing clothes, for example, are all also paid for in the market). The fact that women's domestic labor is excluded from exchange results not from the nature of what they produce, but because women do it privately in the family. Thus, what is now called housework is that work to which the unpaid labor of the housewife has been limited. Even when women work outside the home, Delphy argues that often their wages are appropriated by their husbands and that women must

---

<sup>7</sup>Delphy's article "The Main Enemy" was first published in 1970 and circulated in England in 1974.



still fulfil their "family duties" as well.

Many other Marxist/feminists also identified the domestic work of women as a whole sector of production distinct from (although related to) capitalist relations of production. Household labor became central for a Marxist explanation of women's oppression. Their analyses of this noncapitalist production, the work of women, appeared to offer "an understanding of the material basis for the oppression of women in capitalist society" (Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977, p. 16).

By identifying domestic work either as a mode of production or as contributing to the valuation of the commodity of human labor-power, Marxist/feminists were able to transfer the traditional categories of Marxist analysis onto this domain of women's work. They saw women's oppression in terms similar to those of the exploitation of the working class, as governed by specific relations of production and susceptible to analysis in terms of Marx's theory of value. According to Himmelweit and Mohun (1977, p. 18), as a mode of production, women's domestic labor therefore had a material basis--and by having a material basis, according to the Marxist view, it was "not merely a cultural phenomenon."

By analyzing women's domestic labor as a mode of production and giving women's oppression a material basis in the Marxist sense, Marxists could treat the problem more

seriously--because according to the hierarchy of determination of social "levels," it is the economic base of the society that determines, in the last instance, all the other social levels of ideology, politics, culture--the superstructures (see, for example, Althusser, 1974). At least in the early formulations of Marxist/feminism their concern was to insist on the economic functionality or necessity of women's oppression for the capitalist economy, so that they could conceptualize it in economic and functionalist terms. Later reactions away from these kinds of reductions rehabilitated, in a sense, the importance of culture and ideology for understanding the nature of women's oppression.

By interpreting women's oppression in these terms, the Marxist/feminists avoided a fundamental conflict between the means of analysis of Marxism and feminism. Nevertheless, the subsuming of women's oppression by the Marxist/feminists under the rubric of patriarchal domestic labor understood as either a mode of production in itself, or as contributing to the value of labor-power in capitalism, was a project fraught with difficulty.

As Barrett (1980) has commented, we have difficulty interpreting the relationship between the patriarchal/domestic and the capitalist modes of production. How can we explain patriarchy as a system of male power external to capitalism, yet which is also somehow functional

for capitalism? Why are male domination, female unpaid domestic labor, or the culture of gender differences, necessarily functional for the development or reproduction of the capitalist economy? Why is it necessarily in the interests of capital to pay lower wages to women and have them at least partly supported by husbands, who are then supposedly sometimes paid the breadwinner's wage? Why are women and not men always associated with unpaid domestic labor? How is the class position of women to be defined--in terms of their position in relations of production outside the home, that is, as workers or capitalists, or in terms of their relationship to a husband, that is, as housewives and mothers? No one has specified exactly how the social structures of patriarchy and capitalism inter-relate in terms of the economic roles and status of women.

Furthermore, many theorists often assert that the very concept of patriarchy is a monolithic determining structure that is not explained. Adlam questioned how useful it is to posit "an ultimate antagonism between the sexes whereby men's interests are served and women's denied," saying this occurs when "the categories of 'men' and 'women' are constituted and function differently at different points in society, . . . 'woman' is not always constituted in opposition to 'man' and (that) the two cannot always be conceptualized as a single opposition always functioning to oppress all women according to the same principle" (Adlam, 1979, p. 99).

Marxist/feminists found a way to relate patriarchy to capitalism and avoid asserting two parallel modes of production (and thereby also avoid the problem of theorizing their interconnection) by subordinating the social relations of patriarchy to those of capitalism. McDonough and Harrison (1978) argued that the form of patriarchal social relations within the family is governed by the historical form of capitalist relations of production. The class position of women as either workers or members of the bourgeoisie would limit and condition the form of the patriarchy they would experience within the social relations of the family.

Harrison (1974) specified the relation between domestic and capitalist modes, defining housework as a "client" mode of production to the dominant capitalist mode. As with Delphy's conceptualization of dual modes of production, Harrison does not show how the two modes are inter-related. Himmelweit and Mohun argue--if housework is client to capitalism, why is not capitalism also client to housework? In other words, the dynamic of a relationship between domestic labor and capitalism remained unclear.

Barrett (1980) proposed the concept of the family-household system as an historical institution mediating patriarchal and capitalist social relations, on both an ideological and economic level. The institution traditionally depended on the husband-father receiving a male breadwinner's wage for its primary economic support. Thus,

the domestic-based kinship systems served as ideological centers through which a culture of gender differences is developed. They also serve as the point of intersection between patriarchal and capitalist social relations in the way that women perform unpaid domestic labor for men (and children) and are also recruited for subservient positions in the capitalist labor market.

Other Marxist/feminists (Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978, Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977, Humphries, 1977) have continued to apply Marxist economic concepts to the specific domain of women's unpaid domestic work, without asserting that such work constitutes an entire mode of production that parallels or serves the capitalist mode of production. They have also avoided using the concept of patriarchy as a social system, but have instead looked for specific characteristics of domestic work and its relationships to capitalism.

The approach used, for example by Kuhn and Wolpe (1978), was to define domestic labor as the production of use-values outside of capitalist relations of production.<sup>8</sup> For some, this was seen as a vestige of pre-capitalist forms of production, in which use-values were produced by family units of production for their own immediate consumption, as opposed to production for exchange which was later re-located from the home to external sites such as the factory. Kuhn and

---

<sup>8</sup> Much of the following account of the varieties of theories of domestic labor was elaborated by Himmelweit and Mohun (1977).

Wolpe (1978) analyzed the oppression of women in terms of the production of use-values in the home by women and the production of exchange-values in capitalist relations of production outside the home by men. The problem with their approach is that they failed to specify why such domestic work should be associated with women or that it has anything to do with the reproduction of labour-power. Nor did they explain why an obsolete pre-capitalist mode of production should remain vital work for women in households in modern capitalism.

A second group exemplified by Himmelweit and Mohun (1977) began by defining domestic labor as "that labour that directly maintains and reproduces labour-power." They explicitly identified domestic labor as women's work for two reasons. First, because it refers to the work of mothers in childcare (related to the biological fact that women bear children),<sup>9</sup> and, second, because housework is defined as the work that housewives do in supporting other living laborers (husbands as well as children as future laborers). More than merely the production of use-values in a domestic setting, women's domestic labor is the work of reproducing laborers. Such work therefore indirectly supports the creation of the commodity of human labor-power, which is only

---

<sup>9</sup>A "fact" that raises a host of theoretical difficulties for Marxist feminist theory, problems we shall examine in terms of theorizing the relationship between the natural and the social.

finally consumed in the process of capitalist production outside the home.

Domestic labor, understood as the reproduction of labor-power, was therefore internal and integral to the needs of the capitalist mode of production. The problem was returned to Marx's own analysis of the nature of the commodity of human labor-power and especially to the problem of the method of its creation and valuation. The production of human labor-power became "the material foundation for the existence of domestic labour as a category, different from and equal in status to the category of wage labour" (Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977, p. 22).

Domestic labor had been invisible to Marx, because Marx analyzed the problem of labor-power from the perspective of capital (Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977; Humphries, 1977). Marx looked at the consumption of labor-power by capital rather than the production of labor-power by domestic labor, because it was this feature that, after all, defined the nature of the mode of production that dominated the economy and society he was examining. The actual ways in which labor-power was produced and reproduced outside capitalist relations of production were unexamined. It was through the examination of this reproduction of human labor-power that Marxist/feminists were able to introduce gender differences within the Marxist concept of value of labor-power and at the same time to theorize a material basis for women's

oppression.

### Gender Differences in the Value of Labor-Power

As we saw in Chapter 3, Marx did not resolve the contradiction between the genderless formulation of his theory of the value of labor-power and his recognition of gender differences in the value of individual's labor-power. Humphries (1977) has described this contradiction in terms of the invisibility of the working class family in Marx's economic analysis. Marx's theory of the value of labor-power abstracted from the activity of the working class family in producing goods for its own consumption and in helping to create the value of labor-power, which its members sold on the market for wages. As Humphries remarks, Marx treated the working class family like neoclassical economics treats the firm, "as a black box whose inner workings are simultaneously neglected and mystified" (Humphries, 1977, p. 243). Humphries states that

Marx abstracts from the problem of domestic labor by dealing with a situation in which all workers are engaged in capitalist production and perform no domestic labour whatsoever. No use-values are produced within the household and the capitalist sector provides everything required to replace the labour-power used up in production. . . . Wages are used to purchase a subsistence bundle of commodities whose "consumption" mysteriously leads to the replacement of used-up labour-power. (Humphries, 1977, p. 243)



This abstraction also meant that Marx ignored the relationship between the value of labour-power and the employment structure of the family, because he finally based his analysis on the assumption that the social norm was the male adult worker supporting a wife and children (see Chapter 3). The implications of women's wage labor in relation to their domestic work in the family context were never drawn out for the gender differences in the value of labor-power.<sup>10</sup>

Himmelweit and Mohun (1977) argued that if the focus of Marxism was moved from the relationship of labor to capital to the relationship between domestic work and the production of labor-power, the material basis to women's oppression could be recognized and made visible. They suggested looking at labor-power from the perspective of its own production and, in so doing, examining the visible relationships of economic gender differences.

Starting from Seccombe's earlier analysis (1974), Himmelweit and Mohun argued that the family as a unit of reproduction of labor-power is dependent on inputs from the capitalist mode of production (wages and consumer goods). Seccombe argued that the domestic labor of women was

---

<sup>10</sup> Humphries goes on to make an argument that it was therefore in the political interests of the working class during the period of industrialization to defend the traditional family system of a male breadwinner's wage supporting female domestic labor.

"congealed" into the value of labor of other family members when it was exchanged in the market. But, as Himmelweit and Mohun argued, domestic labor was outside the limits of capitalist market exchange; therefore, it could not be valued precisely as part of the commodity labor-power. Domestic labor could not be both private and part of the social process of valuation of labor-power. Nevertheless, the Marxist/feminist examination of domestic labor revealed the duality of women's position. As both unpaid domestic workers and wage laborers, women were in the middle of the process of valuation of labor-power that operated between the family and capitalist relations of production. Himmelweit and Mohun (1977, p. 24) concluded that "the extent of domestic labour and the number of wage-labourers in the family are among the historical and moral elements which enter into the determination of the value of labour-power. The latter therefore depends in contradictory manner both upon capitalist relations of production and upon the economic structure of the family." Although domestic labor cannot be calculated as a direct effect upon the value of labor, its indirect effects can be theorized.

Harrison (1974), for example, took Marx at face value and asserted that the value of labor is simply the total value of the subsistence goods required by the adult male breadwinner. The domestic labor of women in the home is then a form of "surplus labor," which is appropriated by the

husband in addition to the value of his labor-power as measured in consumption goods sold on the market. The effect of this domestic surplus labor, however, is to enable the capitalist to pay wages below the value of labor-power. He assumed that it is "cheaper" for capital to have housewives produce use-values in the home than to have the equivalent goods produced by capitalist production as consumption goods sold on the market. However, he remained unclear as to how a comparison between the value of domestic labor and its equivalent in market production can be made, given that domestic labor is, by definition, outside the scope of market valuation.

Beechey (1977) tried to solve this dilemma of comparing incommensurate quantities (domestic labor and commodity production) by conceptualizing the impact of women's unpaid domestic labor on the valuation of both women's and men's labor-power as mediated through the family context. She argues that women's unpaid domestic labor necessitates a modification of Marx's theory of the valuation of labor-power. Domestic labor contributes to the value of labor-power as a commodity, yet Marx defined the value of labor-power only in terms of the commodities necessary for its consumption. Marx neglected the input of use-values from domestic labor. Furthermore, Marx also neglected to analyze the implications of his assertion of the adult male breadwinner wage as a social norm for the valuation of

women's labor-power.

Beechey takes up Marx's argument that the employment of women in capitalist industry will tend to reduce the average value of labor-power--because instead of being based on a male breadwinner's wage, sufficient to support a wife and family, the new value of labor-power will be based on individualized units of labor-power. Her reasoning has several implications for gender differences in the value of labor-power.

First, women's labor-power has a lower value than men's historically because it has traditionally been less invested in as human capital--it is less skilled. The deskilling of capitalist production therefore encourages the employment of this "cheaper" form of labor-power. This results in a lowering of the value of the average labor-power in employment.

Second, given that many women remain partly dependent on their husbands for economic support, and in so far as a male breadwinner's wage continues to exist, she argues that part of the costs of reproduction of the value of women's labor-power remains a responsibility of their husbands. Such married women can therefore be profitably employed by capitalists and paid wages below what the value of their labor-power would have been had they not been at least partly supported by their husbands. In this sense, such women are like semi-proletarianized workers and their wages are below

the value of their labor-power.

Molyneux (1979), however, argued against the idea that unpaid domestic labor performed by women serves to lower the overall average value of labor-power by "cheapening" its costs of reproduction. Her argument is, again, because housework is outside the capitalist exchange system, insofar as it is private and not performed in exchange for wages, it is impossible to calculate the effect of such work on the value of labor-power. Furthermore, the actual performance of domestic work will depend on whether the market prices of equivalent goods or services are high or low: "no invariant relationship between domestic labour and the value of labor power can be assumed" (Molyneux, 1979, pp.10-11). Only in the case where market prices of consumption goods were high can we say that housewives' labor necessarily served to lower the value of labor-power in general. We cannot therefore assert that women's unpaid domestic work is necessarily a requirement of capitalist relations of production.

Folbre (1982) took issue with the idea that housework is immune from the demands of efficiency associated with market work, suggesting that families do indeed maximize their time and resources in distributing housework, childcare, and waged work between their members, and in so doing are implicitly aware of the relative values of family members' contributions (this argument is considered further in Chapter Six). Furthermore, the changing relative productivity of housework

versus waged work for women and families has led to women's increased labor-force participation and the consequent decline in fertility rates.

Moreover, the adjustment to Marx's theory of the valuation of labor-power by taking into account the unpaid work of women in the home did not, in itself, give an adequate explanation of why it is women that are doing this work and not men. It was this problem that Marxist/feminists have recently analyzed in terms of the relationship between the natural and the social.

#### The Relationship Between the Natural and the Social

The fact that it is women and not men doing unpaid domestic labor remains as the Achilles' heel of the Marxist/feminist attempt to theorize women's oppression in terms of pre-existing Marxist categories. Himmelweit argued that Marxists have so far failed to acknowledge that the specific quality of domestic labor as women's work cannot be entirely reduced to Marxist economic categorization:

domestic labour has some specific characteristics, crucially, that it is nearly always performed by women, which cannot be captured simply by talking of ways in which it is or is not being taken over by capitalist production. . . . the mistake was to concentrate on what could be encapsulated in existing Marxist categories when precisely what was needed was to lay aside those categories, in order that others appropriate to the analysis of the family be developed (Himmelweit, 1984, p. 171)

The specific quality of domestic labor that has associated it with women and that has remained more resistant than any other to the encroachment of capitalist relations of production, is the role of women in bearing children. Women's domestic labor is not merely the production of use values that can serve to lower the costs of reproduction of labor-power on a daily level--all the cleaning, cooking, and mending--it is also the production of babies and the generational reproduction of labor-power. In a capitalist economy, many aspects of the reproduction of labor-power can be commodified, but responsibility for the birth and parenting of children must still remain outside of capitalist relations of production and exchange to a large extent.<sup>11</sup> This has remained a women's and a familial responsibility. According to Himmelweit (1984, p. 174) "the family continues in existence as a unit separate from other units of production, not because of its role in the production of things, but because it is an essential part, under current social arrangements of the way in which labour power is

---

<sup>11</sup>The recent technological breakthroughs in artificial conception and genetic engineering suggest that even this last vestige of domestic labor could finally become part of capitalist production. This brave new world was in fact called for by Firestone's radical feminism (1970), who argued that the class struggle between the sexes was based on the biological bondage of women in childbirth. Women's liberation could only be achieved by overcoming this biological restriction through technological means.

produced."

In the early "domestic labor debate," Marxist/feminists avoided the consideration of the biological role of women in childbirth as a major aspect of the relationship between domestic work and capitalism. They were understandably concerned to avoid falling into biologically deterministic explanations of social relationships, which have for so long been used to justify the subordination of women. The lack of consideration of this important subject was tantamount to a taboo. It seems that Marxist/feminists were not prepared to risk an explicit acknowledgement of women's role in childbirth and its relationship to economic gender differences. The concept of the reproduction of social relationships was conflated with biological reproduction of the species (see Edholm, 1977).

There was also another reason for its avoidance: the transposition of the Marxist economic categories onto domestic labor worked best when this activity was seen as the production of use-values equivalent to the production of commodities in the market, that is, housework as a mode of production of special types of goods and services. The use by feminists of Marxist economic concepts to comprehend the intergenerational and gender-specific aspects of domestic labor, such as childbirth and parenting, was much less effective.

More recently, the impasse experienced by the Marxist



feminists of trying to subsume domestic labor and family relationships within pre-existing Marxist categories has led them to a reconsideration of biological sexual difference and the social construction of gender differences. The role of women in childbirth is now acknowledged as a fundamental consideration in understanding both the social organization of women's oppression and economic gender differences.

The Marxist/feminist debate has returned to what had perhaps been its unacknowledged centerpiece: the relationship between biological sexual difference and the genderless Marxist concepts of the capitalist economy. Brenner and Ramas (1984, p. 387) ask "how is it possible, given the capitalist drive to accumulate and use up labour power, that women are left out of capitalist production and remain in the home to the extent that they do?" They asked this question as part of a wider consideration of the attempt by Marxists to understand the nature of women's oppression. They argue that the "domestic labor debate" reduced the problem of gender differences to a need of the capitalist mode of production to reproduce labor cheaply, but in so doing, failed to account adequately for the fact that women and not men undertook this work. Neither did Marxist/feminists prove through this debate that such domestic work cheapened the value of labor, because they could not compare nonmarket and market values of production. They could not find concepts to deal with the concrete

quality of gender differences associated with domestic labor. The limited success of the Marxist/feminist development of a theory through this debate was to focus on the duality of women's roles as distributed through a family context, which affected the ways in which women and men entered the labor market.

The other tendency that Brenner and Ramas criticize is the analysis of women's oppression only in terms of ideology or patriarchal culture, thereby removing it from a material basis or from any specific historical determination. In the place of either reducing the problem of women's oppression to domestic labor, or to a question of ideology or culture, Brenner and Ramas propose that Marxism should be considered as a means of analysis that can refer to the relationships between different social structures, and not merely to the issue of economic production.

The alternative they propose begins from what they argue is a material basis for the oppression of women in capitalism. They turn the focus from domestic labor and ideology to the biological facts of reproduction. Following Timpanaro (1975), they insist that such biological facts do not in themselves determine social relations, but must be analyzed in terms of a relationship between the natural and the social. They reformulate the question as: How do capitalist relations of production incorporate the biological sexual difference involved in childbirth, and to what extent

does this difference condition women's participation in economic life? They propose "to analyze the development of the sexual division of labour in capitalism and the formation of the family-household system within the context of the contradiction between the capitalist dynamics of production and the exigencies of biological reproduction" (Brenner and Ramas, 1984, p. 48).

Brenner and Ramas argue that there is a contradiction between the tendency for capitalist accumulation to pull women into the labor force (thereby laying the groundwork for the material independence of women from men) and the facts of childbirth and of women's responsibility for childcare. These biological facts and social tasks of childcare associated with women have "posed a significant barrier to the fullest development of (the) tendency" of capitalism to draw women into the labor force and have conditioned the forms of their participation in that labor force.

In terms of the economics of capitalism, Brenner and Ramas' conclusion is simple. Pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, outlays for maternity leave, and nursing facilities and childcare posed significant costs to capital without comparative increases in productivity to be gained from hiring female laborers if and when equivalent male laborers were unavailable. Childcare has generally remained a privatized domestic responsibility, and given the weight of cultural tradition, its responsibility has fallen on women

and not on men. This responsibility, in turn, has affected the competitiveness of women in the labor market. "Given the historical condition under which the system emerged, the forces and relations of capitalist production imparted a coercive charge to biological reproduction" (Brenner and Ramas, 1984, p. 53).

### How Far can Feminism Stretch Marxism?

Feminists have sought to explain the nature of women's oppression. They have turned to the confusing and contradictory legacy of Marxism as an aid to understanding, even though aware that much of women's experience of oppression was far removed from the form or substance of traditional Marxism. The admixture of feminist consciousness with the Marxist concepts of economy and society has been both exhilarating and problematic. Within this unusual combination of feminism and Marxism, we have tried to elaborate an emerging understanding of the nature of economic gender differences--the ways in which women and men enter into the social relations of the economy.

From our analysis of Marx (in Chapter 3), we know that complex difficulties are associated with Marx's interpretations of economic gender differences. These are centered around two opposing lines of thought that foresaw the elimination of gender differences as well as their exploitation in capitalist relations of production.

Furthermore, the question of gender differences in the theory of the valuation of labor-power was left ambiguous and unresolved.

The feminist starting point for this intertwining with Marx's legacy was the work of Engels. For the modern Marxist/feminists, however, Engels' vision of the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism was too optimistic and incomplete. Engels had patriarchy defeated by capitalism, at least for the working class.

Feminists were well aware that the defeat of patriarchy by capitalism had not yet occurred. Engels' ideas were at best an exaggeration of trends that encouraged female participation in the labor force and the partial economic independence of women from men. He ignored precisely what these theorists had to contend with: the weight of culture and ideology in fixing unequal gender differences in society and economy, in housework and waged work, and the continuing responsibility of women for childrearing and unpaid domestic work within a privatized domestic environment.

We suggested that the feminist reaction to the Marxist legacy was a variety of replacements of the traditional Marxist hierarchy of inequality: class was replaced by gender. These replacements represented different ways in which gender inequality and capitalism were theoretically inter-related.

The first replacement took the form of identifying

women's unpaid domestic work as a patriarchal mode of production or activity in which labor-power is reproduced. Marxist/feminists could not express the linkage between patriarchy and capitalism satisfactorily. On the one hand, the system of male power did not translate into capitalist relations of production as described by Marx; on the other hand, Marx's theory of value based on market exchange could not account for the work of the housewife. Neither could they show that women's subordination in the family was functional or necessary for capitalist economy. Finally, although the theory of patriarchy can assert a system of male power over women, Marxists cannot specify why it should be women as opposed to men that are always performing unpaid domestic labor.

The second replacement of class by gender took the form of the reformulation of the theory of the value of labor-power by the consideration of gender differences based on the role of women as domestic laborers. This project came closest to overcoming some of the paradoxes in Marx's own analysis of the relationship between gender and the valuation of labor-power. By ignoring the theory of patriarchy and focussing on the relationship between women's domestic labor and the production of labor-power within the family, Marxist/feminists have shown how women occupied a dualistic and contradictory role in capitalist economy. Women were in the middle of the process of valuation of labor-power that

operated between the family and capitalist relations of production. Even though this inter-relationship between value, labor, and women's role in the family was indicated, it remained extraordinarily difficult for Marxist/feminists to develop into a coherent theory. Again, they came against the unresolved problem of measuring or accounting for the relationship between unpaid domestic work and the value of labor-power in the market. They also could not explain through their reformulation of the value of labor-power what was the fundamental nature of the gender differences involved in the process: again, why was it women and not men who performed unpaid domestic labor?

The third replacement of class by gender took the form of the analysis of the relationship between women's role in childbirth and capitalist relations of production, the relationship between the natural and the social. Marxist/feminists asserted that the concept of domestic labor represented two distinct activities with different implications for Marxist conceptualization. The first activity was the work of the housewife in the daily reproduction of labor. This was seen to be parallel to the capitalist production of consumption goods. It was therefore amenable to analysis by Marxist economic categories. The second activity was the work of the housewife in childbearing and the generational reproduction of labor-power, which was seen to be more fundamentally gender specific (only women

have babies) and was less capable of conceptualization by Marxist economic categories. Nevertheless, Marxist/feminists saw the relationship between biological childbirth and capitalist relations of production as a contradiction between the dynamics of production and the exigencies of biology. This contradiction in the relationship between the natural and the social served to subordinate the place of women in the labor market. Although we find it useful to acknowledge the real effects of the social relations of biological childbirth in structuring women's economic activity, Marxist/feminists have not clarified exactly how this operates in given historical circumstances. The facts of childbirth may indeed be biological, but the ways in which they are socially embedded will vary, a variation that cannot be explained by the assertion of a contradiction between the dynamic of capitalism and the biology of childbirth.

In seeking to understand economic gender differences through the feminist analysis of women's oppression, using the tools of a reinterpreted Marxism, we have looked at the inter-relationship between women's subordination and capitalism. This linkage was necessarily focused on relationships between an economic structure (the capitalist mode of production) and a wider social context in which women worked (the domestic domain). Our focus on this relationship between market production and the household/family meant that we did not confront in depth the actual detailed positioning



of women within the labor market. In establishing the relationships between the domestic and the productive realms, Marxist/feminists have not fully analyzed the particularities of women's waged labor. They have asserted rather than explained the actual patterns of economic inequality between women and men in capitalist relations of production. Nevertheless, their establishment of a series of ways of thinking about the relationships between women's productive and reproductive roles has laid the groundwork for a wider Marxist-feminist analysis of economic gender differences.

## REFERENCES

- Adlam, D (1979). "Review, the Case Against Capitalist Patriarchy," M/F A Feminist Journal, no. 3. pp. 83-102.
- Althusser, Louis (1974). Reading Capital. London: New Left Books.
- Barrett, Michelle (1980). Women's Oppression Today, Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis. London: Verso.
- Barrett, Michelle (1984). "Rethinking Women's Oppression: A Reply to Brenner and Ramas," New left Review, No. 146, pp. 123-128.
- Bebel, August (1904, 1971). Woman Under Socialism. New York: Schocken Books.
- Beechey, Veronica (1977). "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production," Capital and Class, No. 3, pp. 45-66.
- Benston, Margaret (1969). "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," Monthly Review, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 13-27.
- Brenner, Johanna and Ramas, Maria (1984). "Rethinking Women's Oppression," New Left Review, No. 144, March/April, pp. 33-77.
- Cousins, Mark (1978). "Material Arguments and Feminism", M/F A Feminist Journal, No. 2. pp. 62-70.
- Coward, Rosalind (1983). Patriarchal Precedents, Sexuality and Social Relations. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Delphy, Christine (1984). Close to Home, A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Edholm, Felicity, O. Harriss, and K. Young (1977). "Conceptualising Women," Critique of Anthropology, pp. 101-130.
- Engels, Frederick (1972). The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. New York: Pathfinder.
- Firestone, Shulamuth (1970). The Dialectic of Sex. New York: Morrow.

- Folbre, Nancy (1982). "Exploitation Comes Home: A Critique of the Marxian Theory of Family Labour," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 6. pp. 317-329.
- Friedan, Betty (1963). The Feminine Mystique. New York: Norton.
- Gamarikow, Eva, D. H. J. Morgan, J. Purvis, and D. E. Taylorson (Editors) (1983). Gender, Class, and Work. London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd.
- Gould, Carol C., and M. W. Wartofsky, (Editors) (1976). Women and Philosophy, Towards a Theory of Liberation. New York: Perigree Books.
- Harrison, John (1974). "The Political Economy of Housework," Bulletin of Conference of Socialist Economists, Vol. III, no. 1.
- Hartmann, Heidi (1979). "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," Capital and Class, Vol. 8, pp. 1-13.
- Himmelweit, Susan and S. Mohun (1977). "Domestic Labour and Capital," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 1, pp. 15-31.
- Himmelweit, Susan (1984). "The Real Dualism of Sex and Class," Review of Radical Political Economics, Special Issue: The Political Economy of Women, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 167-184.
- Humphries, Jane (1977). "Class Struggle and the Resistance of the Working Class Family," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 1, pp. 241-258.
- Kuhn, Annette, and A. Wolpe (1978). Feminism and Materialism, Women and Modes of Production. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Capital. Volume One. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- McDonough, R., and Harrison R. (1978). "Patriarchy and Relations of Production," in Feminism and Materialism, Women and Modes of Production, edited by A. Kuhn, and A. Wolpe. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Millet, Kate (1970). Sexual Politics. New York: Doubleday.

- Mitchell, Juliet (1971). Woman's Estate. New York: Random House.
- Molyneux, Maxine (1979). "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate," New Left Review, No. 116, pp. 3-27.
- Morgan, L. H. (1974). Ancient Society. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.
- Review of Radical Political Economics (1984). "The Political Economy of Women." Vol. 16, No. 1. Spring.
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1974). Woman's Consciousness, Man's World. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1974). Women, Resistance and Revolution. New York: Vintage Books.
- Secombe, Wally (1974). "The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism," New Left Review, No. 89. pp. 3-24.
- Secombe, Wally (1975). "Domestic Labour--Reply to Critics," New Left Review, No. 94. pp. 85-96.
- Siltanen, Janet (Editor) (1981). "A Commentary on Theories of Female Wage Labour," in Cambridge Women's Studies Group, Women in Society. London: Virago, pp. 25-40.
- Sokoloff, Nancy (1980). Between Money and Love: The Dialactics of Home and Market Work. New York: Praeger.
- Timpanaro, Sebastian (1975). On Materialism. London: Verso.

CHAPTER 6

NEO-CLASSICAL ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS  
ON GENDER DIFFERENCES: STRETCHING  
THE LIMITS OF MARKET EXPLANATIONS

The contradictory position of women that we found in Marshall's economics (Chapter 4) has been reproduced by recent neoclassical economists. In Marshall, on the one hand, the labor of women was subject to the paramount laws of the market as with all other economic factors. On the other hand, Marshall's moral and economic efficiency argument called for women to be partly excluded from the labor force so that they could produce and care for what he called a race of vigorous male laborers. The supposedly natural role of women as mothers and homemakers (justified by the fact that women have babies) interfered with the pure economic individualism of the market analysis.

This tension between an economic approach that is universal in its intent and scope (subsuming all economic phenomena underneath rationalist market principles) and an external world of natural gender differences (distinct from, or resistant to, the logic of the market) forms a constant theme running through the later development of neoclassical economic thinking on gender. The purpose of this chapter is to show how neoclassical economists have resolved this tension in one of two ways: either they extend economic principles so as to include what were previously considered external or exogenous phenomena (such as gender differences and housework), or else they assume such issues are exogenous.

These forms of resolution of the problem of gender in neoclassical economic thinking are examined here in terms of whether they have offered meaningful ways of understanding economic gender differences--the social relations of women and men in the economy. Our argument is that although some neoclassical economists have brought gender within the margin of economic thought, they have done so at the price of ignoring the social significance of gender differences as such. Compared with the difficulty of the Marxist-feminist formulation of an economics of gender differences (see Chapter 5), the neoclassicals have succeeded in encompassing issues of gender in an almost effortless extension of the basic parameters of the theory. In so doing, however, they have glossed over critical problems and stretched their basic premises beyond their useful capacity.

According to Marshall, women were caught on a boundary between a moral view of gender roles in society and the abstract individualistic technique of marginalist analysis, which did not refer to concrete differences between women and men. Similarly, the later neoclassical writers concerned with explaining the economics of gender differences have insisted on the usefulness of a marginalist approach. The very power of marginalist economics, however, derives precisely from its abstraction from an understanding of historical social relations. The technique presupposes abstract ungendered individuals active in market

relationships. The dilemma for neoclassical economists has been how to reconcile the marginalist technique and its implicit lack of consideration of gender differences among individuals with the historical and social reality of gender differences in the economy.

We examine this dilemma in the following ways: first, we show that Marshall's contradictory position towards women is a reoccurring line of thought in later neoclassical thinking; second, we examine the two forms of resolution of this contradictory way of thinking about gender differences--the wide extension of economics to include gender differences (as exemplified in the work of Gary Becker), or, the treatment of gender as an exogenous variable that is unamenable to economic reasoning because it is outside the market; third, we argue that both the extension of economics and the exclusion of gender from economics founder upon the problems of discrimination<sup>1</sup> or labor-market segmentation, which threaten the very basis of the economic approach,

---

<sup>1</sup>There is now a large neoclassical economic literature on discrimination, mainly referring to racial discrimination. Becker (1971) and others have argued that it may be applied also to discrimination by sex. Our concern here, however, is not primarily with the neoclassical economics of discrimination, but with the economic approach to gender differences, of which the theories of discrimination are a subordinate part. Before a theory of discrimination can be formulated, we must establish an approach to gender differences--because if it is assumed, for example, that women are naturally different from men as economic individuals, then the concept of discrimination will be different from one that assumes all economic individuals to be the same.



because the market (or its shadow prices) can no longer be used reliably as the basis for economic understanding.

#### The Power of Marginalism and the Problem of Gender

Marshall defined the economy as a system of market prices that could be understood by means of a marginalist technique (as we showed in Chapter 4). Part of the great power of these tools of analysis and measurement is that they do not refer to gender differences, as their generality depends on abstraction from the concrete qualities and social relationships of individuals. The basic assumption is that individuals (firms) maximize utility (profits) and that such maximization is always subject to the marginal principle. We argued in Chapter 4 that Marshall never completely reconciled the abstract technique of the marginalist method with his normative morality of different economic roles for women and men.

Other early British neoclassical economic theories of gender differences have been reviewed by Madden (1973). Most of the early theories assumed imperfect competition: thus, Fawcett (1918) argued that women were overcrowded into unskilled occupations which reduced their wage levels. Edgeworth (1922) argued there were certain occupations that were efficient either for women, for men, or for both (mixed)--thus, suggesting that the individual subject of economics was "already" gendered before the operation of the

market. Men received higher wages because they supported a family. Women required lower wages because they had fewer dependents to support. Thus, wages were based on gendered status rather than individual contributions to production, a theory that contradicts the usual neoclassical marginal productivity assumptions. Finally, Robinson (1934), developed the theory of monopsonistic labor markets where different supply curves of the labor of women and men, and different degrees of labor market organization, created wage differentials by sex. Madden points out that the recent theories of discrimination associated with Becker and the Chicago School generally have assumed perfect competition.

Marshall's ambiguity on the question of economic gender differences has been incorporated by later neoclassical economists. Parallel to Marshall's value judgement that women should first and foremost be mothers and housewives, neoclassical economists have in general taken the facts of women's role in childbirth and their traditional activities in childcare, and they made these into permanently fixed and natural attributes affecting all women's economic participation and economic worth. This qualitative categorization is inconsistent both with the claim by neoclassical economists that their economics is a value-free science and with their commitment to an individualistic view of the economy in which the gender of individual economic actors should not be significant.

The Extension of Neoclassical Economics to Include Gender:

Gary Becker.

Becker inherited the marginalist technique elaborated by Marshall and the founders of the neoclassical economic school and used it to extend the domain of economics. Although Marshall's marginalist economics referred to the material world of goods and services measured by money prices, Becker's marginalism refers to any and all human behavior associated with utility maximization. Marshall's views on gender differences reflected his judgments as to the different moral and efficient roles of women and men within the context of longterm economic development, but Becker's views on gender differences depend more strongly on biological assumptions that have an immediate effect on the marginal productivity of women and men in both the household and the market.

Becker (1976,1981) defined the economic approach as referring to individual maximization of utility from basic preferences that do not change rapidly over time. The behavior of such individuals is coordinated by both explicit and implicit markets, characterized by possible equilibrium conditions. His economic approach is not restricted to wants or markets with monetary transactions, but provides a framework applicable to all human behavior.

Becker's extension (1981) of the economic approach led him to consider explicitly the family and economic gender

differences. According to him, the economic approach to the family will be "applicable at least in part, to families in the past as well as in the present, in primitive as well as modern societies, and in Eastern as well as in Western cultures" (1981, p. 3).

Because our primary concern is with the neoclassical economic approach to gender differences, rather than the neoclassical literature on economic discrimination, we are not considering here the application of Becker's theory of discrimination (1971) to gender. That theory, as Madden (1973) has argued, presupposed men and women as independent "societies" in a competitive market in which wage discrimination results from the taste or preference for discrimination, which is a cost. Discrimination is seen as a restrictive practice that interrupts free trade between individuals. The problem with the application of this theory of discrimination to the question of gender is that male and female societies are by no means independent. On the contrary, the marriage relationship is often a relationship of economic dependency of women on men. We therefore find it more useful to look at Becker's treatment of marriage and the household as an entry into the neoclassical thinking on gender differences, rather than his theory of discrimination which was developed largely in reference to economic racism.

Becker extended marginalist economics to incorporate

gender differences by means of his analysis of time.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas traditional neoclassical economists assumed household economic behavior concerned only the allocation of money income, Becker introduced the household allocation of time as well as money. Furthermore, the earlier economists treated households as though they were single member units of consumption, while Becker treats the household as involving several members in the co-production of various commodities, such as health, skills, children, and emotional values.

In a 1965 paper on the theory of the allocation of time, Becker argued that the problem of the allocation and efficiency of nonworking time was an important economic concern. He considered foregone earnings as being vital to an understanding of the economics of human capital investments and introduced the idea of productive consumption. He thought of households as small factories-- combining time and market goods to produce other commodities that contribute to the maximization of household utility. Instead of allocating time efficiently among commodities through income expenditures, households also allocated the time of their various members. He stated that

---

<sup>5</sup>As Amsden (1980) noted: "Since for neoclassicists a problem qualifies as economic if scarcity is involved, and scarcity involves choice, precious time spent outside the monetary sector becomes a respectable subject of inquiry" (Amsden, 1980, p. 15).

members who are relatively more efficient at market activities would use less of their time at consumption activities than would other members. Moreover, an increase in the relative market efficiency of any member would effect a re-allocation of the time of all other members towards consumption activities in order to permit the former to spend more time at market activities (Becker, (1965) 1980 re-print, p. 75).

The full income of the household then includes money income as well as income foregone or lost by the use of time and goods to obtain utility. Household production of goods takes place according to the cost-minimization rules applicable to the traditional firm.

Instead of having the individual spend income to maximize utility, subject to an income constraint, Becker expanded the utility function to include the allocation of time as well as money. He added a time-budget constraint to the money income budget constraint. Income is no longer "given," but is determined by the overall allocation of time between different activities. Time has its own marginal utility value.

Becker then applied this expanded concept of utility to the activity of individuals in two sectors of the household and the market (both of which are productive in the sense of creating utility) (1981). The unique development by Becker was the establishment of equivalence between the market and the household, using his expanded version of the time-utility

function. He thought of both sectors as producing commodities that satisfy utility. The products of the household, however, cannot be purchased from the market and are consumed by the households themselves. Because they are not exchanged, these commodities do not have market prices, but they do have "shadow prices" equal to their costs of production. Becker thought of this household production as a special relation between goods and time to produce the same commodity. He says, for example "fish and meat are inputs into the production of health and taste; or parental time and nursery schools are substitutes in the production of children" (Becker, 1981, p. 9).

In comparing market and household "production," Becker notes that the most obvious form of what he calls the sexual division of labor is between women and men who are married to each other. It is a division that Becker sees as having historical roots, in that married women "traditionally have devoted most of their time to childbearing and other domestic activities, and married men . . . have hunted, soldiered, farmed, and engaged in other "market" activities" (Becker, 1981, p. 14).<sup>6</sup> He asserted that the division of labor by

---

<sup>6</sup>Becker's suggestion that married women have historically been excluded from market work, including farming, seems to be an inaccurate generalization. We believe it to be more likely that before the period of the exclusion of market work from domestic life that women would engage in such work when they could more easily combine it with childcare. Many historians have reported such activity. Such as, Scott and Tilly (1975), see also the discussion of domestic outworking in Chapter 7--an industrial market

gender is partly a product of biology, in that "the various divisions of labor among family members are determined partly by biological differences and partly by different experiences and different investments in human capital" (Becker, 1981, p. 14).

Before explaining how biological differences explain divisions of labor among family members, however, Becker argued that "individual specialization in the allocation of human capital would be extensive in an efficient family, even if all members were biologically identical" (Becker, 1981, p. 14). He set up the problem in terms that explicitly avoid gender.

The optimal investment of all types of human capital by individuals between activities in either the household or market sector will be based on maximizing utility. In the context of the household which shares a utility-maximizing function, he argued that the optimal decision must take into account the skills of the different household members. Different members of the household will have differing relative comparative advantages and relative efficiencies in the household versus the market sectors of economic activity. These relative relationships are determined by the ratio of the marginal products of each member in the market versus the household sectors.

---

activity on a mass scale that employed thousands of married women in many trades.



Assuming that variations among household members only arise from differences in skills (investments in human capital) regardless of biology, he showed that each member with a greater comparative advantage in the market would specialize completely in the market, and each member with a greater comparative advantage in the household would specialize completely in the household. This complete specialization would benefit the household as a whole, as the investment of individual's time in one or the other sector will increase the returns from that sector over time. The investor in the household or the market has no incentive to invest in the opposite sector. In the efficient household, all members would invest their time completely in either the market or the household sector. Thus, so far, what has determined the relative comparative advantages of individuals for work in the market or the household has not been their biological sex, but their different experiences and investments in human capital.

When Becker finally reintroduces biological determination into the model, the results are not at all surprising:

Although the sharp sexual division of labor in all societies between the market and household sectors is partly due to the gains from specialized investments, it is also partly due to intrinsic differences between the sexes . . . women not only have a heavy biological commitment to the production and feeding of children, but

they are also biologically committed to the care of children in other, more subtle ways . . . moreover, women have been willing to spend much more time and energy caring for their children because they want their heavy biological investment in production to be worthwhile (Becker, 1981, p. 21)

People therefore marry to increase their utility. Women "hire" men as breadwinners, because men earn more than women in the market, as women's earnings are less because of their childbearing and rearing activities. Men "hire" women as mothers, nursemaids, and housewives, in a mutually beneficial division of labor that maximizes utility for the household as a whole (Amsden, 1980).

Becker's logic of gender specialization is circular. The best example of it can be found where Becker argues that human biological orientation calls for girls and boys to receive traditional stereotyped human capital investments. Becker argued that

since specialized investments begin while boys and girls are very young, they are made prior to full knowledge of the biological orientation of children, which is often not revealed until the teens and even later. If only a small fraction of girls are biologically oriented to market rather than household activities, and if only a small fraction of boys are oriented to household activities, then on the face of no initial information to the contrary, the optimal strategy would be to invest mainly household capital in all girls and mainly market capital in all boys until any deviation from this norm is established (Becker, 1981, p. 24).

Becker asserted that there is a strong complementarity between the bearing and rearing of children that reinforces women's roles. Men, on the other hand, "have been less biologically committed to the care of children, and have spent their time and energy on food, clothing, protection and other market activities" (Becker, 1981, p. 22). Thus, although the exact degree of biological determination of relative comparative advantages between women and men in the market and household sectors cannot be known, Becker suggested that

an hour of household or market time of women is not a perfect substitute for an hour of the time of men when they make the same investments in human capital . . . an efficient household with both sexes would allocate the time of women mainly to the household sector and the time of men mainly to the market sector (Becker, 1981, p. 22).

Elsewhere, Becker is not so reticent about the explanatory power of biology, stating that "biological differences in comparative advantage between the sexes explains not only why households typically have both sexes, but also why women have usually spent their time bearing and rearing children and engaging in other household activities, whereas men have spent their time in market activities" (Becker, 1981, p. 23).

The ambiguity that we found in Marshall's analysis of economic gender differences has therefore reappeared in a

slightly different guise in Gary Becker's economics. For Marshall, gender differences were caught between the abstract logic of a marginalist analysis that ignored gender and his normative values of women's moral and efficient economic roles that were different from men. The morality was justified by the biological fact of women bearing children. In Becker, the marginalist technique has been significantly extended: it constitutes a universalistic economic approach to human behavior. Yet, it is odd that in arguing that the marginalist analysis of individual utility maximization can explain all human behavior, Becker also resorted to biology to explain economic gender differences. Moreover, Becker admitted that the boundary between biological determination and human capital investment is unclear in explaining economic gender differences. The logic of Becker's economics is weakened by the impetus of biology.

Becker, in extending the economic approach, claimed to subsume gender differences in the family and the household, but actually he remained dependent upon a crude and unexplained biological determination. He used biology to justify the results of the economic logic of utility maximization. Becker claimed to have developed an economic approach with which to understand all human behavior, but, at least in the case of gender differences, he merely grafted the marginalist technique onto traditional stereotypes of gender roles based on conservative biological assumptions.

## Specifying the Boundary Between Economics and Gender

Becker internalized the problem of gender by means of extending the marginalist economic approach. Other economists, such as Lloyd and Niemi (1979), Mincer and Polachek (1974), Mincer (1962), and Phelps Brown (1977), have been less ambitious in their claims for the capacity of neoclassical economics to explain gender differences in the economy. They have tried to specify which aspects of the problem of gender differences can and should be explained by the market (understood in terms of the systematic interaction of individuals or firms maximizing utility or profit) and which cannot and should not be so explained. Furthermore, for these economists, what is external to the logic of the economic approach is not a simple biological determination of gender differences, but a more complex array of social and historical factors that have structured the relations between women and men in the economy.

Yet, the problem of specifying this boundary is difficult. We have no clear definition as to exactly where the market begins and ends, and we cannot determine how the market explanation will work when its boundaries are not clearly defined. The problem of inclusion or exclusion of issues of gender within the market explanation is subject to twin perils: internalizing gender within the neoclassical approach necessitates reducing the cultural, ideological, and institutional context of gender to the format of economic

factors measured by price and the marginal calculus; excluding gender means that the economic approach abdicates its responsibility to explain those problems in which we are interested.

Neoclassical economists have therefore presented the problem in terms of whether gender differences can be explained by the functioning of the market. As with Marshall, they rely upon the market and the marginal method to offer an explanation. Their formulation of the problem becomes one of whether or not economic gender differences are "before" or "within" the market (Phelps Brown, 1977). By "before" the market, they mean that gender differences are a factor of individual differences created outside of the determinations of the market mechanism, thereby not subject to its influence and so external to economic thinking; or, they are a factor of individual differences falling "within" the determinations of the market mechanism, therefore subject to economic analysis.<sup>7</sup> The question for the neoclassical analysts becomes one of whether or not they can reduce gender differences to the characteristic form of reckoning of this form of economics--to make these differences equivalent to

---

<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, Gary Becker resolved the contradiction between the "before" and "within" market factors by converting the "before" factors into the format of the "within" factors. By treating the economics of production (market) and consumption (household) as formally similar, with the household understood as a factory, he eliminated the traditional distinction between economic behavior and the wider society.

all other factors measurable by price and subject to the marginalist calculus. In solving this problem, neoclassical economists have to move from the concept of an individual to the concept of relationships between individuals who are characterized by gender differences.

Mincer (1962) looked at the increasing labor force participation of married women. The status of marriage for women led Mincer to consider that the economic position of such women cannot be thought of only in terms of the opposition between work and leisure. The economic position of such women also must be conceptualized in terms of the nonmarket work that such women do in the home. We especially note that the need arises to reconceptualize the dichotomy between work and leisure by the consideration of nonmarket work at home only when considering the economic position of women as opposed to men. That women and not men should do nonmarket work at home appears obvious, yet it is unexplained. The work of women in the home is taken for granted as a social fact. Economists must now account for such work, because so many women are also entering the labor market.

The housework of women is "a demand for a productive service derived from the demand by the family for home goods and services" (Mincer, 1962, p. 43). (We are reminded of Marshall's consideration of the economic position of women from the starting point of their place in the family).

According to Mincer, this family context of women's economic position means that women's work is considered only in relationship to the tastes and skills of other family members. He states that "the distribution of leisure, market work, and home work for each family member as well as among family members is determined not only by tastes and by biological or cultural specialization of functions, but by relative prices which are specific to individual members of the family" (Mincer, (1962) 1980 reprint, p. 44).

Again, as with Becker, Mincer uses a biological (and cultural) specialization of functions associated with gender in a manner that does not actually indicate how or why such specialization has occurred. Given the unexplained "facts" of such specialization, Mincer sees the problem as the substitutability between the wife and other mechanical or human factors of production, and between work in the home and market production. Mincer states that because certain female activities are less easily substitutable than others "substitutes for a mother's care of small children are much more difficult to come by than those for food preparation or for the physical maintenance of the household" (Mincer, 1962, p. 45).

For Mincer, the specialization of gender in which women are biologically and culturally allocated to childbirth and childcare has an effect on women's general economic participation. The effect of such responsibilities of



married women is the key to understanding their higher turnover rates of labor-force participation. Furthermore, the participation of married women is governed primarily by their husbands' earning power--because it is the family context of total income that is the key determinant of their participation.

The family context of women's economic participation was further elaborated by Mincer and Polachek (1974). As with Becker's analysis, Mincer and Polachek introduce the problem in terms that do not at first refer to gender, suggesting that the division of labor within the family arises from "complementarity and substitution relations in the household production process and by comparative advantages due to different skills and earning powers with which family members are endowed" (Mincer and Polachek, (1974) 1980 reprint, p. 169). Individuals in such families have a genetic endowment and are invested in as human capital. The gender differences associated with such endowments and investments, however, are not analyzed, even though Mincer and Polachek are investigating family investments in human capital and the earnings of women. They state "that the differential allocation of time and investments in human capital is generally sex linked and subject to technological and cultural changes is a matter of fact which is outside the scope of our analysis" (Mincer and Polacheck, (1974) 1980 reprint, p. 170).

They must therefore take as a given that there is a "sex linkage" behind the problem that is entirely ignored. They consider only the time/allocation of investments in human capital that give rise to the observed market earnings of women. Furthermore, they refer to, but do not consider directly, the discriminatory attitudes of employers and workers, even though they do acknowledge an earnings differential between women and men.

Given that unexamined factors external to economic analysis (biology and culture) result in most women having a less continuous work history experience in the labor market than men, (which is furthermore affected by unexamined problems of discrimination against women), Mincer and Polacheck argue that it is likely that women's human capital depreciates relative to that of men over time. This effect influences both women's own decisions and the decisions of their employers--young women are less likely than men to augment their job skills, given the likelihood of their intermittent labor market participation, while employers will be less likely to invest in female human capital for the same reason. Thus, for Mincer and Polacheck, the market can explain at least some of the wage differentials between women and men, but only in terms that must take for granted fundamental structures of gender differences that are "before" the economic analysis.

Lloyd and Niemi (1979) used the neoclassical economic

approach, but they try to acknowledge to what extent the "before" the market factors contribute to economic gender differences. They note that the traditional theories of labor supply (Robbins 1930, Marshall 1961) were exclusively theories of male labor-force participation. Becker (1965) and Mincer (1962), on the other hand, assumed that the presence of children was "the primary determinant of the division of labor between the sexes" in the household and the labor market (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979, p. 36). They argue that the picture is not so simple. There has been a dramatic reduction in what Lloyd and Niemi call sex differentials in labor-force participation, especially for women of child-bearing age. Yet, women continue to work for fewer hours than men and to be part-time workers much more often than men. They argue that marriage and childcare still deter some women from the labor market (to a decreasing extent) and that discrimination against women is a further obstacle (the extent of which is not known).

Basically, the problem becomes one of trying to specify whether there are objective differences in the marginal utility of women's labor relative to that of men's as revealed by the market. If the market were a reliable measure of objective differences in the value of women's and men's labor, Lloyd and Niemi argue that employment would be adjusted so that the value of the marginal product of labor would equal the wage rate. They note that "under such

conditions, since there would be no leeway on the demand side of the market to generate unequal compensation for equal work, any observed sex differences in earnings, which are the products of wage rates and hours of work, would have to be rooted in the supply side of the market, stemming from variations in the amount/or skill level of the labor supplied" (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979, p. 155).

As Lloyd and Niemi mention, however, the supply of labor is affected by objective differences in the range and type of opportunities available to women as opposed to men:

thus women and men with the same characteristics will be faced with different opportunities in the labor market . . . to the extent that women and men on the average differ, or are believed to differ, in types and levels of characteristics which are valued by employers as indices of potential productivity, they will be hired for different jobs and paid different wages (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979, p. 4)

To what extent are such different opportunities the result of discrimination or of objective differences in the quality of male and female labor?

In answering this question, Lloyd and Niemi immediately confront the dilemma of women's fecundity, which they assert adds a particular "option and constraint" to the economic activity of women. In other words, women's traditional roles in childbirth and childcare have to be factored into the analysis from the beginning. Neoclassicals therefore cannot

operate on the basis of an equivalent individualism between women and men: the "before" the market social position of women is generally considered to be different from that of men. Gender differences have already disturbed the basis of the economic analysis.

The natural fecundity of women, differences in levels of education and training, the relative physical strength of men and women on the average, and other such factors that affect the nature of the labor of women compared to men as it is presented to the market, represent various forms of "before" the market gender differences. Neoclassical economists examine these natural and socially determined differences as potentially objective differences in the value or utility of women's labor relative to men.

The problem, however, is that their measure of objective differences in the utility of male and female labor is itself crooked: the market mechanism of prices and the derived economic tool of the marginal calculus have been warped by institutionalized discrimination. The prices are false; the market is imperfect. Lloyd and Niemi argue that discrimination is apparent both "before" and "within" the market, and exactly where it begins and where it ends cannot be known. They ask

Do the lower earnings, higher unemployment, and occupational segregation of women result from their higher turnover and lack of continuous job experience? Or are

discontinuous job histories and high turnover the inevitable result of being restricted to secondary occupations, characterized by low earnings, unstable employment and little or no opportunity for advancement (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979, p. 13)

They state that the balance between what are objectively different qualifications of women and men and what are the results of discrimination is impossible to measure. As soon as the issue of gender is raised, the individualistic premises of neoclassical market analysis break down. The opportunity choices of individuals seeking to maximize utility are generally different for women than men. Biological and social factors inter-relate to constitute women and men as different types of economic individuals. The "before" the market facts of women's fecundity and their traditional responsibilities for childcare and housework, serve to present the labor of women to the market in a different way from that of men. Differences are then also compounded by "before" the market discrimination against women, in such areas as education and career choices.

For Becker, for example, these "before" the market gender differences allowed him to trade-off the division of labor between men and women in the household and the market. Lloyd and Niemi have a less benign regard for such trade-offs and insist that neoclassical economic individualism should be based on an elementary equality between individuals in the market, regardless of their gender. Yet, Lloyd and Niemi are

forced to acknowledge that the fecundity of women and their traditional roles as caretakers of children and the home are factors that do not remain exogenous to the economic analysis. The neoclassical economists cannot disregard gender differences. But the way in which such gender differences are included in neoclassicals' market analysis is complicated by the issues of discrimination and labor market segmentation by gender, both of which suggest that the market fails to live up to its own individualistic premises.

As with Marx, we have returned to the question of what does the wage, or the price of labor, mean in terms of economic gender differences? The problem for the neoclassical economists is that the wage may represent a conventional or customary price, associated with issues such as the maintenance of a station or status in life (Phelps Brown, 1977). In cases where employer's discriminate, women are not paid what the market suggests is required to attract their labor, but a conventional valuation of women's labor. If so, then the wage does not, in fact, represent the true market value in the price form of the economic factor under consideration--in this case, the relative value of women's and men's labor.

One such status or station in life is the so-called "breadwinner's wage", by which we assume that adult men are paid sufficient to support a wife (at least partly) and a family. Other problems of status associated with the

measurement of economic gender differences revolve around the issue of occupational segregation. Women have been denied or restricted entry into certain jobs and occupations, by employer's discrimination, legal restrictions and trade union practices, for example. The solution is to compare women's jobs with men's jobs according to their intrinsic worth, a task jeopardized by the neoclassical economists' reliance upon the market as the measure of economic value, because part of the problem is that the market measurement is not reliable.

Labor-market segmentation is a contradiction for the ideals of neoclassical economic individualism. Orthodox neoclassical economists regard such segmentation as resulting from exogenous causes, such as women's choices to invest less in their human capital given the likelihood of their intermittent labor force participation. Critics of this view have analyzed segmentation as being historically produced within the development of the economy (Reich, Gordon, and Edwards, 1973). Lloyd and Niemi (1979) note that the radical changes in women's labor-force participation has not been matched by a dissolution of the systematic differences between women and men in occupational categories.

Neoclassical economists have, nevertheless, attempted to factor in and out the various complex attributes that affect the relative value of male and female labor, and they have tried to take into account the effects of discrimination and



"before" the market gender differences. The conclusions, not surprisingly, are not straightforward. Differences of physical strength between women and men cannot account for all the inequality in income between women and men, according to Phelps Brown. Lloyd and Niemi argue that children are no longer the deterrent to women's labor-force participation that they once were, although marriage and childcare still deter women from participation and affect the forms of their participation at certain stages of the lifecycle. According to Phelps Brown, the interruption of employment characteristic of many women's lifetime commitment to the labor force does affect the value of women's labor relative to men. Yet, Lloyd and Niemi note that, outside of educational attainment, all other aspects of human capital investment are subject to substantial sex differentials that work against women. They conclude that the lower earnings and higher unemployment of women are products of both differences in productivity between the sexes and the result of discrimination against women, stating that "sex differentials in years of work experience and job training have been established as primary factors in an explanation of sex differences in earnings. However, it is unclear whether these differences result from sex differences in participation and career choice or from external constraints imposed by the market" (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979, p. 169).

We cannot resolve within the terms of the neoclassical

economic analysis the actual balance between these endogenous and exogenous, market and nonmarket factors, in explaining the "objective net worth of women's labor" relative to men's. Thus, we cannot solve the problem of causation in understanding economic gender differences. The ideal neoclassical explanation (perhaps only used by an orthodoxy that never actually existed) is that women's lesser labor-force participation (resulting from their motherhood responsibility) leads them to choose jobs in which they have less opportunity to enhance their skills and receive on-the-job training that would increase their human capital. As Amsden notes, the problem with the logic is that lower human capital values for women can just as logically be derived from either cause or effect of their observed intermittent labor-force participation: "low wages due to discrimination . . . may discourage women from investing in human capital; and low investments in human capital perpetuate women's lower earnings" (Amsden, 1980, p. 16). She also notes that even when the different job experience of women is controlled for, there remains a 20 percent differential between average earnings for women and men.

The neoclassical analysts cannot calibrate the market and nonmarket factors. The social relations that embed economic gender differences obviate the premises of a form of economics that must ultimately rely upon the assumptions of the market.

### Stretching the Limits of the Market Explanation

We have observed a tension between the neoclassical economic analysis of the market, based on the idea of individuals regardless of their gender, and economists' other views as to the fundamental differences between women and men in their economic roles and relationships. The ideas of such gender differences have varied from a morality of efficiency (Marshall) to the claim that biological sexual differences justify different economic roles for women and men in the market and the household (Becker).

Neoclassical economists tend to treat gender differences just as they would any other factor or input into the marginal economic equation. In trying to subsume gender within the normal economic logic, however, these economists have consistently had to refer to explanations or determining causes that remain external to economics. Economists in attempting to reduce gender differences to fit the neoclassical economic approach have stretched its premises too far.

Thus, Becker attempted to subsume the issue of gender differences within the simple logic of household utility maximization. However, as we have seen, the basis for his understanding of gender differences derived from biology. Other neoclassical economists, whom we have examined, such as Lloyd and Niemi, tried to explain how economic gender

differences were not a function of biology, but could to a certain extent be explained by the operations of the market. They, however, did not clarify the boundary between the limits of the market explanation and the domain of gender differences (whether thought of in socio-historical or biological terms).

Without referring to biology as a straightforward explanation of economic gender differences, some neoclassical economists nevertheless acknowledged the "option and constraint" of fecundity for women as well as their traditional childcare and housework responsibilities. So long as this option and constraint--to put it in terms of opportunity cost--was only an attribute of women, then the ideal individual of neoclassical economics could no longer be thought of as neuter. Yet, the way in which individuals were gendered, in the form of being the people who gave birth to children or who had the responsibility for their care and for domestic work in general, lacked a clear theoretical justification in economic terms.

The ideal neoclassical economic actor, who must evaluate opportunities presented in the market, is actually placed in a series of social roles and groups that affect the nature of choices available. One such role or group, if it can be so called, is that of gender. The placement of individuals in gendered groups implies different frameworks of resources for women and men. The placement of individuals as women and men

having to some extent pre-given frameworks of economic choices cannot be explained by neoclassical economists.

The overstretching of premises involved in the neoclassical attempt to explain economic gender differences has taken two forms: either economists weaken the market explanation by acknowledging market failure in the form of discrimination and segmentation and by resorting to extra-market explanations such as biology, or they trivialize the market explanation of gender differences by reducing them to the format of the economic calculus (as in Becker's equivalent treatment of women's domestic work with men's labor-market work). These results correspond to what we suggested was the characteristic duality of the way in which neoclassical economists conceptualized gender differences: the division of the problem into what is internal to the economic logic and what is exogenously determined. The division of the problem in this way, however, has been unsatisfactory in explaining economic gender differences.

- Amsden, Alice H. (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1982). "An Economic Theory of Discrimination," in Discrimination, Affirmative Action, and Equal Opportunity, Co-Edited by W. E. Block and M. A. Walker. Vancouver, Canada: The Fraser Institute, pp. 52-90.
- Becker, Gary S. (1981). A Treatise on the Family. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1976). The Economic Approach to Human Behavior. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1971). The Economics of Discrimination. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1965). "A Theory of the Allocation of Time," The Economic Journal, Vol. LXXX, NO. 200, September, 1965, pp. 493-517. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Dex, Shirley (1985). The Sexual Division of Work: Conceptual Revolutions in the Social Sciences. Brighton, England: The Harvester Press Publishing Group.
- Edgeworth, F. Y. (1922). "Equal Pay to Men and Women for Equal Work," Economic Journal, Vol. 32, (December 1922), pp. 431-57.
- Fawcett, Millicent, G. (1918) "Equal Pay for Equal Work," Economic Journal, Vol. 28 (March 1918), pp. 1-6.
- Joseph, George (1983). Women at Work. Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Lloyd, Cynthia, B. and B. T. Niemi (1979). The Economics of Sex Differentials. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Madden, Janice Fanning (1973). The Economics of Sex Discrimination. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Marshall, Alfred (1961), Principles of Economics. London: Macmillan.

- Mincer, Jacob (1962). "Labor Force Participation of Married Women: A Study of Labor Supply," A Report of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 63-73. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Mincer, Jacob and Solomon Polacheck (1974). "Family Investments in Human Capital: Earnings of Women," Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 82, Part 2, March-April 1974, pp. S76-S108. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Phelps Brown, Henry (1977). The Inequality of Pay. California: University of California Press.
- Polanyi, Karl (1957). The Great Transformation. Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Reich, Michael, David Gordon, and Richard C. Edwards (1973). "A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," American Economics Review, Vol. 63, No. 2, May 1973, pp. 359-65. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Robbins, Lionel (1930). "On the Elasticity of Demand for Income in Terms of Effort," Economica, Vol. 10, No. 29, pp. 123-129.
- Robinson, Joan (1934). The Economics of Imperfect Competition. London: Macmillan.
- Scott, Joan W. and Tilly, Louise A. (1975). "Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth Century Europe," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 17, no. 1, January 1975, pp. 36-64. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.

CHAPTER 7

FACTORY WORKERS AND OUTWORKERS:  
WOMEN IN THE COTTON TRADE DURING  
THE ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



In examining how several types of economic theory have approached the problem of gender differences, we have looked at conflicting ways of understanding the social relations of women and men in the economy. The conflict occurs on several different levels, so that we cannot make a straightforward "one on one" comparison between the types of theory. The economic ideas of gender differences as portrayed by Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Alfred Marshall, and their modern offspring, represent divergent systems of thought, paradigmatic ways of appropriating knowledge about the social world. We cannot, therefore, put one small element of each type of theory alongside a small element of another type of theory and examine it in equivalent terms, using the same language. We cannot, for example, place the Marxist-feminist theory of the exploitation of women in domestic labor alongside Becker's idea of the productivity gains to be had from women specializing in housework and consider whether the one or the other can better help us understand the problem of economic gender differences. Instead, we need a device that will allow us to examine the relative merits of the economic approaches to gender differences.

To overcome this problem of comparison, we introduce an historical "case study." The case study portrays the economic activity of women workers in the cotton trade during

the English industrial revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Before describing why this particular historical material should be useful, we explain what the case study is not intended to do. It is not intended to be "a history" of women workers in the cotton trade during the English industrial revolution, as such. Rather, we use the case study to abstract elements of already existing economic and social histories of the English industrial revolution to present a framework for the intersection of economic theories with examples of the social relations of gender differences in the economy. In the case study, therefore, we will not prove or disprove a specific theoretical argument, rather we will use it as a means for interrogating types of economic theory and their understanding of gender differences. We will use it as a framework of instances of social relations of economic gender differences through which the economic ways of understanding can be displayed and then evaluated.

We therefore do not use this framework to show a simple dichotomy between empirical facts of history and a series of

---

<sup>1</sup>We hesitate to refer to the case study as a history, which would suggest that original empirical material has been collected and theoretically formulated into a coherent exposition of a specific chronological period. The case study takes the form of the assemblage of various different "histories" that offer tangential insights into the problem of economic gender differences, without adding up to a totalistic historical picture. The purpose of the case study is not to present a history as such, but to present material through which diverse economic approaches to gender differences can be evaluated.

theoretical approaches to their understanding<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, the very need for the case study arises because we cannot counterpose the "facts" of economic gender differences and the economic theories that are used to understand them. We have already seen that the facts are already somewhat determined by the particular economic approach--what is a fact for the Marxist/feminist approach is entirely invisible to Gary Becker (and vice versa).

To these differences that are inherent to the different types of economists, we must also add the problem of the relationship between the period of the case study (late 18th and early 19th century) and the sequence of development of the economic theories themselves. Thus, for example, Smith's economics appeared before the industrial revolution was recognized; Marx wrote before women entered the labor force to the extent that occurred in the twentieth century; recent Marxist/feminist theories presupposed a level of technical, social, and legal advances in women's status that belong to a fundamentally different social context of gender differences than that which obtained either for Smith, Marx, or Marshall, or, indeed, for those women who worked in the early cotton mills.

All of these problems of the relationship between facts and theory, or between the case study history and the

---

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, we are following Althusser's rejection of the idea that theory is abstract and reality is concrete (Althusser 1975).

sequence of development of the economic theories, serve to emphasize the need to regard the case study as a device for reflection. The limitations of the case study, nevertheless, reveal something useful: when we say, for example, that Adam Smith would not have recognized the specific role of women in outworking forms of production, or Karl Marx's concept of gender in the process of valuation of labor does not match with what happened to the women cotton factory workers, we have learned something about the limits of the economic approaches.

#### Why Women Cotton Workers in English Industrial Revolution?

We chose the history of the women workers in the cotton trade to illustrate the different economic approaches, because it refers very strongly to a series of themes that continually reappeared in our analysis of the problem of gender differences. These themes began, of course, with the basic opposition of gender between women and men. This first dichotomy was then paralleled by many others: divisions between the private and the public, the natural and the social, the domestic and the market, and between housework/childcare and waged work in factories or elsewhere outside the home.

All too often these parallels between a basic gender division of women and men and many other social divisions appeared natural and unexplained in economic theory. Thus,

for example, many economists suggested that because women have babies this "automatically" or naturally<sup>3</sup> explained why they are excluded from the market place of waged work and remain in the home, or else explained the particular difference of their economic position relative to that of men. We therefore felt that in order to confront such ideological<sup>4</sup> elements in the economists' approaches to gender differences, we would find it helpful to juxtapose the economic theories with a socio-economic context in which women worked.

The history of the economic situation of women workers in the cotton trade during the industrial revolution displays very well the issues with which an economic approach to gender differences has to contend. The eruption of the industrial revolution, the transition from domestic based industry to factory production, the early introduction of machinery, the re-structuring of capitalist relations of production over and around traditional social relations of

---

<sup>3</sup> It is significant that in our language when we wish to assert that something is obvious and requires no explanation, we say it is "naturally so". Nowhere is this unreasoned argument used more often than in reference to issues associated with gender.

<sup>4</sup> By ideological, we do not mean that the economic theories are false in a positivist sense, for, as Althusser (1975) has argued, ideological arguments can certainly be logical and coherent, (what could be more logical and coherent than the neoclassical marginalist technique?) but that an unacknowledged practical-social concern predominates in the theories--in this case it is the presupposition of a "natural" world of gender differences that is implicit in the economic discourse.

family life, all refer to the central themes encountered in the economic approaches to gender differences.

The period of early factory industrialization, moreover, was a historical conjuncture that was a key moment in the transformation of the economic livelihoods of women and men. The period of our case study centers on the emergence of factory production out of domestic industry. The growth of factory production first occurred in the textile industry, especially in the cotton trade. It was also this industry that had made extensive use of outwork or putting out systems of production based on domestic industry. These forms of domestic industry were closely associated with the rise of the factory system. Women and children played a dominant role in outworking forms of production. Outwork was a form of capitalist work that took place within the household and was largely compatible with women's domestic and childcare responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

The textile industry was crucial for the

---

<sup>5</sup> Our case study is also valuable because women's involvement in outworking suggests an alternative paradigm of the market economy that is not centered on the factory system or on the location of production outside the home. Such a paradigm might define "economic" to include work performed in the household as well as elsewhere, and would therefore be less likely to marginalize women from economic thought. Moreover, outworking was not merely a transitional organization of mass industrial production that occurred during the industrial revolution and was incidental to the rise of the factory system. Outworking and other domestic forms of industrial production continue on a large scale in many developing economies, again largely as a province of exploitative work for women and children, and again still largely unrecognized by theorists of economic development.

industrialization of the British economy, and, indeed, for the modern forms of industrialization throughout the world (Ashton, 1962). Cotton spinning was the first industrial activity to experience the leap in productivity and social organization of production that signified the industrial revolution. The origins of this industry in the household, as a traditional form of industry for women as well as men, and its subsequent migration to the factory, where women were often a majority of its labor force, means that this industry offers us unique opportunities to observe the social development of economic gender differences in capitalist industrialization and to evaluate how different types of economists can understand such a development.

Other historians and sociologists have examined the place of gender differences in the labor force during the period of industrialization. Examples of the analysts who refer to this question outside of the English industrial revolution include Abbot (1918), Cantor and Laurie (1977), Demos (1970), Gordon (1973), Hareven and Vinoskis (1978), Hareven (1978), Lerner (1969), Norton (1980), Rabb and Rotberg (1971), Smuts (1971), and Sweet (1973). These authors have presented histories of the employment of women, but have not generally related them to economic theories of the place of gender differences in employment.

The intertwining of the case study with the question of the development of economic theories of gender differences

therefore affects the form of our presentation of the history of the women workers in the cotton trade. We begin by examining the so-called proto-industrialization that occurred in European economies before the industrial revolution, in which the putting out and outworking systems of industrial production were developed. The cotton-textile industry is then the focus for our examination of the industrial revolution and the rise of the factory system. It is in this industry that we examine the transformations of economic gender differences associated with the new technology and relations of production. We present in the final part of this chapter an assessment in general terms of the ways in which the social relations of women and men in the economy were transformed by the development of the factory system in the cotton trade. In the Chapter 8 we develop a broad framework to show the relationships between the case study and the economic approaches to gender differences that we have previously examined and to evaluate the economic approaches to gender differences.

#### Proto-industrialization.

The process of development of capitalist industry before the industrial revolution in England, by means of the putting out or outworking systems of production in the countryside, has come to be called proto-industrialization. This was a form of capitalist industry that was not based in factories,



but was linked to agricultural production and employed household units of labor. This production for the market was less integrated into feudal relations of production than agriculture, and we should distinguish it from household production for immediate consumption (although the two often occurred together). While merchant capitalists owned and controlled stocks of materials and used decentralized household labor, the direct producers in the households often owned the basic tools and means of production.

The transition between proto-industrialization and the industrialization of the factory system involved the penetration of merchant's capital into the direct processes of production and a re-organization of the relations of production. With mechanization came centralization: capitalist industry gradually re-located from the site of the household to the factory and other non-domestic work locations, with tremendous repercussions for the economic significance of gender differences (Kriedte 1981, Schlumbohm 1983).

Early industry originated as an intrinsic part of an agrarian economy. Peasants and small holders were industrial producers before the emergence of a social class that held no land or was not associated with agricultural work. Schlumbohm (1981) notes that the most important of these early proto-industries was that of textiles, which was built up on the skills and tools of the rural population. Textile

production took place in the family, which was sometimes supplemented by one or two outside laborers.

These rural industrial producers had to have recourse to the intermediaries of the putters out and merchants in order to obtain raw materials and gain access to markets. The small-scale producers worked on direct commission from the merchant. The dependence of the small producers on the merchant for raw materials led to the penetration of merchant capital gradually into the sphere of rural industrial production. Merchants eventually owned all the raw materials with the result that some of the means of production had been turned into a form of capital no longer owned by the household producers. As industrial equipment was developed that was beyond the means of the small producer, it became the property of the merchant, even if located in the producer's household. Under such circumstances "the direct producers no longer manufactured commodities which they sold as their property; they merely sold their labour power for piece wages (which included the upkeep of the workshops which were also their homes)" (Schlumbohm, 1981, p. 102).

The growing dependence of the small producers on merchant capitalists led to the removal of steps of the production process from the producers' household and therefore out of the family as a unit of production. In linen-producing regions, for example, where flax and hemp were cultivated, the cultivation and processing of yarn and

weaving were divided and no longer occurred within the same household. Merchants would employ family members to work on the same tasks so that a division of labor was developed among families rather than within the family unit. Alternatively, family members were employed on different tasks that were not successive or directly related steps in the production process of the particular commodity. Increasingly, the division of labor was organized by the putter out and not by the family unit of production. The original process of family organized production had required the cooperation of family members in earning an indivisible income for the unit as a whole through their common labor. The greater control of the merchants and putters out led to the family and the household being merely the location where individual workers were engaged in production and each received separate wages (Kriedte, 1983).

The development of the outwork system culminated in its co-existence with the growing factory system from the end of the eighteenth century. The final form of outworking was an organization of capitalist mass production located in the household. It involved a minute subdivision of processes and was labor intensive rather than capital intensive. Outwork tended to be repetitive, making use of basic skills, unsophisticated tools, and its labor required minimal training. Labor was mobile between the different outworking trades. Industries that made use of this organization of

production had access to large pools of labor in periods of growing population and imperfect regional markets.

Outworking labor was unhampered by any forms of collective workers' organizations and emerged in its most advanced forms at a time when traditional forms of apprenticeship had all but disappeared in the early nineteenth century. The problem of location was solved by taking the work to the workers, feasible because of the lightweight nature of commodities involved (Bythell, 1978).

An essential feature of outworking was the very high proportion of women and children employed in the various outworking industries. By the early nineteenth century outworking was used by many trades, including: weaving, framework knitting, shoemaking, nailing, and chainmaking. Although the needlework trades had always been traditionally female dominated, Bythell (1978) notes that in all of the outworking industries there was a tendency for the proportion of women employed in them to increase. This was the case even when the trade had been traditionally a male domain and became particularly evident during the nineteenth century when outworking continued alongside the factory system, when women became the majority of the outworkers.

Even in the phase of proto-industrialization, some or all of the phases or steps of the production process might be centralized in a single center of production where wage laborers would be employed. These workshops or

"manufactories", as they were called, supplemented the traditional patterns of household based rural industry. Some workshops employed whole families as units of labor power, with the family receiving a single wage. This early form of centralization of production was initiated by the merchants and putters out, usually by building workshops as additions to their store houses or counting houses. Some workshops made use of advances in machinery, but many simply centralized several traditional domestic machines or processes in one central workshop. Most workshops remained based on handicraft technology. All the means of production in these workshops, however, were owned by the merchant entrepreneur.

### The Textile Industry

In England, before the 18th century, industry grew in the countryside, moving there from the towns in order to avoid municipal and guild restrictions, and for technical reasons such as the availability of water power and mineral resources (Ashton, 1962). Industrial production, as in the rest of Europe, was the work of small independent craftspeople working in tiny workshops in their homes, selling either directly to consumers or to merchants.

The industrial revolution was not a quick and obvious "revolution", contemporaries such as Adam Smith were largely unaware of its occurrence (Landes, 1969). Some innovations,

such as those in the cotton industry, spread very quickly, while others took decades to be widespread, as with the power looms for the woolen industry. Alongside the early factories and mills remained the workshops and the domestic workers. Factory organization of production was not dominant until the middle of the 19th century. The period of proto-industrialization should not be underestimated, nor should the older organizations and techniques of production that continued alongside the emergence of the factory system. Certain of the "older" forms of production, notably outworking, emerged within certain industries long after the rise to dominance of the factory system, such as in the trades of nailmaking and chainmaking (Bythell, 1978). There certainly was a turning point in late 18th century England, but this was based on older forms of social and economic organization (capitalism had existed for hundreds of years) and depended upon a slow cumulative development of productive powers.

The textile industry in England began with wool. In the proto-industrial period, the woolen trade in England was spread throughout the country and was integrated with agricultural work. Wool was the major industry before the industrial revolution. The family was the unit of production. Traditional divisions of labor within the family were associated with age and gender differences. Women and children would sort, clean, card, and spin the wool. Men

would comb and weave the wool on the handlooms (Ashton, 1962). In the North of England, for example, where the wool trade flourished, the pieces of wool cloth were carried to the market towns, such as Leeds or Halifax, and sold to merchants who bought the cloth in an undyed and unfinished state. Merchants then dyed and finished the cloth and marketed it at home and abroad (Bythell, 1978).

The making of wool cloth by families was a form of capitalist industrial production for the market. With the development of the outwork system, families were paid piece rates, either as a whole or as individuals. Production was organized by the putters out and merchants. Only in outlying areas of Scotland and Wales did families produce woolen cloth merely for their own use to make into clothing.

New types of wool cloth were introduced in the late 16th century known as the "new draperies" that were lighter in weight and more colorful. New textile industries emerged: linen was made from flax in Scotland with the assistance of the government, and in the late 17th century, the Huguenot manufacturers introduced silkmaking to Spitalfields, then a London suburb. The output for the wool industry rose 150 percent during the 18th century (Crouzet, in Hartwell, 1967). Technical innovations occurred early in the woolen industry. In the 16th century, a treadle operated spinning wheel with a flyer was introduced and replaced the hand spindle throughout Northwest Europe by the 17th century (Schlumbohm, 1981).

The innovations of the Dutch loom and knitting frame for wool were often too expensive to be bought by the direct producers in the family workshops, so that the putters out themselves provided this machinery in central workshops or in the family's homes, resulting in family workers becoming simple wage laborers (Schlumbohm, 1981). The merchants often held the raw materials in central warehouses where the outworkers returned on a weekly basis to pick up supplies, return finished articles and collect their piece work wages. The producers continued to own their own tools and simple machinery. More complex machinery, the knitting machines for example, would be rented out from the putters out or merchants. During the early development of the putting out system the work was combined with part-time agricultural labor. Later, outworkers became more obviously proletarianized. The merchants might employ middlemen to cope with their scattered employees and multiple sites of production (Landes, 1969).<sup>6</sup>

The merchants had finishing workshops associated with their workshops where they hired skilled workers to put the

---

<sup>6</sup>The role of merchants was important not simply in providing the capital to finance the raw materials and to distribute and sell the produced goods, but also because of their knowledge of markets and their links to foreign trade. This was particularly important when the export trade began to grow. The subordination of many workers under the domination of merchant capital in the putting out/outwork system, even though the merchants and putters out did not directly supervise production, presaged the relations of production of the factory system.



final touches on the goods to be marketed. Even before the industrial revolution, the task of "fulling"<sup>7</sup> the wool cloth was centralized and involved the use of horse or water power, as well as the "dressing" of the wool, the "raising of its nap" and the dying processes (Ashton, 1962). During the 18th century, such merchants added other workshops for printing cotton and linen, and sometimes handlooms would be gathered together in a central workshop. These developments were all forerunners of the factory system. They were transitional forms of production, largely lacking in power-driven machinery and merely being the agglomeration of domestic scaled activities and techniques of production.

Other harbingers of the factory system appeared in the textile industries. In the silk throwing mills, large and complex machinery was used, copied from Italy. John Lombe at Derby built a large water-driven mill of five stories and 100 feet length, where he employed 300 women and children. It was the first genuine factory in England and opened in 1717 (Ashton, 1962). By 1732, other mills were opening elsewhere. The early cotton mills, which represented the beginning of the industrial revolution, were imitations of these early silk-throwing mills.

---

<sup>7</sup>The process of treating the cloth with fuller's earth and beating it with heavy hammers to matt the texture.

## Rise of the Cotton Industry

It was cotton, rather than wool, that was the key textile industry in terms of innovations and the development of economic gender differences with the rise of the factory system. The cotton industry followed the organizational pattern of the wool trade, but rapidly developed new forms and techniques of production. The transformation of economic gender differences in the cotton industry can best be seen by following through the transition from outworking to the factory system. This process involved changes in technology and relations of production that first affected the traditional patterns of work found in the domestic workshops.

In the outworking system, there were traditional divisions of labor similar to those in the woolen trade, that were associated with gender and age differences. The father and husband would weave the weft, children would pick clean the cotton, while older children and the wife and mother would card and spin. Local spinsters sometimes augmented the family's supply of yarn. Pinchbeck (1969) describes how the family-based outwork was flexible. The unit of production was easily assisted by the addition of outside labor. If there was more than one weaver in the household causing there to be insufficient yarn produced, then sometimes only the cleaning and carding of the cotton might be completed within the home, and the resulting "rovings" sent out to local spinsters for spinning. From three to eight women and

children might typically be employed in supplying one weaver with sufficient yarn.

Raw cotton was first imported from Turkey, then the Caribbean and Brazil. It was used in the English textile industry as early as the 16th century, and it was being combined with linen cloths in Lancashire by the 17th century. At first, cotton yarn was used as a web with other fabrics, whose warp was linen. The printing of cotton-linen fabrics, known as calico and muslin, which were produced in India as "East India Goods" led to a fashion for cotton clothing. The competition of Indian clothing, however, led the English to prohibit the import of Indian cotton goods in 1700 and again in 1721. A cotton industry began to thrive in Lancashire and London, and by the middle of the 18th century, a wide range of better quality cotton goods was being produced in England (Ashton, 1962).

By the late 17th century the cotton industry was growing rapidly, even with little progress in technology except in the areas of dying and bleaching. In the first half of the 18th century, the cotton industry developed more slowly. In the first decade of the century imports of raw cotton were about a million pounds a year (Landes, 1969). The rate of growth of the industry was about 2.6 percent per annum, a rate of growth governed by domestic demand.

In the 1750s and 1760s the introduction of Kay's flying shuttle increased the productivity of weaving, exacerbating

the difficulty of supplying weavers with sufficient yarn (Landes, 1969). The demand for spinning intensified both through the growing demand for cotton goods and the gains in the productivity of weaving.

The slump in the cotton industry caused by the American Revolution in the 1760s and 1770s enabled the cotton industrialists to try out new machinery and develop the factory system to discipline workers and save profits. The slump was followed by an export boom accompanied by growths in population. At the same time, the bottlenecks to transportation were breached with the development of the canal systems. Markets were widened. The cotton industry experienced an upsurge in the 1780s and became the engine of growth for the English economy. The French and European markets were penetrated. A virtuous cycle had begun.

Crouzet and others have argued that the key to innovation in the cotton industry was the shortage of labor (Crouzet, 1972). As it became extended over large geographical areas, the putting out system of production was hampered by rising marginal costs. Workers spent too much time travelling to and fro between the warehouses and their domestic workshops. Supervision became more difficult, and embezzlement was a serious problem. Secondary warehouses were built. Although the solution was to try and concentrate the outworkers in central workshops, it was difficult to lure the domestic workers away from their homes (Ashton, 1962).

(This was probably especially so for female domestic workers who were also mothers looking after young children in the home). Food prices were relatively low in the 1730s and 1740s. Labor was not mobile.

The sharp rise in money wages in the industrial North of England at this time indicates the shortage of labor. Not only was the new cotton industry forced to develop its labor force out of older industries, but it had to do so quickly as the demand for cotton goods rose rapidly. The phenomenal growth of cotton production can be seen from the following figures in Table 1 of retained imports of raw cotton.

The rapid growth of export production of cotton goods at the same time fueled innovation and investment. Even though cotton was only four percent of national income of Great Britain in 1802, it became the model for the general process of industrialization in the textile industry as a whole and in other branches of industry (Deane and Cole, 1962).

The transformation of capitalist industrialization by the innovation of the factory system had profound implications for the organization of the labor process. The relocation of industrial production from the household workshop to the factory also involved the structuring of economic gender differences in the divisions of labor of capitalist economy.

Table 1

IMPORTS OF RAW COTTON  
(millions of pounds)

Year	Imports
1695-1704	1.14
1700-1709	1.15
1705-1714	1.00
1710-1719	1.35
1715-1724	1.68
1720-1729	1.55
1725-1734	1.44
1730-1739	1.72
1735-1744	1.79
1740-1749	2.06
1745-1754	2.83
1750-1759	2.81
1755-1764	2.57
1760-1769	3.53
1765-1774	4.03
1770-1779	4.80
1775-1784	7.36
1780-1789	15.51
1785-1794	24.45
1790-1799	28.64
1795-1804	42.92

Source: Deane and Cole, 1962, p. 51.

The formation of a factory labor force was difficult for capitalists. Ashton (1962) notes that the centralization of the labor process in the factory was led by innovations in technique, particularly associated with sources of power. The smelting and rolling of iron and the use of water and steam power were crucial for the emergence of the factory

system. Both in terms of its site of activity and its relations of production, the innovation of centralization also depended, however, on the reorganization of labor. The loosely structured flexibility of the largely rural industrial outworking system was replaced. Cotton was the vanguard sector in this reorganization, a process that tells us much about the historical formation of economic gender differences.

Capitalists could not easily induce workers to leave their domestic workshops or agricultural employment because "there was no strong desire on the part of the workers themselves to congregate in large establishments. It was only under the impact of powerful forces, attractive and repellent, that the English labourer or craftsman was transformed into a factory "hand"" (Ashton, 1962, p.76). Ashton explains how the restrictions of settlement were overcome to encourage the mobility of labor. In the early factories, the employer might fail to hire a male worker unless he was also able to provide work for his wife and family. The early ironmasters sometimes set up textile works near the forges to provide work for wives and children nearby their husbands. Ashton (1962, p. 112) states that "when an employer like Greg or Oldknow, wanted juvenile or female labour, he was sometimes obliged to extend his operations to agriculture, limeburning and so on, in order to find work for

the men."<sup>8</sup> The technical innovations in power and machinery eventually gained momentum and pressured the formation of a factory labor force--a labor force, as we shall see, that became highly structured in terms of gender differences.

### Technical Innovations in Cotton Spinning

By the middle of the 18th century, the English economy was advancing along a broad front. A specific breakthrough then occurred in the cotton industry. In the 1760s and 1780s, a cluster of innovations created the new industry of the factory spinning of cotton. The booming cotton industry had difficulty in obtaining sufficient quantities of yarn. Spinning remained slow and labor intensive. There were therefore powerful incentives to invent labor-saving devices for spinning. The factory spinning of cotton represented the merger of two flows of technological progress: the coal and iron technology that had emerged since the 16th century provided the "hardware" and materials for factory production, while innovations in textile production machinery in the 1760s encouraged the growth of the factory system. The first cotton mill was built in 1771 by Arkwright at Cromford in Derbyshire (Ashton, 1962).

Technical developments first affected productivity in the domestic outwork sector. The invention of Hargreave's spinning jenny (1770), which could also be used for wool, was

---

<sup>8</sup>Greg and Oldknow were early ironmasters.



compatible with the domestic site of outworking production. The jenny at first contained 16 spindles. A woman could spin as many as 80 threads at once in later versions of the machine (Ashton, 1962). Many families used small jennies as an adjunct to their domestic textile work (Bythell, 1978). According to Ashton, the smallness and cheapness of the jenny and the lack of strength required to operate it led to its enthusiastic introduction into many households. The jenny increased the productivity of hand spinning by between 6 and 24 times (Landes, 1969). The jenny enabled spinners to produce sufficient yarn for the domestic weavers; and therefore, it strengthened the family economy, at least until 1820.

The invention of Arkwright's spinning frame in 1769 was introduced in the early spinning factories and was first powered by horse and later by water, becoming known as the water frame. With this spinning frame, cotton spinning began to be relocated from the household to the factory. It produced a cotton yarn that was strong enough to be used for the warp as well as the weft.

In 1778, Samuel Crompton invented the mule jenny, which combined the advantages of the domestic based spinning jenny with Arkwright's water frame and which could spin fine yarn suitable for the weft or warp for pure high quality cotton. (Arkwright's frame had been suitable for only coarse cotton.) Crompton's mule was only suitable for domestic use in the

1780s, but by 1790 it was used in the factory.

The invention of Arkwright's spinning frame and Crompton's mule led to the first cotton factory mills. In mills in rural areas, Arkwright's water-powered frame resulted in the centralization of cotton spinning. In the 1780s, there were very few water-driven spinning mills, but within a short period, many were built. Improvements were quickly made to the spinning machines with the introduction of the mule. By 1785, the first mills were being powered by James Watts' steam engines. Large factories could then be located in towns, freed from the constraints of rural water supplies.

The inventions of the water-frame, the mule, and the jenny meant that within a few years the limitations to the supply of cotton yarn had been eliminated and the quality of cotton products were greatly improved. Their introduction was followed by the rapid rise of cotton imports in the 1770s and 1780s (Deane and Cole, 1962). Arkwright's mill, making use of his invention of the water frame, came to be the model that was imitated everywhere. The mill was large and used heavy machinery, the buildings being 100' x 30' rectangles and 4-5 stories high. The early buildings contained about 1,000 spindles and 2-300 "hands" were employed.

For a while, two types of spinning mills co-existed: the water-driven Arkwright machinery and the steam-driven mules, which were larger (powering up to 50,000 spindles and

employing up to 2,000 workers by 1850). By 1795, the mules were made of iron and had 240 spindles. The steam-driven mule factories became dominant and were concentrated in the Manchester area. James Watts' spinning jenny (a rotating spinning machine powered by a steam engine) was first used in the 1790s in the larger spinning mills. The earliest spinning jenny had powered 8 spindles, but by 1780 supported 80 spindles. Although the early water frame supported 200 spindles, by 1850 water frames supported 2,000 spindles. One worker could manage two machines with two children as assistants. Productivity had been increased several thousand times. By 1838, four-fifths of the cotton mills were steam driven, and by 1850 nine-tenths were steam driven (Landes, 1969).

#### Transformations in Economic Gender Differences

Although spinning remained domestic, it continued to be a responsibility of women and children. Smelser (1969) argues that the use of the jenny in the home increased the incomes of the female spinners as the demand for cotton grew. For a while, the water frame and the domestic jenny continued to be used in parallel, the one in the mill-factory, the other in the home, for the production of cotton yarn. The jenny remained useful for the production of the weft, while the frame was useful for producing the warp. The jenny was then also enlarged in scale.

As the scale of the domestic jenny increased, the jennies were gathered together in workshops, where they were worked on by men. As soon as the scale of the jenny led to its relocation out of the home, jenny cotton spinning switched from being a female to being a male occupation. The enlargement of the jenny led to an entry of men into spinning, and other ancillary processes, such as carding and roving, were also sent out of the home into the factory after 1775.

The use of Arkwright's water frame in the rural mills, however, did not result in the factory employment of domestic textile workers. On the contrary, the earliest spinning mills seem to have employed adult and child labor who had not previously been associated with the textile trade. Ashton (1962) suggests that the mills were not successful in recruiting adult labor. The new factories were avoided by the adult independent laborer, as they were associated with the Poor Law Authorities' "houses of industry" for paupers. A major source of labor for the early rural mills in the North of England was, in fact, imported children apprentices sent under the auspices of the Poor Law and parish overseers. Occasionally whole families would be sent. Under these circumstances, as Ashton notes, the early textile plant was rather more akin to a colonial settlement than a modern factory.

Pinchbeck (1969) suggests that girls were often a

majority of the child apprentices, while adult women made up only a small portion of the adult labor force. The workforce in the early rural mills was often displaced agricultural workers, exdomestic servants, parish paupers, and "the unskilled of all trades." Pinchbeck also agrees that the domestic textile workers did not desire to work in the mills. Smelser suggests that whole families were employed in the early mills, alongside the widespread use of child apprentices. Smelser estimates the proportions of adult males in employment as only 1:10 in the 1780s and 1790s (Smelser, 1969). Mill masters sometimes employed additional men as builders, groundsmen, and craftsmen to build and repair machinery and buildings. The labor force of the early rural mills using the water frame was usually composed of child apprentices, often females, supplemented by whatever adult male and female labor was required for heavier work and supervision.

Collier (1964), on the other hand, argues that there was a greater degree of correspondence between the labor force of the domestic textile industry and the new water-frame mills. Based on the analysis of the wage books of early mills, Collier found that Arkwright's machinery was adapted for the use of women and children. Collier argues that labor of child apprentices was favored only when there was a lack of other local workers. Where there was sufficient local labor, the mill owners favored the employment of women and girls

displaced from domestic spinning.

The early mill owners had little need for adult male labor and so did not attract the domestic weaver or his family. The loss of domestic spinning for the wives and daughters of the weavers, as Collier notes, however, led to the eventual loss of the male weaver's monopoly in this trade "by seeking employment for those members of their families who had previously prepared their yarn, the weavers hastened a development which was inevitable since it was found that neither a man's strength nor much skill were required to weave the new cloths" (Collier, 1964, p. 3).

Where mills were set up in areas of widespread domestic spinning industry, some of the mill's labor force was recruited from the female labor pool of that industry. Many mills, however, were established in isolated locations because of their need for water power and had to recruit their labor from afar, in which case the employment of child apprentices and the paupers was often necessary.

The water-frame spinning mills were first replaced by the mule system and later by the steam-powered systems. The use of the mule for spinning after 1779 encouraged a tendency for men to become involved with spinning. Crompton's invention of the mule had been originally intended for domestic use, and it was used in household workshops for about ten years after its invention in 1779. In 1790, the mule began to be powered by water and was relocated to the

mills. In the mills, where the mule was heavier, only men were employed upon it. Again, we see that the relocation of the site of production from the household to the factory, as a result of technological advance, was immediately associated with a transformation in the gender of the labor involved.

As the water-frame mills were being superceded by mills using the mule system, apprentice child labor was replaced by that of adult females in the water-frame mills in the country, while men were recruited for work in the mills using the mules (Pinchbeck, 1969). The employment of child labor, especially as arranged through the Poor Law authorities had apparently become troublesome, increasingly regulated, and costly.

Such transformations in the gender basis of occupations or divisions of labor were by no means permanent, as in the 1820s factory mule spinning switched to being a job for women and children, based on a technological advance that made the process automatic. In the early 19th century, the mule for spinning cotton in the mills was semi-automatic. The mule spinner had to be highly skilled and was well paid. Mule spinners were usually young men assisted by "piecers," young children who twisted the end of broken threads. In the 1820s, a long strike by the mule spinners in Manchester led the mill owners to ask engineers to devise an automatic machine that could be operated by unskilled women and children. Such a machine was devised by the engineer Richard

Roberts, known as the "self-acting mule". This mule was automatic and became widespread during the 1830s, although it did not totally supercede the older type of mule until the 1850s (Bythell 1978).

Smelser (1969) argued that the transition to the urban factory had a two-phased impact upon the household family production unit. From 1790 to 1820, the urban factory employed male mule spinners along with their wives and children as assistants. Children also worked in factories separately from their parents and as household helps for other families. After 1820, however, male mule spinners were replaced by adult women and children. The family based unit of factory labor was no longer employed. Within a short period after 1800 the steam powered mule became dominant and spinning with the jenny in the home had disappeared. Arkwright's water-powered-frame spinning mills no longer expanded.

Because the increased production of spinning in factories entailed the expansion of weaving, weaving occupied a larger place in the outwork sector of production. Thus, women entered into weaving, while it remained a domestic industry. Domestic spinning also continued after the introduction of factory spinning for specialized tasks that the factory could not yet accomplish. The result was that, as Smelser has suggested, during the early period of factory spinning, labor within the family unit of production in the



household was rearranged rather than replaced (Smelser, 1969).

Collier's (1964) analysis of the Manchester factory of McConnel and Kennedy in 1795 provides a useful illustration of the symbiotic relationship between the outworking systems of production and the early factories and of the key role of women's labor within that relationship. Of the 300 workers at the mill, there were many women who worked irregularly, coming in to take work home with them when they did not actually work in the mill. These women worked on hand processes that did not require their attendance at the mill. In the same factory that used the mule, only men were spinners, but were a minority of total employees. Most of the employees were either women, boys or girls, and they worked at preparatory processes. Adult women and men worked as "stretchers," boys and girls as "winders," and other young children as "scavengers." The male mule spinners often employed their own families as assistants (Collier, 1964).

The mule system of spinning had been water powered like the water-frame, which it superceded. The mule began to be steam powered at the end of the 18th century, enabling its location in urban as opposed to rural settings and allowing for the combination of powered spinning and weaving in the same factories. Smelser argued that this was a further factor that altered the nature of the labor being employed in the mills, encouraging the employment of adult women. The

proportion of child apprentices was reduced after 1800. The proportion of adult males in steam-powered mule mills was usually not more than 20 percent. Pinchbeck also argues that the introduction of the urban steam-powered mule mills led to mule spinning becoming an adult women's occupation in the early 19th century.

The mill owners at this time also preferred to employ adult women with experience in handloom weaving to work on the new powered weaying looms that began to appear around 1820. Pinchbeck suggests that in the 1830s and 1840s these women were often the daughters of the distressed handloom weavers. Except for the women power-loom weavers, however, the majority of adult women employed in textiles in the first half of the 19th century remained associated with subsidiary processes. Women were the "tenters" of the machines and frames, they worked in the carding rooms, and as assistants to the weavers and spinners. Hewitt (1975) suggests that in the 1840s in Manchester 27 percent of the total cotton employees were women, a proportion that increased in the following decades. In some areas, such as Blackburn in 1871, the proportion reached 34 percent. The gender and age distribution of cotton workers for the years 1835-1907 can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF COTTON OPERATIVES, 1835-1907  
(as percentages of total employed in cotton factories)

	Children under 14	Women and Girls	Young Men 14-18	Adult Males over 18	Total
1835	13.1	48.1	12.4	26.4	100.0
1850	4.5	55.6	11.2	28.8	100.0
1862	8.8	55.7	9.1	26.4	100.0
1868	10.3	55.1	8.5	26.1	100.0
1874	13.9	53.7	8.3	24.1	100.0
1878	12.8	54.9	7.2	25.1	100.0
1885	9.9	56.0	8.0	26.1	100.0
1890	9.1	55.9	8.2	26.8	100.0
1895	5.8	58.8	7.8	27.6	100.0
1901	4.0	60.8	7.1	28.1	100.0

Source: Deane and Cole, 1962, p. 190

Most women factory workers, however, were unmarried, a fact that again confirms the barriers felt by mothers to working outside the home. Hewitt suggests that by 1901 only 24 percent of the women workers in the Lancashire mills were either married or widowed. E.P. Thompson also confirms the juvenility of the adult factory workers, and the likelihood that they were not married (Thompson, 1968). Thompson suggests that up to one-half of factory workers were aged under 21 in the early 19th century, and more than half of the adults were women (making it difficult for older males,

especially ex-handloom weavers, to get factory employment). Young males were displaced from the mills as they became older because of the higher costs of their wages.

The expansion of the factory-based, cotton-spinning industry led to women assisting men with domestic weaving on the handlooms, as domestic spinning was displaced and their labor became available. Thus, women entered what had previously been a completely male trade. Pinchbeck (1969) argues that the entry of women into weaving was made feasible by the less arduous nature of weaving machine spun yarn. The great expansion of women as weavers on the handlooms in the domestic locations occurred after machine spinning of cotton on the water frames began in the mills.

The mechanization of weaving was slower and less spectacular than that of cotton spinning as it took longer to develop a satisfactory power loom. The cost advantages of power loom weaving relative to powered spinning were less. The traditional handloom had been greatly improved by the invention of the flying shuttle in 1737 by John Kay, enabling weavers to work faster on broad cloths without help. Traditionally, weaving was done by a man with a boy helper or apprentice. The shuttle doubled the productivity of weaving and was taken up throughout the industry by 1760. Cotton handloom weavers grew in numbers between 1780-1820 until it became a factory industry. In areas such as North East Lancashire, homes might have two or three looms. By this

time, women had entered the weaving industry in the home, with the relocation of cotton spinning to the factories, and Bythell argues that most of the weavers were women and children. The industry was both urban and rural. In towns such as Manchester, Bolton, Blackburn, and Preston, there were whole districts of handloom weavers. In the countryside, weaving remained integrated with agricultural work. Weavers in the towns tended to be more highly skilled and permanently employed (Bythell, 1978).

In 1800-1804, the Lyons craftsman Jacquard invented a weaving system that allowed complex patterns to be quickly woven using long strips of hole-punched cardboard that ordered the movement of the loom. The system was first used for silk. By 1800, some power looms were introduced that wove automatically, the first patents being held by the Reverend Cartwright in 1785. The weaving machine was improved during the 1800s, but was only used on coarse fabrics (Ashton, 1962). In 1822, Sharp and Roberts of Manchester invented a system of automatic warping that increased the productivity of the power loom three times over that of the handloom, leading to a spurt in its introduction on a widespread basis by 1850. Several such looms could be managed by one person (Bythell, 1978).

The first major investments in the factory-based power loom for weaving occurred during the trade cycle upswing of 1825 (Bythell, 1978), by mill owners already engaged in

cotton spinning. Handloom and power weaving co-existed after 1825, with power-weaving gradually taking over from the handlooms. According to Bythell, the handloom weavers had almost completely disappeared by the 1850s "the story of the handloom weavers . . . shows that outwork was a form of capitalist organization eminently capable of rapid expansion, given an abundance of cheap labour; it shows that industrial production could still be widely dispersed and its roots firmly embedded in rural life" (Bythell, 1978, p.47).

Bythell (1969) suggests that 1826 was the peak of activity for the handloom weavers and that in the 1830s the number of domestic handloom weavers remained higher than that of all the cotton factory workers. By 1850, however, the numbers of handloom weavers had fallen to 43,000 and were concentrated in the luxury goods trade. The handloom weavers were virtually extinct by 1860. Handloom weaving survived in the wool industry for a longer period. The decline of handloom weaving is the classic story of immiseration and technological unemployment and was the basis for Marx's idea of the "industrial reserve army". As the general prices for cotton goods fell after 1815, cottons were substituted for other cloths, such as silk, linen, and woolens, and for non-British cotton goods imported from abroad. The British production of cotton goods wiped out the Indian cotton industry, a social calamity described by Marx (Marx, 1972).

## The Factory System and the Gradual Decline of Outwork

The innovation of factory spinning of cotton signalled the decline of the outwork spinning industry. In the late 18th century the most important outworking industry was textiles, which formed the biggest sector of the industrial economy until well into the eighteenth century. Spinning and weaving were the most important forms of outwork production, and until the end of the 18th century, outwork spinning employed the most people. The introduction of new technology in the factory system for the cotton industry led to the total disappearance of outwork spinning in the early years of the 19th century. Between 1770 and 1830, the location of spinning was switched from the household to the factory. Women and children who had been domestic spinners either went into factory spinning or switched to handloom weaving, which remained an outwork industry and required many more workers as the cotton industry expanded rapidly (Bythell, 1978).

The growth of Lancashire as the world's foremost industrial center resulted from the concentration of the textile industry there and led to its decline in other areas which became marginal. From being a widespread industry worked upon on a casual part-time basis in countless households throughout the countryside, interspersed with agricultural work, the textile industry became concentrated in factories employing an industrial working class (Bythell, 1978).

Thus, the first spinning factories did not eliminate outwork but transferred it from spinning to handloom weaving. Weaving did not become a factory industry until the 1820s. The factory and the outworking systems of production co-existed and complemented each other, growing together. For the period of first growth of the factory system, outworking "was a perfectly rational, viable, and adaptable form of organization in many industries, as capable of expansion as contraction" (Bythell, 1978, p. 36).

Therefore, even as one industrial sector or process entered the factory system, others remained part of the outwork systems of production. This form of co-existence of the factory system with domestic outworking is especially important for our understanding of the evolution of economic gender differences in the nineteenth century. Bythell notes that an essential feature of the outwork system was the very high proportion of women and children employed in this form of production in a variety of trades. As he states, there was a tendency in the 19th century for the proportion of women to increase:

in so far as women were employed in manufacturing industry, (as opposed to services) in the nineteenth century, the bulk of them remained for long in the outwork environment: as the significance of outwork declined, the role of women within it increased; for as the men moved out, women moved in. Accustomed to low pay, anxious for ways of adding their mite to total family income, and generally



incapable of self defence, women became the key element in that persistent cheapness of labour which was one of the prime requirements of a viable outwork system (Bythell, 1978, p. 163).

Bythell argued that for many women and children outwork was either the only employment locally available or the only sort of work they could conveniently do. This remained the case even when outworking became largely an urban form of production during the 19th century and had shifted from its dispersed rural patterns characteristic of the eighteenth century and earlier. Bythell notes that both the wives of dockers in the East End of London and the wives of rural agricultural laborers lived in areas where the local economy provided low paid work that employed only men, so that wives had to become outworkers. In other areas, however, such as colliery towns, and in steel and shipbuilding areas, outwork industries employing women were not common. Industrial work for men in these other areas, outside the home, was often better paid, and their wages could in some cases support wives and families.

#### Transformations in the Social Relations of Women and Men

The short period of transition of the relocation of cotton spinning from the home to the factory indicated a reoccurring pattern--men moved "upwards" into work with more advanced technological means of production and women replaced

them in the jobs with relatively "lower" or more backward forms of production, using superceded machinery located either in the factory or domestic workshop. The process was dynamic, for as soon as a newer form of production, involving technical innovation, became widespread and established, it was often adapted for use by women or children, and the jobs associated with it became deskilled.<sup>9</sup>

On a broader scale this is what happened in the relationship between the outworking system of production and the factory system as a whole. As the factory system gradually replaced the outwork systems of production, women became ever more prominent in outworking. The compatibility of outworking with part-time and casual labor, and with the tasks of the household and childcare, obviously had much to do with the growing predominance of women in this sector of production. On the negative side was the evident incompatibility of factory work outside the home for women who had families to look after. Bythell argues that a further factor to be considered was the regularity and level of men's earnings, which determined the local existence of large pools of women engaged in low-paid outworking industry.

---

<sup>9</sup>The deskilling of factory work by the introduction of machinery was examined by Marx. As we saw in Chapter 3, Marx also noticed that such deskilling was associated with the replacement of male by female labor. Modern economists have continued to examine the phenomenon of deskilling, and its association with changes in the gender composition of the labor-force. For an introduction to the modern literature, see Braverman (1974), Hill (1981), Friedman (1977), Milkman (1980), Scott (1982), and Walker (1979).

Thus, the close interaction and complementarity of the outwork system with the developing factory system set the framework within which women's and children's labor was allocated between the two systems. The allocation was constrained both by the nature of work available to husbands and fathers and by the demands of childcare and housework that devolved upon women.

Outwork was not succeeded by the factory system in a swift process of change; rather, the two systems intertwined and supported each other, and in this process of interaction structured a pattern of economic gender differences. Only over the very long term, between the end of the 18th century and the beginnings of the 20th century, was the outworking system definitively replaced by large-scale factory production. Over this longer term decline of outworking, women and children gradually became the majority labor force in this domestic form of production. At the same time, their position in the factory labor force remained consistently at a disadvantage compared to men.

Thus, even in the earliest factories, which preferred to employ women and children, men were employed in the small proportion of jobs with greater responsibility and higher wages. Even though factory workers were generally better off than outworkers and others working outside the factory system, when women were employed in factories they consistently held inferior positions and received lower wages

than men. As the factory system expanded throughout the 19th century, it tended to become more frequently a male preserve.

The economic gender differences fostered by the intertwined development of outworking and the factory system were further entrenched by legislation and trade union policies during the 19th century. The so-called protective legislation led to women being banned from night working and prevented them from working in certain industries (Brenner and Ramas, 1984). Women were thereby unable to compete with men on an equal basis for certain skilled jobs, including mining and printing. The 1847 Ten Hours Bill limited women's labor to ten hours per day in the textile industry only. The legislation was later extended to other industries and to workshops in 1867. The 1842 Mines Regulation Act prohibited women from underground mine work. Trade unions also excluded women from many trades, to avoid what Brenner and Ramas call "ruinous competition" (even though unions only covered a small proportion of total employment). When women entered a trade, the result was usually a rapid depression of wages and the degradation of work.

Most women withdrew from full-time work in the factories and shops with the birth of their first child. According to Brenner and Ramas, married women shaped their employment around their domestic responsibilities "whereas their sons and daughters went into unskilled waged work, women with children gained income in those employments that

fitted with the demands of childcare and housework: part-time work, homework, seasonal work, taking in boarders, etc." (Brenner and Ramas, 1984, p. 49).

When and if women could take their children to work outside the home, they did so. The married women working in the textile mills usually had husbands employed only seasonally or on very low wages. Even in the textile towns where the opportunities for women's work was greatest, Brenner and Ramas (1984) found that married women only made up a small proportion of the total workforce. In Preston in 1851, they state that 26 percent of women workers were married, in a town in which two-thirds of the population worked in the textile factories.

The shift in the location of production from the household to the factory meant that the necessary labor of looking after children and taking care of the household became the responsibility of women, the modern occupation of housewife was invented. In the pre-factory systems of production, this work was combined with industrial production for the market. Machine production in factories meant that productive and reproductive work could no longer be combined.

The rise of the factory system and relations of production centered outside the household was therefore an important influence upon the development of gender differences in the relations of production of the economy. The early development of industrialization took a form in

which women were sometimes a majority of the labor force in certain industries (especially the cotton trade), while in other branches of industry women's labor tended to be excluded from the market. The process of industrialization offers a complex picture of the integration of gender differences. Key to this picture were the constant limitations on women's industrial participation posed by their childcaring and domestic responsibilities--so that often it was younger unmarried women that were employed in the few industrial sectors in which women predominated.

It therefore seems that the early industrial employment of women was a process of the marginalization of women in two senses. First, it was a real economic marginalization, as women were isolated in certain industries that employed women (as in cotton) or else were pushed into the declining sectors of outworking or domestic service. Second, it was a process of theoretical marginalization as economists discounted the importance of gender differences in an economy defined predominantly in terms of the work of men in factories and other places of work outside the home. Economics down-played the significance of forms of work (both for the market and not) in the household, which had become the site of women's work characterized by less modern relations of production.

## REFERENCES

- Althusser, Louis (1975). Reading Capital. London: Verso.
- Abbot, Edith (1910). Women in Industry. New York: Appleton.
- Ashton, T. S. (1962). The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830. London: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, Michael (1980). Approaches to the History of the Western Family. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, Michael (1976). "Sociological History and the Working-Class Family: Smelser Revisited," Social History, No. 3. October 1976, pp. 317-334.
- Anderson, Michael (1971). Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Braverman, Harry (1974). Labor and Monopoly Capital. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Brenner, Johanna and Maria Ramas (1984). "Rethinking Women's Oppression," New Left Review, No. 144, March/April, pp. 33-77.
- Bythell, Duncan (1978). The Sweated Trades, Outwork in Nineteenth Century Britain. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bythell, Duncan (1969). The Handloom Weavers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cantor, Milton, and Laurie, Bruce (1977). Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Creighton, Colin (1980). "Family, Property and Relations of Production in Western Europe," Economy and Society, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2 May 1980, pp. 129-163.
- Crouzet, Francois (1982). The Victorian Economy. Translated by Anthony Forster. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Crouzet, Francois (1972). (Editor), Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution. London: Methuen.
- Cipolla, Carlo M. (1962). The Economic History of World Population. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

- Collier, Frances (1964). The Family Economy of the Working Class in the Cotton Industry, 1784-1833. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Deane, Phyllis (1972). "Capital Formation in Britain Before the Railway Age," in Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution, edited and introduced by Francois Crouzet. London: Methuen.
- Deane, Phyllis, and W. A. Cole (1967). British Economic Growth, 1688-1956. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition.
- Demos, J. (1970). A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth County. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Friedman, Andrew (1977). Industry and Labor. London: Macmillan.
- Floud, R and D. McCloskey (1981). The Economic History of Britain Since 1700. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hareven, Tamara (1978). Transitions, The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective. New York: Academic Press.
- Hareven, Tamara, and Vinovskis, Marisa (1978). Family and Population in Nineteenth Century America. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hartwell, R. M. (1967). The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England. London: Methuen.
- Hartwell, R.M. (1971). The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth. London: Methuen.
- Hartwell, R. M. (1970). The Industrial Revolution. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Hewitt, R. M. (1975). Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1959). Essays in World Economics. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1965). Capital and Growth. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1969). A Theory of Economic History. New York: Oxford University Press.



- Hill, Stephen (1981). Competition and Control at Work: the New Industrial Sociology. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kriedte, Peter, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm (1981). Industrialisation Before Industrialisation, Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kriedte, Peter (1983). Peasants, Landlords, and the Merchant Capitalists: Europe and the World Economy, 1500-1800. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuznets, Simon (1973). Population, Capital, and Growth, Selected Essays. New York: Norton.
- Kuznets, Simon (1966). Modern Economic Growth. Rate, Structure and Spread. New Haven and London.
- Kuznets, Simon (1960). "Quantitative Aspects of the Economic Growth of Nations," Economic Development and Cultural Change. VIII, No. 4 Part II, July 1960, pp. 1-96.
- Landes, David (1969). The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lerner, Gerda (1969). "The Lady and the Mill-Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," Mid-Continent American Studies Journal, Vol. X., pp. 325-369.
- Marx, Karl (1972). "On Imperialism in India" and "The Future Results of British Rule in India," written for the New York Daily Tribune, London, July 22, 1853 and London, Friday, June 10, 1853, in Robert C. Tucker, (editor) The Marx-Engels Reader. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Mathias, Peter (1983) 2nd edition. The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914. London, 1969.
- Medick, Hans (1976). "The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: the Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism," Social History, No. 3 October, 1976, pp. 292-315.
- Mitchell, B. R. (1962). Abstract of British Historical Statistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Milkman, Ruth (1980). "Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor: Historical Perspectives on "Women's Work" and the American Labor Movement," Socialist Review, Jan-Feb, 1980.
- Norton, Mary Beth (1979). Women of America: A History. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Pinchbeck, Ivy (1969). Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution. New York: Kelley.
- Rabb, Theodore K., and Rotberg, Robert, I. (1971). The Family in History. New York: Harper and Row.
- Schlumbohm, Jurgen (1981). "Relations of Production-Productive Forces--Crises in Proto-Industrialisation," in Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, Jurgen Schlumbohm, 1981, Industrialisation Before Industrialisation, Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, Joan Wallach (1982). "The Mechanization of Women's Work," Scientific American, Sept. 1982.
- Smelser, Neil (1969). Social Change and the Industrial Revolution. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smuts, Robert (1971). Women and Work in America. New York: Schocken Books.
- Sweet, James, A. (1973). Women in the Labor Force. New York: Seminar Press.
- Thompson, Edward P. (1968). The Making of the English Working Class. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Walker, Pat (1979). Between Labor and Capital. Boston: South End Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1980). The Modern World System, II, Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy, 1600-1750. New York: Academic Press.

CHAPTER 8  
EVALUATING THE ECONOMIC APPROACHES  
TO GENDER DIFFERENCES

In this chapter, we develop a series of thematic relationships between the history of the women cotton workers and our previous analyses of the economic approaches to gender differences. To understand how different economists view the social relations of women and men in the economy, we combine the essential ideas of the different economic approaches (which have their own historical and theoretical relationships to each other) with the materials of the case study (which obviously also have their own history, aspects of which "speak to" the economic ideas in different ways).

Relationships Between the History of the Women Cotton Workers and the Economic Approaches to Gender Differences

First, Smith developed abstract economics ideas, ignoring gender differences. There is a glaring disparity between the significance of gender differences in the divisions of labor of both outworking and the early factory system and their absence in Smith. We find a disparity between Smith's economic abstraction, which ignored gender differences, and the historical reality of these forms of production, in which gender differences were obvious.

Second, Smith was the starting point for an abstract structure of economic thought in which individuals are not characterized by gender, a tradition that reappeared in different guises in both the Marxist and the neoclassical

economic approaches. In Marx, however, the absence of gender in his economic categories represented only one of his arguments. In his other argument, he referred to the explicit exploitation of gender differences in the relations of production of capitalist industry. We therefore examine Marx's two arguments in relation to the ways in which women were employed in the cotton trade during the industrial revolution. Marx's unresolved arguments on the problem of gender in the process of valuation of labor are re-examined in the light of the history of technological change and factory industrialization of the cotton trade.

Third, with Marshall and the early development of neoclassical economics, we found a movement away from an inherent normative direction of economics derived from Smith (based on Smith's ideas of natural laws governing individuals' economic behavior, which contribute to economic growth and social well-being). This departure results in Marshall's ambiguous economic position on gender differences. The ambiguity stems from the separation between the neutral technique of marginalism, in which gender is absent, and an external normative framework of economic development, in which gender differences are argued to be morally correct and economically efficient. Marshall, in using a marginalist method, interprets the rationality of individuals maximizing their utility, and his work can therefore offer some insight into the behavior of the economic individuals of our case

study materials. He did not, however, explain the social relations of gender differences that structure the economic livelihoods of women and men. Yet, a different aspect of Marshall's approach--the normative ideology of women's roles--is found to have some real resonance with the facts of the lives of women workers in the cotton trade, but he still does not actually explain such economic gender differences.

Fourth, the Marxist-feminist theorists coped with the awkward legacy of Marx's contradictory positions on gender by replacing the problem of class with that of gender. The results of the replacement suggested new ways of theorizing economic gender differences, essentially by positing women as mediators between families as reproducers of labor-power and the process whereby the labor of women and men was valued unequally. An understanding of women's economic position was to be found in a relationship between the natural and the social. The case study, however, reveals how difficult it has been for these Marxist/feminists to make such an analysis. A theoretical impasse remains between the genderless categories of Marx's economic concepts and the gender-specific domain of women's roles in housework and childcare.

Fifth, the recent neoclassicals reproduced the ambiguity towards women that was found in Marshall. These modern users of the marginalist technique also held ideas of the distinct roles of women in the economy, sometimes based on biological

assumptions and sometimes based merely on an acknowledgement that certain gender differences among individuals were products of "before" the market social conditions. Unifying the domains of gender differences in the workplace and the home by subsuming the entire field under the rubric of utility maximization, Becker offered an extension of the economic method to understand gender differences. We used the case study, however, to help us understand that such a unification of the field was a glossing over of substantive differences in the nature of social relations between the home and the workplace. Our history of the women cotton workers also confirmed the difficulty experienced by other neoclassical economists in separating the market and nonmarket factors involved in the determination of economic gender differences.

Adam Smith: The Lack of Recognition of Gender.

In Chapter 2, we found that Smith did not recognize gender differences. Yet, in our case study of the history of the women workers in the cotton trade, we found that women and men frequently occupied very different places in the division of labor. We had difficulty reconciling the historical reality of women's work with the principles of market economy that were developed by Smith. Women were not treated as equal individuals with men. The economic livelihoods of women and men were radically distinguished.

How was it possible for Smith to think of women and men as equivalent economic individuals?

In the period of proto-industrialization, when industrial production occurred by means of outworking and the putting-out system, we find that women and men had different kinds of work in divisions of labor organized through the family and based in the home as a workplace. In the outworking sections of the textile industry, which continued alongside the early development of the factories, we found that the labor of women and children predominated. Many women therefore worked in entirely different locations and organizations of production than men. They worked in these forms of production because they could thereby combine childcare and housework with industrial work for the capitalist market.

Outworking, especially in the textile industry, became a form of capitalist mass production that employed mainly women in their home workshops. Its minute subdivision of processes between individual workers in different locations was not like the centralized division of labor envisaged by Smith to be the most efficient organization of production. Key to the viability of outworking was the availability of women to be outworkers. The availability of women outworkers, in turn, depended on the fact that women who were mothers found it difficult to work outside the home. These links between the site and organization of production and the associated



gender typing of jobs remain outside the individualistic premises of Smith's economics.

Smith virtually ignored these older forms of industrial organization in describing the growth of the English economy and in elaborating his own economic principles. Even though Smith did not recognize some of the portents of the industrial revolution, he was well aware of the benefits of economic centralization as made clear by his description of the gains from the division of labor. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 2, Smith's occasional references to "domestic" economy indicate that he thought of outworking and putting out systems of production as backward.

We cannot, however, interpret Smith as dealing entirely with a pure abstraction of economic individuals. He recognized the existence of social ranks and classes in his economic categories and was, therefore, not an absolute individualist. His idea of society and economy arranged individuals into the ranks and orders of stockholders, laborers, and landlords. Yet, Smith did not refer to fundamental gender differences within these social ranks and economic categories.

The relations of production and divisions of labor of outworking and the putting-out system therefore contradicted the ideals of Smith's economics. This was a contradiction not only in terms of the divisions of labor associated with gender in the family, which were not based on the ideals of

Smith's division of labor, but also in terms of the principles of organization of these older forms of industrial production. Moreover, Smith did not comment on the basic inequalities of the ways in which gender differences were associated with the rise of divisions of labor in the factory system, and with the introduction of technology in that system (they occurred largely after he wrote) and would, anyway, have been outside the conceptual framework of his economics.

We therefore should not forget that Smith's economic principles stem from the assumption of basic individual equality. We find that Smith conceptualized the economy, and its growth, in terms of centralized market-oriented forms of production employing advanced divisions of labor. Smith did not consider the economic roles of women and men to be different. Yet, our case study showed that the place of women and men in the economy was very different, both in outworking and the factory. In Smith's concept of the economy, the role of women as household workers, either for the capitalist market or for their own family's needs, was excluded from consideration. Although he suggests that the market system naturally inter-relates the self-interest of individuals through the process of equal exchange of labor and products, he does not provide any natural, social, or historical rationale for economic gender differences.

Karl Marx: Cotton Workers--Proletarians Rather than Women or Men

Marx turned Smith's idea of the natural market system into an idea of the historical development of modes of production. Marx saw that beneath the equal exchange of commodities by individuals in the commercial society lay a system of unequal relations of production that defined economic classes. These capitalist relations of production, however, were not seen by Marx to be basically organized around principles of gender differences; instead, they were defined in terms of the private ownership of means of production in the form of capital and by the sale of labor-power by workers in exchange for a wage. At the level of this idea of the capitalist system, Marx, like Smith, did not think of the economic individual as either male or female.

Yet, when we examined the development of Marx's thought, the problem of gender differences did, in fact, emerge in a contradictory way. We found two conflicting appearances of gender differences within Marx's economic approach that must both be considered in evaluating the Marxist understanding of economic gender differences.

In turning to what happened to the women workers in the cotton trade, we can re-examine Marx's contradictory ideas on gender differences in the economy. Marx's first argument was that the development of capitalism occurred in such a way that gender differences were disregarded. His position was

similar to that held by Smith. As with Smith, we found that the historical situation of women in the cotton trade contradicted the idea of the absence of gender differences in capitalist relations of production. Women and men in the cotton trade, in fact, occupied different places in divisions of labor and organizations of production.

We note, however, that when Marx suggested that gender differences would be superceded in the social relations of the economy, his thinking was the result of an historical argument. The key feature of Marx's understanding of capitalist economy was the placement of individuals in relations of production based on property ownership of the means of production, a placement that was not based on gender differences.

From this Marxist perspective, then, our history of women workers in the cotton trade represents a transitional economic situation in which an historically outmoded form of economic organization based on natural gender differences is still influential in the period of early industrialization. Thus, for Marx, the divisions of labor that we found in the family units of production in the cotton outworking trade are vestiges of very old organizations of production<sup>1</sup> that are

---

<sup>1</sup>We do not mean to suggest that Marx understood there to be a direct historical sequence between primitive economy and the early industrial period, but that in reference to the ideal types of modes of production that Marx identified (see Hobsbawm, 1977), the domestic outworking activity can be seen as equivalent to primitive economic organizations in which gender differences formed the basis of divisions of labor.

being weakened and replaced by the advanced capitalist relations of production based in factories in which an individual's gender will not form the basis of divisions of labor.

Although Marx argued that gender differences would be eliminated in the process of capitalist development, we showed how he goes on to analyze their exploitation in relations of production. Marx suggested that the introduction of modern machinery had eliminated the traditional physiological basis to economic gender differences, so that women and children could be employed at tasks previously reserved for adult men. Furthermore, the new factory machine production caused a relative deskilling of jobs, so that traditional skills acquired by adult men were no longer a prerequisite for employment, further encouraging the employment of women. But instead of women and men being employed equally, Marx argued that women would be employed instead of men as their labor was cheaper. Thus, gender differences were reinserted into the argument.

In our case study we show that traditional gender differences associated with cotton spinning were transformed; men became spinners on the new machines as production was relocated outside the home. Thus, rather than women replacing men as machinery was first introduced, we find that men replaced women as industry relocated from the domestic workshop to the factory--at least in the initial period of

technical innovation. The pattern of gender typing of jobs, however, was by no means constant. Women replaced men as factory workers, as factory machine production became established. The women factory workers, however, were usually young, unmarried and without children, whereas the women employed in domestic outworking were mothers with children to look after.

There was, thus, a tendency for the jobs associated with innovations in technology, new machinery, and new processes of production to be at first defined as male occupations: they were thought to demand higher skills or greater strength and were deemed appropriate for men who were paid higher wages than women. As the process of production became routine and as the technology was superseded, the jobs tended to become available for women. In certain instances, machinery was adapted for the use of women and children.

At least in the cotton trade, factory jobs were usually gender-specified. Marx's argument, suggesting that factory machine production would result in the supersession of gender differences in employment, was not supported by our case study on the cotton trade. On the contrary, we find there was a dynamic and continual process of the redefinition of the gender typing of jobs associated with technical innovation in different sectors of the industry. Thus, Marx's other argument appeared correct--at least for the cotton trade and over the long term--which was that as

technical innovations became routine and the jobs associated with new machinery became deskilled, women were often hired to replace men.

We must, however, still consider Marx's logic as to why women replaced men. The implication of Marx's analysis is that women replaced men because their labor was cheaper. Yet, according to Marx's theory of the valuation of labor-power, there was no reason why women's labor should necessarily be of lower value than men's.

For Marx, the development of capitalist factory production signified a reformulation of the concept of the valuation of labor-power in which gender differences played an important part, but in which, finally, the exact role of gender was ignored and excluded from his analysis. As we saw (in Chapter 3), Marx argued that factory machine production would encourage the employment of women (and children). The value of labor-power had previously been based on the value of those goods required to support and reproduce the labor of a skilled adult male laborer and his wife and family; now, the value of labor-power was reformulated to support unskilled men, women, and children as equivalent individuals, and the circumstances of family life are ignored. The value of the labor-power of unskilled women and men is the same.

We cannot find such an equivalence in the value and employment of the labor-power of women and men in the history

of the cotton trade. Furthermore, Marx himself abandons the idea of the supersession of gender differences, both in the process of valuation of labor-power and in industrial employment, by asserting that female labor will replace male labor because it is of lesser value.

Marx, in his explanation of the valuation of labor-power, ignored what we find are important aspects of the organization of gender differences in the cotton trade: women employed in the factories were usually younger, unmarried, childless; women in the domestic outwork sector were usually those looking after children. Furthermore, there was, surely, a relationship between the work that women did in the home and the process of the valuation of labor-power, a relationship that affected both the ways in which women's and men's labor-power was valued differently and the ways in which they were employed. Marx examined the problem of the valuation of labor-power only from the perspective of capital, in terms of the value of commodities consumed in the "production" of labor-power. It was left to the Marxist-feminists to attempt to reformulate Marx's theory to acknowledge gender differences.

Alfred Marshall: Marginalism Versus the Morality of the Women Cotton Workers

Marshall's thinking was also contradictory in its perception of gender differences, but in a very different way



from that of Marx's. Marshall's great achievement was to take from Smith and classical political economy the basic abstraction of an individualistic market economy--the commercial society--and develop marginalism as a technique of economic analysis with which to model the whole economy. A new idea of marginal utility, representing subjective value, allowed for the central focus of economic analysis to be on market prices. Marshall's contradictory perception of gender differences then arose between the abstraction of the marginalist technique of analysis, which was based on the idea of individualistic utility maximization measured in prices that did not make reference to gender differences, and a wider normative framework of the analysis of economic development in which gender differences were regarded as morally correct and economically efficient.

Thus, outside of the marginalist technique of economic analysis, Marshall argued that women had a moral responsibility towards the care of children, which, in turn, was a social and economic benefit. This moral responsibility overshadowed the premise of individualistic equivalence between women and men that underlay the marginalist economic technique. Women, therefore, appeared to be on the margin between a market economy of prices (the marginalist analysis of which paid no heed to gender) and a social world of long-term economic development (in which women had a unique moral responsibility).

The economic rationality of utility maximization runs strongly through the case study; it was evident as much in the innovations of machinery that reorganized cotton spinning in factories as in the desire of outworkers to augment family income. The ubiquity of utility maximization cannot be doubted; we saw it in the desire for profits and in the need for income; it was common among firms, families, women, and men. Furthermore, Marshall with his theoretical advance of an economic analysis that extrapolated from such utility maximization to the overall economic system of market prices certainly could understand much of the development of the cotton trade. (As we noted in Chapter 4, Marshall was in fact a renowned expert at sectoral analyses of specific industries).

Pure marginalist economic analysts, however, have little to say about the gender differences of labor. There is a sense, nevertheless, in which Marshall's moralistic justification for gender differences had a strictly economic rationality. This was the idea that over the period of long-term economic development, the role of women as housewives and mothers would enrich the value of human capital, add to total income, and encourage the growth of the economy. Following from this economic logic, a series of wider systematic economic gender differences can be extrapolated. We can use this logic to justify women receiving lower wages than men and their being placed in inferior positions in the

divisions of labor of the economy--because their primary economic purpose was to rear full-time male laborers as highly valuable human capital.

We can, therefore, take such a logic and relate it to what we saw happening to the women workers in the cotton industry. We can then interpret the different economic situations of women and men as reflections of this underlying systematic logic that gave to women a primary economic role of raising of adult male labor as highly skilled human capital in the family. The basic motivation that Marshall gives for economic gender differences, however, is not that they contribute to long-term economic development and can therefore be understood in terms of the marginalist principles of utility maximization, but that they are the desirable results of a normative morality that exists independently of the pure rationality of economics.

Certainly, if we reconsider the morality that Marshall uses to justify economic gender differences, we can find much evidence from the history of the women cotton workers that confirms the existence of such ideas. Women factory workers were considered a serious moral problem, and they were presumed to have caused the destruction of the working class family and a breakdown in morals in the great nineteenth century industrial cities such as Manchester and London. (This was the case even though, as we have noted, the great majority of women factory workers were neither married nor

mothers). The supposed degradation of morality associated with women working in factories was a major justification for the so-called protective legislation that limited the work opportunities of women in England.<sup>2</sup> Similar questions of morality were raised over the conditions of domestic outworking--there were great reforming movements to eliminate the exploitation of women and children in the so-called "sweated trades."

We did not select our case study, however, primarily to illustrate the contemporary moral or ideological justifications for the right and proper places of women and men in the economy. Moreover, the historical existence of a morality or ideology that justifies economic gender differences is a distinct problem from the capacity of the economic approaches--in this case Marshall's--to explain such gender differences. Yet, it cannot be denied that such ideas may, nevertheless, have had real historical economic effects. Marshall's ambiguity towards gender differences, as expressed in the distinction between the marginalist technique of analysis and the normative morality of gender roles, may

---

<sup>2</sup>Marx, like Marshall, expressed moral outrage at the exploitation of women and children in capitalist industry, but drew different theoretical implications. Marx and Engels saw that the other side of the supposed destruction of family life and the degradation of morality was the reformation of the economic and social relationships between women and men on a higher level. Marshall saw no such possibility. More recent historians, such as Anderson (1980) have seriously doubted whether the family was in any sense "destroyed" by the drastic industrialization of the 19th century cities.

have, therefore, represented a real compromise between the neutral economic technique and the influence of morality (understood in a broad sense as ideological effects) on the historical form of the economy.

Marshall also follows a similar line of argument to that of Marx when he remarks how modern factory machine production has broken up old hierarchies of gender, age, and skill in the divisions of labor. Yet, in contrast to Marx and Engels' view that the employment of women in factories marked the defeat of patriarchy and was a liberation of women, Marshall suggests it led women to "neglect their duty of building up a true home, and of investing their efforts in the personal capital of their children's character and abilities" (Marshall, 1961, p. 685).

Even though our case study on the women cotton workers did not focus on the problem of social mores, the real effects of such ideas were nevertheless apparent. The history of the women cotton workers revealed that in both outworking and in the factories, jobs were generally specified by gender. There were jobs for women and jobs for men (and jobs for children). Yet, the specification of jobs by gender was not at all constant; rather, it was a fluid and dynamic pattern of switches between the gender typing of jobs associated with innovations in technology and changes in the location and organization of production. Over the long term, a pattern emerged in which women (relative to men) tended to

be allocated to jobs that were associated with established or superceded technology, requiring what were perceived as lower skills and in which they received lower pay and held lower status--whether such jobs were in outworking or in the factory. The actual distribution of women between outworking and the factory was largely given by whether or not women were looking after children.

To some extent, we find that this gender typing of jobs was associated with moral or ideological views as to what were appropriate jobs for women as opposed to men, even though such views appeared highly flexible in response to changing technology and organizations of production. Otherwise, why were jobs so strongly associated with gender, when there was no "objective" reason for such association, and even as the association between gender and jobs was so changeable under specific circumstances? People switched their gender-typing of jobs, but the jobs did not generally become genderless. Thus, for example, the traditional gender typing of jobs in domestic spinning and weaving was only broken down with the ruptures of the relocation of such forms of production to the factory.

The moral and ideological quality of economic roles was also illustrated by the difficulty experienced by the early factory capitalists in luring domestic workers into the factory. They had to resort to hiring child apprentices and paupers under the Poor Laws. Factory work was at first

regarded as morally repugnant.

The establishment of factory production alongside the continuation of outwork did not mean, as Marshall desired, that women specialized only in the rearing of male human capital in their families. However morally repugnant the factory might have appeared, both women and men eventually entered its doors in large numbers, and they each took different jobs. For women who were also mothers, work for the capitalist market continued with domestic outwork, or with other kinds of work that were compatible with childcare and the domestic location.

The historical existence of gender-typed jobs associated with traditional ideologies of what work women and men should do, therefore, was not the equivalent of Marshall's normative ideal of women's exclusion from the labor market and their devotion to the rearing of efficient male labor in the home. The actual historical pattern of economic gender differences that we saw in the cotton trade indicated the widespread economic participation of women, even as it was colored by their childcaring and housework responsibilities. The different economic roles of women and men certainly were affected by moral views and ideologies, but these were not simple reflections of the ideal that a woman's place was in the home, they showed a complex picture of mobile changes in the gender typing of jobs.

The center of Marshall's economic approach, marginal

utility analysis, cannot explain the patterns of economic gender differences that we found in the cotton trade. Marshall took a moral axiom--that women's primary economic role was as mothers and housewives--and found this to be of long-term economic benefit to male human capital. It was therefore a moral maxim that established Marshall's views on the different roles of women and men and not his economic approach that explained the existence of economic gender differences. The marginalist technique of economic analysis, the foundation of neoclassical economics, remained immune from the prerogatives of gender differences.

Marxist/Feminist: Women and Men and the Value of Labor.

The recent Marxist/feminist theorists inherited a contradictory legacy from Marx (and the later Marxists). Feminists coped with this legacy by reworking the concerns of Marx to complement and enrich their understanding of gender inequality and the oppression of women. We argued that this reworking took the form of a basic replacement of the central Marxist pre-occupation with class by gender, so that an alternative hierarchy of inequality was developed. We examined the Marxist/feminist arguments insofar as they referred to the development of theories of economic gender differences.

The replacement of class by gender was analyzed in three major forms. First, the idea of patriarchy indicated a realm



of women's domestic and reproductive work that paralleled, supported, and maintained the economic activity of capitalist production. Second, the analysis of women's domestic work led to a reformulation of the Marxist theory of the valuation of labor-power so that it could acknowledge gender differences. Third, the family was presented as an ideological center of formation of gender differences among individuals and as the institution in which women's biological role in childbirth occurred, so that the problem of economic gender differences was considered as a relationship between the natural and the social.

In our history of the women cotton workers, we focussed on the place of gender differences in the historical development of relations of capitalist production, both in the household and the factory. We did not consider in any detail the ways in which women performed domestic work that was not for the market--how they coped with childcare and housework as well as doing their factory jobs or their outwork. Nevertheless, the case study did suggest that a system of economic gender differences was established between the work of women as reproducers of labor-power in the home and as workers for the capitalist market. This inter-relationship took many forms and had many effects on ways of understanding economic gender differences.

Thus, for example, in the development of proto-industrial systems of production based in households, we

observed that women and men worked at different tasks, the divisions of labor of which were based on gender and age differences. The work of reproducing labor-power was combined in the same location with work for the capitalist market. Before the development of a mass labor market for wage labor, these domestic divisions of labor associated with gender differences did not involve systematic differences in the value of female and male labor, as the family was a unit of production and reproduction, and the labor it "produced" was not sold as wage labor on the market. The family was compensated as a whole with the piece rate wages of the putting out system.

In this historical context, therefore, the work of women at home in reproducing labor-power was not distinct from the market valuation of labor-power, as labor-power in general was not marketed. When households owned means of production and worked on commission or piece rates, no social mechanism was available to account for the domestic work of women in reproducing labor-power, or to treat the labor of men and women differently due to the facts of women's domestic and childcare responsibility.

The gradual transformation of these domestic relations of production, and the historical creation of an industrial working class, changed the social mechanisms in which economic gender differences were established. We find that both women and men entered into the new relations of

production in the factories and mills, and they also continued to work for the capitalist market in their household workshops (subject to the patterns of gender/job typing and inequality that we observed). Now the work of women in reproducing labor-power in the home was an activity distinct from the market based valuation of labor-power. Yet, such domestic work affected the valuation of labor-power in the market; affected such valuation differently for women and men; and was associated with the different patterns of employment of women and men.

Marx and the Marxist/feminists have presented the problem of gender differences in the valuation of labor-power and in the employment patterns of women and men as two distinct processes. Taking the direction of the Marxist/feminists, and looking at the history of the women cotton workers, we see that the actual social process of valuation of labor-power simultaneously involves the distribution of gender differences in divisions of labor and patterns of employment. The valuation of labor-power and the place of women and men in the labor market are both subject to a single process in which gender differences are effective in a system that operates between households and the labor market. We can illustrate this process with some hypothetical examples from the history of the women cotton workers.

A woman outworker, spinning cotton yarn in the household

workshop, was occupying a place in relations of production (or division of labor) that was given by her gender, a place that she required because she was also looking after children. Looking after children, she was also creating the value of future labor-power, a value that included both the "use-value" of her time and the exchange value of the commodities purchased from her (and her husband's) income from exchanging the products of their labor (or exchanging their labor-power for wages). The value of the labor-power of the woman outworker was itself affected by the constraints of her domestic responsibilities, her skills could not be advanced very much, her time was restricted, the location of her work was limited by her children's needs.

The adult woman factory mule spinner in the 1820s, on the other hand, represented a different picture of the relationship between the valuation of labor-power and the place of gender in the division of labor. This woman was generally unmarried and childless and her work on the new factory machinery was not highly skilled, and she did not need to invest a lot in training or education. The fact that this woman was also not supporting children and was expected to leave the labor market should she have children, contributed to the lowness of the value of her labor-power.

The adult male employed in the cotton factory worked on advanced new machinery that was considered to require higher skills, and he was expected to have a longer-term commitment

to such work that might justify investments in training. Furthermore, the expectation was that the value of such work in the form of the wage would at least partly support the reproduction of his wife and family. This worker, however, might have found himself without a job once the processes of machine production were routinized and deskilled--and his wife or daughter might have been employed in his place at lower wages. The wage of the skilled adult male worker confirmed the divisions of labor in the family that associated his wife with specializing in the domestic work of reproducing labor-power, thus lowering the value of her labor-power and detrimentally affecting her place in the employment patterns and divisions of labor of the market.

Although we can select these ideal-typical individual examples from the case study of the relationship between individuals' gender, the value of their labor-power, and their place in relations of production or divisions of labor, we find it more difficult to develop a systematic understanding of these inter-relationships as a social process in the economy. The Marxist/feminists' attempt to develop a systematic theory of the relationships between gender and capitalist economy have been caught between the poles of Marx's theory valuation of labor-power (which does not explicitly recognize gender differences) and their own understanding of the impact of gender differences in the social relations of the economy.

The question then becomes: is there a way of understanding the valuation of labor-power and the place of women and men in divisions of labor that can unify the distinct social fields of gendered domestic work and labor in the capitalist market? It is ironic, but it is exactly such a theoretical unification that was achieved by Becker's extension of the neoclassical economic approach to gender--an approach, however, that in unifying the domestic and the market lost the significance of gender differences as distinctly ordered in these two domains.

Neoclassical: Women Cotton Workers as Utility Maximizers.

The recent neoclassical approach to the problem of economic gender differences reproduced the ambiguity towards women that was found in Marshall's economics. Again, we find that the marginalist technique of analysis was based on a form of individualism that did not differentiate gender. Yet, as with Marshall, the later neoclassical economists had particular ideas about nature and associated ideas of what were right and proper economic roles for women and men that conflicted with the individualistic premises of the market analysis.

The extension of neoclassical economics to include gender differences was exemplified in the work of Becker. Becker extended Marshall's marginalist approach to apply it to all human behavior, assuming that all human action is

based on utility maximization. Becker asserted that gender differences operated between the household and the labor market as a result of unified process of utility maximization by individuals in families. The gender differences associated with individuals' was, nevertheless, given by Becker from biological origins. Women's supposedly natural roles in childbirth and childcare led them to specialize in these activities, which then affected their labor market participation. For Becker, unlike the Marxists and Marxist/feminists, there was no theoretical problem in relating the work of women in the home with the work of individuals' in the labor market.

As with Marshall's marginalist technique, from which Becker's approach descends, we can use Becker's idea of utility maximization to interpret the history of the women cotton workers, and thereby consider its value for understanding economic gender differences in general. However, again as with Marshall's approach, we find that the final cause or origin of the explanation of economic gender differences is not given by the economic approach, but by an external principle: in Marshall's case it was a moral maxim that specified a unique role for women in the economy; in Becker's case it is a biological argument that determines the different economic status of women and men.

Following Becker's analysis, we can take the hypothetical situation from our case study of a household

with a husband and wife who are both involved in cotton textile production in the home. The wife spins yarn and the husband weaves on a loom. Both husband and wife have invested in skills for these activities as their human capital, and both commit themselves full-time to these activities. They decide to have children. Regardless of biology until this point, it has been most efficient for husband and wife to specialize completely in the tasks for which they have been most invested as human capital. The wife has a greater comparative advantage in spinning, the husband in weaving. The complete specialization of both wife and husband benefits the total utility of their household.

When the couple decide to have children, however, it is a biological argument that Becker uses as to why the wife should specialize full-time now in domestic childcare and completely give up her spinning. Women are argued to have a biological commitment to the production and feeding of children and are also biologically committed to the care of children in other ways.

From this primary biological justification for women specializing in domestic work and abandoning the labor market (or their spinning work in the home in our example), Becker elaborates other justifications. He finds that men generally earn more than women in the labor market, which added to the biological rationale, further confirms that women's domestic specialization adds to total household utility. The husband-



weaver earns more than the wife-spinner anyway. His argument is circular: men earn more in the labor market than women because they specialize in market work, women earn less than men because biology makes them specialize in domestic work which is not for the market. Most importantly from the neoclassical point of view, this specialization is of mutual benefit for women and men, because it increases the total utility of the household.

The trouble with Becker's rationality from the point of view of our history of the women cotton workers is, first, that biology is an inadequate explanation for the specialization of women in domestic labor, and, second, the fact that women generally earn less than men in the labor market is not adequately explained by such specialization. At this point, we see how Becker's collapse of the distinction between household and market, by treating both equivalently in terms of utility maximization, results in the weakness of his explanation of economic gender differences. By denying the distinction between the domain of gender differences in the household and in the labor market, Becker is left with an explanation in terms of a deus ex machina: biology.

We do not need to argue against the importance of the effects of women's role in childbirth and childcare in structuring their economic roles and opportunities--this was made very obvious by our examples of the women outworkers who

were mothers looking after children, and by the women who worked in the early cotton factories, who tended to be unmarried and childless. We should, however, note that there are limits to the impacts of such biological "facts" that are historically given by specific social relations. Only under certain social conditions is an individual mother obliged to devote herself full-time to the care of her children. The biological limits to such care are very limited indeed--as indicated by such historical examples as the aristocratic use of wet nurses and nannies, or the modern use of parental substitutes and the high-tech care of children in the absence of their biological mothers.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, we must consider whether or not Becker's rationality of utility maximization merely serves to justify the status quo. If we reconsider our example of the husband-weaver and the wife-spinner, we can imagine that if this household were in existence at the period when domestic weaving was driven out of business by factory loom-weaving, then the labor of the wife would certainly have had greater market value than that of the husband. She might even have

---

<sup>3</sup> A more important and interesting question is whether or not women as mothers wish to devote themselves full-time to childcare, and under what kinds of economic and social conditions this is possible (must it require the support of a breadwinner husband?). If they do not, then what are the options for other kinds of childcare that benefit children? If there are, indeed, only limited biological imperatives involved in women's childcare, then the question of men's involvement in childcare is a key question, one that has not been raised by the economic approaches we have examined.

been hired as a factory hand on the new power-looms that had driven her husband out of work. In this situation, we can imagine that the so-called biological demands of her domestic childcare responsibility would have been resolved rather simply--the father or some other substitute for the childcare work of the mother would have been introduced.

The problematic results of Becker's analysis led us to consider ways in which other neoclassical economists specified the boundary between an economic explanation in terms of the market and the wider domain of gender differences. In contrast to Becker's reduction of the entire problem to the terms of utility maximization, these other economists portrayed gender differences as either "before" or "within" the market. Yet, it seemed impossible for the neoclassicals to demarcate the boundary of what the market could explain, as their market explanation foundered on problems of discrimination and labor market segmentation, which appeared to have origins (or to extend) both "before" and "within" the market.

Thus, while the neoclassical economists offered ways of integrating gender differences between households and the labor market, they are inadequate for the task of explaining what we find to be the patterns of gender in the economy, as illustrated by our case study. The neoclassicals must either reduce the explanation of gender to the format of utility maximization (sometimes with biological justifications) or

admit that the market cannot be used to explain the economic patterns of gender differences. Either solution was not capable of interpreting the complex historical place of gender in the cotton trade.

CHAPTER 9

THE LIMITS OF ECONOMICS AND THE PLACE OF GENDER

Drawing together the history of the women cotton workers and the analyses of the economic approaches to gender differences, we have arrived at the question of what it is that economics has achieved. Our original question was, how did economists deal with the problem of gender? Now, our question is, what is it that economists were trying to do, given that their economic theories were developed largely without taking gender seriously (or by conceptualizing gender inadequately)? Our problem of evaluating the economists' ways of understanding gender is also one of determining the purpose of gaining knowledge or understanding of the economy. We can evaluate the approaches to gender differences only within a wider purview of the purposes of economics.

As we will show, the economists' understanding of gender differences reveals the nature of the way in which economists think. We reveal economics as a highly purposive method of abstracting from social reality. The goals of economists have not generally been to understand the place of gender in the economy. Instead, their goals have been to understand, broadly, the creation of national wealth and the accumulation of capital, through the system of market exchange and capitalist production. (This goal has been similar whether the economists have supported capitalism or desired to see it overthrown). We see economics, therefore, as a system of power to recognize those aspects of society that economists desire to know.

Furthermore, we show, that if economists were to treat the issue of gender seriously, their methods of analysis would be severely threatened. If economists were to take gender seriously, they would alter the nature of economic thought.

### The Goals and Purposes of Economics

All the economists we have analyzed were concerned with understanding the creation of national wealth. They understood wealth as the accumulation of capital (whether as money, material, or surplus value). All of their related economic concepts refer back to this central notion of wealth. Smith's theory of natural laws was designed expressly to understand how individuals behaved in such a way that they produced wealth through the market system. Marx also sought to understand the capitalist achievement of the market-based economy that produced commodities. Marshall wanted to model the laws of the market so that he could understand and improve the economy. Whether or not the economists approved or disapproved of capitalism, they shared an economic perspective in which they wanted to know how material wealth was produced in a market system of monetary exchanges.

This shared focus on the market production of goods and services, on priced transactions of exchange, represents an emphasis on specific areas of economic activity and social

life. The emphasis partly removes the concern of these economists from many social relationships in which individuals are involved in other kinds of economic activities and in which the social relationships of gender are highly implicated.

Their economic thought is centered on market production. By production, we mean that these economists centered their concept of economy on the production of goods for exchange in the market--the production of commodities. By market, we mean that these economists were only concerned with what was exchanged in priced transactions. Certainly, some economists emphasized the production side of the economy, as with Marx, while others, such as Marshall, emphasized the market, as the key area through which the economy was to be understood. Either way, a similar delimitation of what is economic has been specified.

The centering of economics on market production has profound implications for the ways in which economists have understood labor and the activity of work. Market production only concerns labor that is waged, or paid for as a commodity in the Marxist sense. All other kinds of work, laboring, and productive activity that is not waged or exchanged in the market falls outside of the concern of the economist. As defined through market production, economists cannot relate nonmarket work to the economy (or it can only be related in terms of shadow prices or asserted effects). Furthermore, in



order to reduce the act of waged-laboring to a homogenous factor input or commodity form, economists have had to abstract from the social relationships in which work is embedded and from the qualitative characteristics of individuals who work. The precise ways in which such abstraction occurs varies among Smith, Marx, and Marshall, or their descendants, as we have shown.

In looking at how these economists have dealt with gender, we have also, by default, looked at how they excluded so much of productive social activity from their understanding of what is economic. When we saw how Smith set up an idea of abstract ungendered individuals active in market exchange, we also saw that Smith excluded all the work that women and men performed in their homes that was not intended for exchange in the market. Marx's theory of value, coming from the perspective of the capitalist production of commodities, meant that he could not theoretically see the effect on the value of human labor of childcare and housework performed by women. Such work, and its value, could not appear in Marx's theory of the economy. Marshall's model of prices that defined the economy, similarly, excluded all those social activities of working and production that were not priced and in which, so often, women have been the primary workers. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from much of what was defined as economic, was also the exclusion of other ideas of what might be considered productive,

valuable, and useful in social activity--different ideas of the quality of life, welfare, and even human happiness.

Although we cannot say that this restricted definition of the economy as market production means that the work of women is completely excluded from consideration, we can suggest that many of the social activities in which women have been more involved than men have been marginalized from economic consideration. The work of women in reproducing labor and in supporting male labor has definitely been rendered insignificant by such a definition of what is economic. Moreover, the very idea of what is economic has been restricted to what is productive, or of value, as defined only in terms of the production of material wealth. The economists whom we analyzed can assert that women are included in the definition of the market, or in relations of production, but there remains a vast domain of social life in which most people (women and men) are active that has been excluded from economic thought.

It is, therefore, not simply a question of the exclusion of women, it is also an issue of the qualitative definition of what is economic activity. The partial exclusion of women's work from economic consideration implies more than its absence from the definition of what is economic. It also represents the devaluation of the kinds of work that women have most often performed. The ordinary business of living, rearing children, making households work, and reproducing

human society, has, thereby, been denigrated and dismissed from the serious consideration of economic thought. In its place, economists have raised on to a pedestal the capitalist production of commodities by waged labor (whether or not this is understood to be exploitative) as the central concern of economic thought.

What would happen to this view of economics, if economists were to take seriously the social relationships of gender?

#### The Implications of Gender for Economics

The limits of Smith's economic approach to the issue of gender were unclear. The absence of gender in the way that Smith abstracted an economic model from social reality was both progressive and illusory. His abstract view of individuals as equal, equivalent, and subject to natural laws, suggested that individuals were not differentiated by gender. We find it remarkable that Smith did not refer to the distinctions between the economic roles of women and men. Yet, the apparently progressive quality of his abstraction also served to mask the gendered quality of individuals' economic activity. Smith's individualism begs the question as to whether or not his economics had, thereby, eliminated women from economic consideration.

We find that Smith did not explicitly exclude women from consideration; neither did he distinguish them by any

theoretical difference from men as economic actors. This remained the case even as he compromised the ideal equality of economic individuals with the introduction of the historical reality of unequal social status: the social ranks of landlords, masters, and workers, which corresponded to the economic categories of rent, profit, and wages. Given Smith's recognition of unequal economic and social ranks, we conclude that Smith remained committed to a view of economic individuals who lacked differentiation by gender but which included women.

The obvious silence concerning gender by Smith nevertheless speaks loudly about the nature of his way of understanding social reality. Smith begins with ideal equal individuals--women and men--who all are subject to natural propensities to engage in economic behavior. Individuals naturally seek to exchange, exchange naturally encourages the division of labor, the division of labor leads to the historical growth in commercial society, commercial society results in the accumulation of wealth and property and the appearance of economic rank. Within this logical-historical trajectory, Smith's conceptual spotlight zooms in on the structure of economic relations between landlord, master, and worker, but leaves the differences between women and men off in the wings.

Smith began with the desire to understand the growth of national wealth. His economics thus derived and progressed

from strong goals. The direction of his thinking did not call for the revelation of the place of gender differences in the concept of the economy. If we imagine how Smith could have considered gender in his understanding of the economy, we can see more clearly the specific abstractions required to make his economics possible.

Smith could have posited a dualistic natural law that applied differently to the behavior of all women and all men. The natural propensities of all men would be to truck, barter, and exchange. All men would be economic individuals and would be landlords, masters, or workers depending on their success in commercial society. The natural propensities of all women would be to have babies, to be entirely responsible for their care and rearing, and to be responsible for all housework. Women, by natural law, would be excluded from activity as economic individuals in the market. The economy of the market would thus be a male-gendered social system. The imaginary introduction of gender into Smith's economics reveals how far from such a position Smith's own views actually were. It also reveals how dependent Smith's economics was on very strong definitional assumptions that abstracted from the complexity of social reality--including an abstraction from the complexity of gender.

Marx's form of economic abstraction was very different from Smith's, but also involved the idea of an economic

system in which gender differences were not readily apparent as characteristics of economic individuals. Yet, Marx's abstraction was contradictory in this regard, and we find two conflicting lines of thought in his economic approach, which at one and the same time asserted both the elimination and the exploitation of gender differences in the historical development of the capitalist mode of production.

Marx defined relations of production in terms of ownership and control of means of production by economic classes that were not specified in terms of gender. Yet, Marx's method of abstraction was historical, so that the idea of individuals' social relationships was given by the particular ways in which labor (or production) occurred in history. This gave Marx an entry into theorizing gender differences in economic terms.

The precise way in which Marx theorized the relationships between such supposedly natural gender differences and the historical and social relationships of economic development, however, remained confusing and contradictory. Gender emerged in a contradictory way in Marx's theory of value--its place was defined narrowly from the perspective of capitalist production and not from the wider perspective of social relations in the family or household. This weakness leads us to consider what would be the implications for Marx's economics if gender had been made internal and fundamental to his form of economic abstraction.

As with our imaginary introduction of gender into Smith's economic abstraction, Marx could have started with a concept of the individual as a gendered being. Unlike Smith, however, Marx did not define individuals on the basis of immutable natural laws, but on the basis of historically evolving social relations. Neither could Marx assert a simple biological determination of economic gender differences, because he insisted on the social evolution of natural constraints to human individuality (though Marx certainly does hold that natural differences of gender are nevertheless significant, even if subject to historical development). On what basis could Marx define economic individuals in terms of gender?

Marx would have had to consider seriously the whole complex of historical, social, and biological conditions that demarcated gender differences according to the specific conditions of historical periods. The different civil status, ideological treatment, cultural status, familial responsibility, and biological constraints on individuality given by the status of gender would have to be taken into account. Then such demarcations would have to be interpolated between his economic abstraction that went from the individual to the class structure.

Thus, for example, the place of women and men--and children--in different patterns of domestic work and

childcare would inform the ways in which Marx theorized their entrance into the social relations of capitalist production. This, in turn, would have implications for his theory of value. No longer could he theorize about value only from the perspective of capitalist production. In order for gender differences to be recognized in Marxist economics, he would have to consider value from the wider perspective of domestic work as well as capitalist production. It was exactly the problems of such a theoretical development that were confronted by the Marxist/feminists.

Marx, moreover, would have difficulty in systematically asserting a social division between women and men that counterposed all women and all men in a monolithic social division comparable to that between capitalist and worker. At least in capitalism, the division of gender does not amount to a social division that automatically assigns women and men to entirely distinct economic roles or social activities. This could perhaps be the case if, for example, all women were housewives and did not participate at all in the capitalist labor market; then, he would have found it possible to maintain a gendered class division that paralleled and crossed over the class division based on the social relations of capitalist production. (The difficulty of constituting gender as a social and economic class system was revealed in our discussion of the Marxist/feminist approaches). The historically contingent attributes of



gender that affect individuals could at most be modifying characteristics that affect an individuals' placement within Marx's theory of the economy.

In the absence of a theory of the social structure of gender, Marx in his concept of classes and the mode of production can only crudely refer to the economics of gender differences. From our examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the Marxist approach, we find that the theory of production requires redefinition if we are to comprehend the social relations of gender.

Such a redefinition of production would not be limited to the production of commodities in places of work outside the home, and it would require a redefinition of Marx's theory of the commodity. (In redefining the commodity, Marx would have to recognize the gendered attributes of the human commodity of labor-power as well as the influence of such attributes on the valuation of commodities produced by such labor for exchange in the market). Production would include the production of the value of human labor-power and its specifically gendered qualities. Production also would include both the use-values or utility of goods and services that are not exchanged as commodities in the market (including therefore the economic "value" of much of the work performed by women outside the market), and it would continue to include the production of commodities as exchange-values in the market. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the

redefinition of production would include the production of gender itself as a social and economic category.<sup>1</sup>

We find a further example of the way in which economics was a form of abstraction that ignored gender differences in the work of Marshall. Marshall's form of abstraction, however, was different from both that of Smith and Marx. Marshall's focus on market prices, like Smith's idea of the natural propensities of individuals, allowed him to set up a complete autonomous model of the economy. As with Smith, Marshall needed to abstract from differences among individuals so that he could generalize an economic model. However, unlike Smith's idea of economic individuals as all sharing naturally given propensities, Marshall achieved a similar effect through the assumption of all individuals' operating according to the principles of maximization of marginal utility. Market price became the fundamental economic signifier, replacing Smith's natural laws. The centering of marginalist economics on market prices removed it from any qualitative understanding of individuals

---

<sup>1</sup>I am following the idea of West and Zimmerman (1987) that gender is a routine recurring accomplishment that is a feature of social situations. Thus, gendered work, such as housework, childcare, and the definition of jobs as male and female, is not only a question of the allocation of time, skill, or power, but is in a fundamental sense also the actual symbolic production of gender. The housewife in doing housework is also "doing" gender. So too with the male breadwinner earning the family income. "Insofar as a society is partitioned by "essential" differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced, doing gender is unavoidable" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137).

in social relationships. The only social relationship pertinent to the neoclassical economics was that between individuals and the price of goods (the utility preference).

The strength of Marshall's neoclassical economics, as with Smith, was its abstraction, an abstraction that also removed it from the problems of gender that we wished to understand. The attribute of gender held by individuals was invisible to the marginalist calculus, the very power of which depended on its abstraction from such qualitative characteristics of individuals in society.

We find, nevertheless, that the problem of gender differences was certainly present in Marshall's economics, but it came from the outside, as it were. Gender differences were given by a normative morality of women's domestic and childcare responsibility that colored the neutral technique of the marginalist analysis, but the morality remained distinct from the pure economic approach. In his economic approach, as such, Marshall had nothing to say about gender differences.

Would it have been possible for Marshall to have introduced gender within the marginalist technique? How could the dualism of the neutral technique of marginalism and the morality of gendered economic roles be integrated? The integration of the marginalist technique and gender could only occur if the notion of individual subjective value or utility was redefined in such a way that it varied uniformly

with corresponding differences associated with gender. Again, as with our imaginary introduction of gender into Smith's natural laws, Marshall would have to assert uniform differences of taste between women and men that were reflected in patterns of supply and demand. Yet, even if we could show that there were uniform distinctions in subjective taste shared by all women that were different from all men, we still need to show how such distinctions would affect the wider purpose of the marginalist economic technique and its overall model of the economy. For, after all, the strength and power of this form of economics was its remarkable capacity to abstract from just such sectoral, localized, or individualized characteristics and aggregate a picture of the total economy in terms of the uniform measure of prices.

What is more interesting is not whether gender could be inserted into the underlying model of individual utility that supports the marginalist method (which would contradict the goals and purposes of this technique), but how Marshall's normative morality of gender can or cannot be integrated with this form of economics. As we argued in Chapter 4, Marshall only succeeded in unifying his moral views on women's economic roles with the marginalist technique by asserting a long-term economic benefit of women rearing high quality male labor and their associated partial exclusion from the labor market. Yet, such a "benefit" could only be perceived given the terms of Marshall's prior normative judgments as to the

right and proper course of economic development that put women's primary economic place and purpose in the home. In the case of a society in which such domestic systems of support for male labor was not available, Marshall's economic technique would not have been at all affected, confirming the break between his moral views and his economics, as such.

Marshall's morality of gender reflected a view of a social world external to the economy of market prices, a world in which women occupied the boundary between the market economy and a wider moral universe. For Marshall to have integrated these two worlds would require that he redefine economics away from its basis in uniform marginal utility expressed in the form of prices. The redefinition of economics would then have to include the "other" world with its moral dimension of gender which cannot be expressed by the marginal calculus. If he did such a redefinition of economics, he would have to abandon the basis of the marginalist technique that depends for its operation on the abstraction from qualitative characteristics of individuals in social relationships. The only way that he could combine the two worlds of the marginalist technique and the morality of gendered roles would be through an extension of the principle of utility maximization to apply to what have been traditionally noneconomic fields--which is exactly what Becker attempted. Yet, as we argued in Chapter 6, this unification takes place at the expense of ignoring the

substantive qualities of the fields that are thereby incorporated into the economic analysis.

When we return to the reformulation of the Marxist economic approach by the recent Marxist/feminists, we find that several key issues were clarified, but that the feminists who reworked Marx remained unable to integrate the gender differences associated with domestic labor and those found in the labor market--a relationship was indicated, but an operational theoretical system had not been established.

The Marxist/feminists showed that a relationship existed between women's domestic labor, the value of labor-power in general, and gender differences in the value of labor-power and in its employment in the market. We observed some instances of these kinds of relationships from the history of the women cotton workers. Yet, we could not establish this relationship as a theoretical system that explained economic gender differences, because the underlying Marxist theory of value held that women's domestic labor was unvalued because it was work that was not exchanged in the market. Furthermore, there were aspects of women's domestic labor, especially their role in childbirth and childcare, that remained particularly immune to the usual Marxist economic form of understanding. Marxist/feminists could reduce gendered work such as housework and childcare to the formal properties of the theory of production, but they failed to explain their gendered quality.

Of course, the Marxist/feminists wanted to develop an economics that concerns gender, and in so far as they stretched Marxist categories towards that goal, they succeeded. In this sense, the purposive direction of this form of economics inevitably came closest to our needs and interests in understanding the economics of gender differences.

The great irony of the history of the economic approaches to gender differences was that Becker's neoclassical economics, derived straight from Marshall's absolutely genderless marginalist technique, succeeded in unifying the domains of gender differences between the household and the market. (The unification was weakened, however, by the derivation of gender differences within the economic approach from external biological assumptions).

In the same way that we asked what would have been the implications of Marshall integrating his morality of gender with his economic technique, we may ask what would happen if Becker took seriously the biological assumptions that are taken for granted. In expanding the idea of utility to refer to the allocation of time as well as income, Becker widened the scope of economic analysis beyond its traditional concern with the market production of goods or services. The gendered division of labor in the household (and thereby in the labor market) is determined partly by "biological differences" and partly by different investments in human

capital (see Chapter 6). The exact degree of determination of biology, Becker acknowledges, cannot be known. Yet, it is exactly this kind of determination that is the crucial factor in his analysis of gender specialization. The logic of utility maximization that results in gendered specialization of women in housework and childcare, and their inferior position in the labor market, derives from this pre-given determination. Becker only explains what already has been predetermined. What would Becker have to do to take biological determination of economic gender specialization seriously?

Becker would have to consider Marx's idea that the biological constraints on human individuality are subject to historical change and development. What was a biological constraint of gender 500 years ago is a very different constraint in 1987. The weight of such constraints and their economic impact must have changed dramatically. Certainly we would expect the biology of childbirth to impact the gendered division of labor, but such impact will vary according to social conditions. What was once a biological constraint is perhaps now an ideological or moral effect determining the roles and responsibilities of women's work. Without the prior acknowledgment of the interaction of biological constraint with social conditions, the logic of utility maximization is bound to repeat the status quo in interpreting the economics of gender specialization.



Yet, for Becker to take biology seriously in this way would be to threaten the whole basis of the economic approach. Becker operates by applying economics on a plane of already given assumptions of social reality. As soon as these assumptions are examined, as when we question whether we can actually specify how gender specialization is determined by biology, then the whole pack of cards is likely to collapse. If we cannot say how biology determines that women specialize in childcare and housework, and thus are less invested in as human capital for the labor market, then we cannot feed such assumptions into the logic of utility maximization that justifies such specialization.

Yet, there is a larger picture revealed by the ways in which the different economic theories approached the problem of gender. Whatever the distinctions in the structure of economics devised by Smith, Marx, and Marshall and their descendants, they shared central characteristics. Economic thought, although not always an explicitly purposive activity, has been directed towards specific goals and needs. In abstracting from social reality to build an economic model, the economist desires to recognize certain social features and not others. The economist sees what she/he selects to be made visible. The forms of absence and appearance of gender in economic theory reveal what is made visible by economists. In this sense, economics is a system of power, a power designed to make visible what is desired to

be known. In making what is desired to be known visible, the economist makes invisible or distorts whatever is of no concern.

What then does economics do? Each economist that we have examined, abstracted from social reality a functioning systematic model of relationships between individuals and the material and social world. The purpose of these models was to understand the system of market production, in one way or another. The models all required specific concepts that delimited the nature of individuality and its social relationships. It was within this delimitation that gender was recognized or denied.

Yet, although the place of gender in economic thought reveals what it is that economics does, there remain certain qualities of gender that pose particular difficulty for economics to deal with. The economic problem of gender is not merely one of the visibility of gender (as if the mere acknowledgement of gender would solve the problem we are interested in). Gender is everywhere. Gender is so ubiquitous in the social world, so "natural", that it does not demand attention, examination, or explanation. Gender has always been so obvious that it is invisible. Making gender visible is therefore a step towards the problem. But this also means that economic theories, even if they have not referred to gender specifically or explicitly, have in a certain sense, always been about gender. It is the ways in

which they have been implicitly about gender that has been the problem.

Furthermore, the presence of gender in all social relationships is not merely the representation of gender in social relationships, but also the production of gender through social relationships. The work of mothering, housework, being the breadwinner, being a coalminer, being a secretary, is not merely the production of value (for Marx), the expression of utility preferences (Becker et al), or the fulfillment of natural propensities (Smith); such work, as with all social interactions, is the creation and reinforcement of gendered identity. Economic activities are also the construction of gender. It is this production of gender in all social relationships (including the economic) that has remained the most invisible aspect of the obvious nature of gender in society--and in its theoretical representation in economics.

The limits of economics with regard to gender have revealed to us the wider limitations of economics. In thinking of how economists could have thought more seriously about gender, we have discovered that economists cannot think seriously, or very well, about many other aspects of our social lives that could, and should, be thought of as economic. Economists' focus on market production has resulted not only in the marginalization of gender.

The abstractions economists have made in order to model

successfully market production have inevitably been detrimental for our understanding of the economy of human livelihoods outside of those limits. The dominance of the ways of thinking of economics, however, makes it hard for us even to conceptualize what economics could be, if it did refer to a wider domain of social life and activity. The question of gender, nevertheless, has pointed us in this direction. We can see that the domain of social life that we would want economics to refer to is not simply that of the market and the cash nexus. Illich (1982) has called this wider context of economic activity "the vernacular," meaning all those forms of subsistence that extend beyond the market.

The point of view of economists has been that of capital (again, whether or not such a view reflected a desire to abolish capitalism). The point of view of an economics that could deal with gender and a wider social domain would be developed from the needs of human livelihoods. By this, we mean that a new order of logic or goals would guide the purposive direction of economics. If economists have been directed by the logic of maximization (of utility, of capital accumulation), a new logic would reflect the needs and values of people rather than commodities. The understanding of the economy would be directed towards social and political goals.

Thus, we have seen that there is a need for economists to recognize gender, arising from our recognition of the place of gender in economic activity--a place that extends

beyond the market. It is a place, in the case of gender, where the political values of the women's movement have demanded recognition and social change. The recognition of this need suggests a direction for the development of economic thought, towards a qualitative understanding of social relationships.

Yet, recognizing such limits, and thinking of such new goals or forms of logic for economics, assumes that the present form of economics can be changed. We have shown how the consideration of gender would alter drastically the nature of economics. For economists to have a new starting point, one based on the diversity of human needs and interests, rather than the unilinear logic of maximization given by the market or capital, would involve abandoning the forms of abstraction used to develop models of the market. Instead of abstracting from the complexity of social life and individual characteristics (such as gender), economists would now have to represent such diversity. Economics could no longer be based on the principles of homogeneity (whether given by prices or relations of production). As such, a new economics would not be generalistic, it would be fragmentary. Such a fragmentation would not achieve the powerful model of social integration offered by existing economic theory, but would recognize the qualitative differences that express human needs and interests. Such an economics would not be an economics as we have so far known it.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Michael (1980). Approaches to the History of the Western Family. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy (1978). The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1977). "Introduction," to Karl Marx, in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, Edited by E. J. Hobsbawm, New York: International Publishers.
- Illich, Ivan. (1982). Gender. New York: Random House.
- Marshall, Alfred (1961). Principles of Economics. London: Macmillan.
- West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman (1987). "Doing Gender," Gender and Society, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1987.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbot, Edith (1910). Women in Industry. New York: Appleton.
- Adlam, D. (1979). "Review, the Case Against Capitalist Patriarchy," M/F A Feminist Journal, No. 3. pp. 83-102.
- Althusser, Louis (1975). Reading Capital. London: Verso.
- Amsden, Alice H. (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Anderson, Michael (1971). Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, Michael (1976). "Sociological History and the Working-Class Family: Smelser Revisited," Social History, No. 3. October 1976. pp. 317-334.
- Anderson, Michael (1980). Approaches to the History of the Western Family. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Anthony, P. D. (1977). The Ideology of Work. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Arendt, Hannah (1958). The Human Condition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle, (1984). The Complete Works. Volumes One and Two, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ashton, T. S. (1962). The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830. London: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, Ernest (1957). "Introduction," to Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500-1800. By Otto Gierke. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Barrett, Michelle (1980). Women's Oppression Today, Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis. London: Verso.
- Barrett, Michelle (1984). "Rethinking Women's Oppression: A Reply to Brenner and Ramas," New left Review, No. 146, pp. 123-128.



- Bebel, August (1904, 1971). Woman Under Socialism. New York: Schocken Books.
- Becker, Gary S. (1965). "A Theory of the Allocation of Time," The Economic Journal. Vol. LXXX, No. 200, September, 1965, pp. 493-517. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1971). The Economics of Discrimination. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1976). The Economic Approach to Human Behavior. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1981). A Treatise on the Family. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Becker, Gary S. (1982). "An Economic Theory of Discrimination," in Discrimination, Affirmative Action, and Equal Opportunity. Co-Edited by W. E. Block and M. A. Walker. Vancouver, Canada: The Fraser Institute. pp. 52-90.
- Beechey, Veronica (1977). "Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production," Capital and Class, No. 3. pp. 45-66.
- Bell, Daniel (1981). "Models and Reality in Economic Discourse," in The Crisis in Economic Theory. Edited by Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol, New York: Basic Books, pp. 46-80.
- Benston, Margaret (1969). "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," Monthly Review, Vol. 21, No. 4. pp. 13-27.
- Billet, Leonard (1978). "Justice, Liberty, and Economy," in Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations. Edited by Fred R. Glahe, Boulder, CO: The Colorado Associated University Press, pp 83-110.
- Blaug, Mark (1980, third edition). Economic Theory in Retrospect. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Braverman, Harry (1974). Labor and Monopoly Capital. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Brenner, Johanna and Ramas, Maria (1984). "Rethinking Women's Oppression," New Left Review, No. 144, March/April, pp. 33-77.

- Bythell, Duncan (1969). The Handloom Weavers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bythell, Duncan (1978). The Sweated Trades, Outwork in Nineteenth Century Britain. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Campbell, T. D. (1971). Adam Smith's Science of Morals. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Cantor, Milton, and Laurie, Bruce (1977). Class, Sex and the Woman Worker. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy (1978). The Reproduction of Mothering, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cipolla, Carlo M. (1962). The Economic History of World Population. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Clarke, Simon (1982). Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Collier, Frances (1964). The Family Economy of the Working Class in the Cotton Industry, 1784-1833. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cousins, Mark (1978). "Material Arguments and Feminism," M/F A Feminist Journal, No. 2. pp. 62-70.
- Coward, Rosalind (1983). Patriarchal Precedents, Sexuality and Social Relations. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Creighton, Colin (1980). "Family, Property and Relations of Production in Western Europe," Economy and Society, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2 May 1980, pp. 129-163.
- Crouzet, Francois (1982). The Victorian Economy. Translated by Anthony Forster. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Crouzet, Francois (1972). (Editor), Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution. London: Methuen.
- Deane, Phyllis, and W. A. Cole (1967). British Economic Growth, 1688-1956. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition.

- Deane, Phyllis (1972). "Capital Formation in Britain Before the Railway Age," in Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution. Edited and introduced by Francois Crouzet. London: Methuen.
- Deane, Phyllis (1978). The Evolution of Economic Ideas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Delphy, Christine (1984). Close to Home, A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Demos, J. (1970). A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth County. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dex, Shirley (1985). The Sexual Division of Work: Conceptual Revolutions in the Social Sciences. Brighton, England: The Harvester Press Publishing Group.
- Dobb, Maurice (1973). Theories of Value and Distribution Since Adam Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dumont, Louis (1977). From Mandeville to Marx, the Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Edgeworth, F. Y. (1922). "Equal Pay to Men and Women for Equal Work," Economic Journal, Vol. 32, (December 1922), pp. 431-57.
- Edholm, Felicity, O. Harriss, and K. Young (1977). "Conceptualising Women," Critique of Anthropology, pp. 101-130.
- Elson, Diane (1979). Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism. London: CSE Books, Ltd.
- Engels, Frederick (1972). The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. New York: Pathfinder.
- Fawcett, Millicent, G. (1918) "Equal Pay for Equal Work," Economic Journal, 28 (March 1918), pp. 1-6.
- Finley, Moses (1973). The Ancient Economy. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- Firestone, Shulamuth (1970). The Dialectic of Sex. New York: Morrow.

- Floud, R and D. McCloskey (1981). The Economic History of Britain Since 1700. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Folbre, Nancy (1982). "Exploitation Comes Home: A Critique of the Marxian Theory of Family Labour," Cambridge Journal of Economics, No. 5. pp. 317-329.
- Friedman, Andrew (1977). Industry and Labor. London: Macmillan.
- Friedan, Betty (1963). The Feminine Mystique. New York: Norton.
- Gamarikow, Eva, D. H. J. Morgan, J. Purvis, and D. E. Taylorson (Editors) (1983). Gender Class and Work. London: Heineman Educational Books, Ltd.
- Gierke, Otto (1957). Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500-1800. (Including a lecture on "The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity," by Ernst Troeltsch). Translated with an introduction by Ernest Baker. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Gould, Carol C. and M. W. Wartofsky, (1976). Women and Philosophy, Towards a Theory of Liberation. New York: Perigree Books.
- Gould, Carol, C. (1976) "The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy" in Gould, Carol, C. and Marx W. Wartofsky (Editors). Women and Philosophy, Towards a Theory of Liberation, pp. 5-44. New York: Perigree Books.
- Gould, Carol, C. (1980). Marx's Social Ontology, Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Hareven, Tamara (1978). Transitions, The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective. New York: Academic Press.
- Hareven, Tamara and Vinovskis, Marisa (1978). Family and Population in Nineteenth Century America. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harrison, John (1974). "The Political Economy of Housework," Bulletin of Conference of Socialist Economists, Vol. III, No. 1.
- Hartmann, Heidi (1979). "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," Capital and Class, Vol. 8, pp. 1-13.

- Hartwell, R. M. (1967). The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England. London: Methuen.
- Hartwell, R. M. (1970). The Industrial Revolution. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Hartwell, R. M. (1971). The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth. London: Methuen.
- Hewitt, R. M. (1975). Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1959). Essays in World Economics. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1965). Capital and Growth. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hicks, John Richard (1969). A Theory of Economic History. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, Stephen (1981). Competition and Control at Work: the New Industrial Sociology. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Himmelweit, Susan and S. Mohun (1977). "Domestic Labour and Capital," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 1, pp. 15-31.
- Himmelweit, Susan (1984). "The Real Dualism of Sex and Class," Review of Radical Political Economics, Special Issue: The Political Economy of Women, Volume 16, no. 1, pp. 167-184.
- Hirschman, Albert (1977). The Passions and the Interests. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1977). "Introduction," to K. Marx, in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations. Edited by E. J. Hobsbawm, New York: International Publishers.
- Humphries, Jane (1977). "Class Struggle and the Resistance of the Working Class Family," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 1, pp. 241-258.
- Illich, Ivan (1982). Gender. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Jevons, W. Stanley, (1871, 1970). The Theory of Political Economy. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd.

- Jha, Narmadeshwar (1973). The Age of Marshall, Aspects of British Economic Thought 1890-1915. London: Frank Cass.
- Joseph, George (1983). Women at Work. Manchester: University of Manchester.
- Keynes, J. M. (1982). "The Life of Alfred Marshall, 1842-1924," in Wood, John Cunningham (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm. (Originally published in the Economic Journal, Vol. 34, September 1924, pp. 311-72).
- Kriedte, Peter, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm (1981). Industrialisation Before Industrialisation, Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kriedte, Peter (1983). Peasants, Landlords, and the Merchant Capitalists: Europe and the World Economy, 1500-1800. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuhn, Annette, and A. Wolpe (1978). Feminism and Materialism, Women and Modes of Production. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Kuznets, Simon (1960). "Quantitative Aspects of the Economic Growth of Nations," Economic Development and Cultural Change VIII, No. 4, Part II, July 1960, pp. 1-96.
- Kuznets, Simon (1966). Modern Economic Growth. Rate, Structure and Spread. New Haven and London.
- Kuznets, Simon (1973). Population, Capital, and Growth, Selected Essays. New York: Norton.
- Landes, David (1969). The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lerner, Gerda (1969). "The Lady and the Mill-Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," Mid-Continent American Studies Journal, Vol. X., pp. 325-369.
- Levitt, T. (1982). "Alfred Marshall: Victorian Relevance for Modern Economics", in Wood, John Cunningham, (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.

- Lichtheim, George (1965). Marxism, an Historical and Critical Study. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.
- Lloyd, Cynthia, B. and B. T. Niemi (1979). The Economics of Sex Differentials. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lukes, Steven (1984 reprint). Individualism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Macpherson, C. B. (1979). The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Madden, Janice Fanning (1973). The Economics of Sex Discrimination. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Marshall, Alfred (1961). Principles of Economics. London: Macmillan.
- Marshall, Alfred (1975). The Early Economic Writings of Alfred Marshall. Edited by J. K. Whitaker. New York: Free Press.
- Marx, Karl (1970). "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in Marx, Engels, Selected Works. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl (1972). "The German Ideology," in The Marx Engels Reader. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels (1972). "The Communist Manifesto," in The Marx Engels Reader. Edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Marx, Karl (1972). "On Imperialism in India" and "The Future Results of British Rule in India," written for the New York Daily Tribune, London, July 22, 1853 and London, Friday, June 10, 1853, in Robert C. Tucker, (editor) The Marx Engels Reader. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Capital, Volumes One, Two and Three. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl (1977). Grundrisse. Harmondsworth: Penguin Publications.
- Marx, Karl (1982). Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. New York: International Publishers.

- Mathias, Peter (1983) 2nd edition. The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914. London.
- McDonough, R and Harrison R. (1978). "Patriarchy and Relations of Production," in Feminism and Materialism, Women and Modes of Production. Edited by A. Kuhn, and A. Wolpe. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Medick, Hans (1976). "The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: the Structural Function of Household and Family During the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism," Social History, No. 3 October, 1976, pp. 292-315.
- Meek, Ronald, L. (1977). Smith, Marx and After. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Menger, C. (1871, 1950). Principles of Economics. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Mincer, Jacob (1962). "Labor Force Participation of Married Women: A Study of Labor Supply", A Report of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 63-73. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Mincer, Jacob and Solomon Polacheck (1974). "Family Investments in Human Capital: Earnings of Women", Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 82, Part 2, March-April 1974, pp. S76-S108. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Milkman, Ruth (1980). "Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor: Historical perspectives on "Women's Work" and the American labor Movement," Socialist Review, Jan-Feb, 1980.
- Millet, Kate (1970). Sexual Politics. New York: Doubleday.
- Mitchell, B. R. (1962). Abstract of British Historical Statistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, Juliet (1971). Woman's Estate. New York: Random House.
- Molyneux, Maxine (1979). "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate," New Left Review, No. 116, pp. 3-27.



- Morgan, L. H. (1974). Ancient Society. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.
- Norton, Mary Beth (1979). Women of America: A History. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- O'Brien, Denis, P. and Presley, John, R. (Editors) (1981). Pioneers of Modern Economics in Britain. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books.
- Okin, Susan Moller (1979). Women in Western Political Thought. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Parsons, Talcott (1982). "Wants and Activities in Marshall", in Wood, John Cunningham, (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.
- Parsons, Talcott, (1982). "Economics and Sociology: Marshall in Relation to the Thought of his Time", in Wood, John Cunningham, (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.
- Phelps Brown, Henry (1977). The Inequality of Pay. California: University of California Press.
- Pierce, Christine (1971). "Natural Law Language and Women" in Woman in Sexist Society. Edited by Vivian Gormick and Barbara K. Moran. New York: Basic Books.
- Pinchbeck, Ivy (1969). Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution. New York: Kelley.
- Plato, (1968). The Republic of Plato. Translated with Notes. New York: Allan Bloom.
- Polanyi, Karl (1957). The Great Transformation. Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Rabb, Theodore K. and Rotberg, Robert, I. (1971). The Family in History. New York: Harper and Row.
- Rattansi, Ali (1982). Marx and the Division of Labour. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Reich, Michael, David Gordon, and Richard C. Edwards (1973). "A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," American Economics Review, Vol. 63, No. 2, May 1973, pp. 359-65. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Review of Radical Political Economics (1984). "The Political Economy of Women." Vol. 16, No. 1. Spring,
- Robbins, Lionel (1930). "On the Elasticity of Demand for Income in Terms of Effort," Economica, Vol. 10 No. 29, pp. 123-129.
- Robinson, Joan (1934). The Economics of Imperfect Competition. London: Macmillan.
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1974). Woman's Consciousness, Man's World. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Rowbotham, Sheila (1974). Women, Resistance and Revolution. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sabine, George Holland (1937) (4th edition). A History of Political Theory. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden.
- Schlumbolm, Jurgen (1981). "Relations of Production-Productive Forces--Crises in Proto-Industrialisation", in Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, Jurgen Schlumbolm, 1981, Industrialisation Before Industrialisation, Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1954). History of Economic Analysis. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, Joan W. and Tilly, Louise A. (1975). "Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth Century Europe," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 1975, pp. 36-64. Re-printed in Amsden (1980). The Economics of Women and Work. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Scott, Joan W. (1982). "The Mechanization of Women's Work," Scientific American. September, 1982.
- Secombe, Wally (1974). "The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism," New Left Review, No. 89. pp. 3-24.
- Secombe, Wally (1975). "Domestic Labour--Reply to Critics", New Left Review, no. 94. pp. 85-96.
- Siltanen, Janet (Editor) (1981). "A Commentary on Theories of Female Wage Labour," in Cambridge Women's Studies Group, Women in Society, London: Virago. pp. 25-40.

- Skinner, Andrew (1983). "Introduction," to The Wealth of Nations, by Adam Smith, Books 1-111. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Smelser, Neil (1969). Social Change and the Industrial Revolution. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Adam (1966). The Theory of Moral Sentiments. New York: Augustus M. Kelly.
- Smith, Adam (1976). An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. Edited and with an Introduction by Edwin Cannan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Smuts, Robert (1971). Women and Work in America. New York: Schocken Books.
- Sokoloff, Nancy (1980). Between Money and Love: The Dialactics of Home and Market Work. New York: Praeger.
- Spiegel, H. S. (1983). The Growth of Economic Thought. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sweet, James, A. (1973). Women in the Labor Force. New York: Seminar Press.
- Thompson, Edward P. (1968). The Making of the English Working Class. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Timpanaro, Sebastian (1975). On Materialism. London: Verso.
- Tribe, Keith (1981). Genealogies of Capitalism. New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Walker, Pat (1979). Between Capital and Labor. Boston: South End Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1980). The Modern World System, II, Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy, 1600-1750. New York: Academic Press.
- Walras, (1874, 1954). Elements of Pure Economics. Translated by W. Jaffe. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc. (1926, Elements d'Economie Politique Pure (Theorie de la Richesse Sociale), 5th edition, Paris and Lausanne.
- West, Candace, and Don. H. Zimmerman (1987). "Doing Gender," Gender and Society, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1987.

Wood, John Cunningham (1982). Alfred Marshall: Critical Assessments, Volumes I-IV. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm.