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Introduction: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Sociological Perspective on Ethics and Society

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INTRODUCTION: CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ETHICS AND SOCIETY

Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan

Then, being nothing if not practical, they set their keen and active minds to discover the kind of conduct expected of them. This worked out in a most admirable system of ethics.

—Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

Social Ethics: Sociology and the Future of Society provides a complex yet accessible statement of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's mature sociological theory of ethical life. Her perspective is welded intellectually to sociology and evolutionary thought and concretely to the well-being of children throughout the world. We have failed, writes Gilman in *Social Ethics*, to teach even "a simple, child-convincing ethics based on social interactions, *because we have not understood sociology*" (emphasis added). For Gilman, a world in which children are not loved, well fed, properly clothed, thoughtfully educated, and humanely disciplined is a world ethically at odds with logic and itself. From this fundamental premise, all else follows. Thus: war, barbarism, waste, religious bigotry, conspicuous consumption, greed, environmental degradation, preventable diseases, and patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations—all these for Gilman are highly unethical *and must not be allowed to stand* if society is to be a good place for children. If, as readers of *Social Ethics*, we sense that we are being firmly lectured as well as cajoled by Gilman's penetrating wit and obvious intellect—that is because we are. Gilman pulls no punches, she really intends us to change our ways, and to use

sociological insights to improve our future society. *Social Ethics* first appeared in 1914 in serial form in Gilman's extraordinary pedagogical experiment in adult education, a self-published monthly sociological journal, issued from 1909 to 1916, written *entirely* by Gilman and called, aptly enough, *The Forerunner*.

The publication of *Social Ethics*, now for the first time in book form, completes the republication of four of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's major sociological works originally serialized in the final volumes of *The Forerunner* during 1914, 1915, and 1916. Taken as a whole, Gilman's *Social Ethics*, *Herland*, *With Her in Ourland*, and *The Dress of Women* provide an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the central sociological issues facing not only Gilman's era, but also our increasingly hyper-modern era at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Each of these works—whether fiction or non-fiction, fundamental overview or special study, hypothetical thought experiment or searing real world critique—informs, interprets, and reinforces the others.

Of the major works in this sociological quartet, *Herland* is undoubtedly the best known and most widely read, and when first published in book form in 1979, with an introduction by Ann J. Lane, was trumpeted as a "lost feminist classic" (see, for a more carefully edited recent edition, Gilman 1999). *Herland* is a fictional fantasy in which three male explorers discover a secluded and idyllic world inhabited and governed only by women, and this latter feature has understandably delighted successive waves of scholars and students in women's studies and American literature courses. Yet *Herland*, despite its literary attributes, is fundamentally a work of sociology. It is not a utopia, but rather a lucid and persuasive thought experiment of the highest order in which Gilman plays systematically with alternate institutional arrangements and interpersonal relationships emerging from women's values and worldview.

Herland is a step on the way *to* a future utopia where men and women create the ideal society. The ending of *With Her in Ourland* points to the possibility of such a utopia, but Gilman does not write the story of that utopia. When *Herland* is evaluated as a utopia, and this is a large literature (e.g., Kessler 1995; Knight 1997, 1999; Lane 1979), it is the scholar who depicts *Herland* as a utopia, not Gilman. Gilman wrote *With Her in Ourland* in order to add a necessary step toward the possible imaginary land where men and women are both full human beings and children are central to the social structure. For a thorough analysis of *Herland* in cultural terms, see Deegan (1997), and, more briefly, as a sociological thought experiment, see M.R. Hill (1996).

Of the three men introduced into *Herland*, it is Vandyke Jennings, a

sociologist, who—although flawed—is nonetheless the most sympathetically portrayed and is ultimately the most amenable to the unfolding sociological rationale of Gilman’s hypothetical Herland. Van narrates the story and, importantly, comprehends what the Herland women have accomplished (Gilman 1999: 102–3):

Their religion, you see, was maternal; and their ethics, based on the full perception of evolution, showed the principle of growth and the beauty of wise culture. They had no theory of the essential opposition of good and evil; life to them was growth; their pleasure was in growing, and their duty also.

With this background, with their sublimated mother-love, expressed in terms of widest social activity, every phase of their work was modified by its effect on the national growth. The language itself they had deliberately clarified, simplified, made easy and beautiful, for the sake of the children.

This seemed to us a wholly incredible thing: first, that any nation should have the foresight, the strength, and the persistence to plan and fulfill such a task; and second, that women should have had so much initiative. We have assumed, as a matter of course, that women had none; that only the man, with his natural energy and impatience of restriction, would ever invent anything.

Here we found that the pressure of life upon the environment develops in the human mind its inventive reactions, regardless of sex; and further, that a fully awakened motherhood plans and works without limit, for the good of the child.

And as to ethics, *per se*, Van reported (Gilman 1999: 114):

They developed their central theory of a Loving Power, and assumed that its relation to them was motherly—that it desired their welfare and especially their development. Their relation to it, similarly, was filial, a loving appreciation and a glad fulfillment of its high purposes. Then, being nothing if not practical, they set their keen and active minds to discover the kind of conduct expected of them. This worked out in a most admirable system of ethics. The principle of Love was universally recognized—and used.

Patience, gentleness, courtesy, all that we call “good breeding,” was part of their code of conduct. But where they went far beyond us was in the special application of religious feeling to every field of life. They had no ritual, no little set of performances called “divine service,” save those religious pageants I have spoken of, and those were as much educational as religious, and as much social as either. But they had a clear established connection between everything they did—and God. Their cleanliness, their health, their exquisite order, the rich peaceful beauty of the whole land,

the happiness of the children, and above all the constant progress they made—all this was their religion.

Herland, however, is not an ideal society. It is incomplete despite the obvious appeal and virtues of a peaceful, humane, well-ordered existence.

Thus, Gilman marries off Ellador (a young Herland forester) to Van and prepares her to embark on a reconnaissance tour of the outer world—the real world—to discover what can be learned for the eventual benefit of Herland. Ellador, in *With Her in Ourland: Sequel to Herland*, eventually opines to Van (Gilman 1997: 64):

“It must be nobler to have Two,” she would say, her eyes shining. “We are only half a people. Of course we love each other [in Herland], and have advanced our own little country, but it is such a little one—and you have The World!”

As Ellador prepares to leave Herland for her study of Ourland, Van notes: “there was a great to-do all over the country about Ellador’s leaving them. She had interviews with some of the leading ethicists—wise women with still eyes, and with the best of the teachers.” A thorough re-grounding in ethics was thought necessary for anyone who ventured for the first time from the sheltered realm of Herland into the unknown terrors of the real-world.

In *With Her in Ourland: Sequel to Herland*, the second major work of the sociological quartet to be re-published recently in book form, in 1997, Ellador and Van circumnavigate the globe. The roles in Herland are reversed: Van becomes the guide and Ellador the observer. And, whereas *Herland* was an exercise in sociologically-informed imaginative fiction, *With Her in Ourland* is a fictionalized treatise that centrally engages the concrete and horrendous realities of world war, famine, bigotry, economic exploitation, and sexual oppression—and is necessarily a more foreboding and unsettling work than *Herland*. The Herland/Ourland saga is a comprehensive sociological excursion that runs from the sublime to the horrendous and finally to the possibility of redemption and hope for a better future based on egalitarian cooperation and understanding between women and men.

The Dress of Women, published for the first time in book form in 2002, is a non-fiction guidebook to a range of gender issues presented in Gilman’s Herland/Ourland saga, and Gilman published it in *The Forerunner* during 1916 in concert with the serialization of *Ourland*. In *Dress*, Gil-

man spelled out many of the specific intellectual, philosophical, and sociological insights that she wove into the ethical dilemmas and plot devices featured in the Herland/Ourland saga. Concrete examples, Gilman believed, are useful pedagogical tools—and virtually everyone wears clothing; it is a universal example. Central issues for Gilman are the ethical dimensions of clothing in terms of cost, materials, and sexual oppression. *The Dress of Women* is a methodological *tour de force* demonstrating Gilman's ability to integrate and bring wide-ranging social scientific analyses and perspectives to bear on a single, focused topic: clothing, and it begins with a fundamental, wholly sociological premise: "Cloth is a social tissue" (Gilman 2002: 3). *Dress*, however, leaves Gilman's overall ethical system less than fully explicit, a point remedied here by the publication for the first time in book form of Gilman's full-length sociological treatise on *Social Ethics*.

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN: SOCIOLOGIST

Gilman was a well-known sociologist in her era whose work was integrated into the early pattern of sociological labor by numerous sociologists. She presented review papers at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Society (Gilman 1907a, b), an organization of which she was a dues-paying member, and published full-length articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* (Gilman 1908, 1909). Gilman also worked closely with four male sociologists: Patrick Geddes, George Elliott Howard, Edward Alsworth Ross, and Lester Frank Ward. Her dense and complicated ties are documented in depth by Deegan (1997). These men were not her only professional allies, however. For example, James Q. Dealey (1909) included three of Gilman's books, *Women and Economics* (1898), *Concerning Children* (1900), and *Human Work* (1904), in his bibliography for his introductory textbook, *Sociology: Its Simpler Teachings and Applications*. Dealey discusses marriage, divorce, children, and women in some detail, as well. He has a short section on "social ethics" (pp. 320–1), indicating once again the importance of this topic in sociology during this era.

Several women in the social sciences also counted among Gilman's allies. Gilman's (1935) autobiography was reviewed sympathetically in the *American Journal of Sociology* by Clara Cahill Park (1936), the feisty feminist wife of the patriarchal Robert E. Park, after Gilman's "altruistic" suicide (see Durkheim 1951 and Martineau 1989, on types of suicide generally). Florence Kelley reported that *Women and Economics* was

read by so many Hull-House sociologists, including Jane Addams, that she could barely get time to read it herself (Deegan 1988: 229). Since Gilman also read Addams' work, it is logical to assume that Gilman had specifically read Addams' (1902) *Democracy and Social Ethics* and found the latter book helpful in formulating the text in hand. Gilman's intellectual ties with Addams are further discussed in other sections below.

As a pedagogue, Gilman pursued the popular lecture circuit and the lay press rather than the classroom or the specialist textbook market. She taught sociology through novels, short stories, and punchy essays. Gilman spoke on college and university campuses, giving guest lectures, and she published several non-fiction, full-length treatises, of which *Women and Economics* is the best known. Her special forte, however, was producing serialized works that were offered on the monthly installment plan. These conceptually integrated works included *Herland*, *With Her in Ourland*, *The Dress of Women*, *Social Ethics*, and others. The use of fiction to teach non-fiction sociological ideas to mass audiences has a major precursor in the didactic novels of Harriet Martineau (Hill 1989a, 1991; Hill and Hoecker-Drysdale 2001) and in the later sociological novels of Mari Sandoz (Hill 1987, 1989b), thus placing Gilman in a tradition of female sociological novelists. Working largely outside the academy, Gilman sought to make sociology relevant and intelligible in the lives of everyday women and men.

Gilman wrote and published *The Forerunner* as an educational, sociological enterprise. The influence of works like *The Dress of Women* and *Social Ethics*, presented over the course of a year in twelve monthly installments, was limited primarily to the regular readers of her magazine. Gilman tried to increase readership of *The Forerunner* by offering reduced price subscriptions to the members of "Gilman Circles" (small, face-to-face groups in which the contents of each monthly issue were to be discussed and debated), but sales were poor and the wider audience that Gilman imagined never materialized, thus relegating *Social Ethics* to virtual obscurity. *Herland*, however, and, more recently, *With Her in Ourland*, two novels originally published in *The Forerunner*, have been republished and received renewed notice. Deegan (1997) argues that *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland* should properly be read as two parts of a whole, since each novel radically informs the other. Similarly, *Social Ethics* is best read in conjunction with the two parts of Gilman's *Herland/Ourland* chronicle, for it systematically invokes and logically grounds the structural arguments that give rise to the women-only society and culture of *Herland* and the sober critiques in *With Her in Ourland* voiced

by Ellador, Gilman's peripatetic protagonist in both novels. In the same way that *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland* compliment each other, Gilman's fiction (represented here by the Herland/Ourland saga) is complimented by her non-fiction (in this case, *Social Ethics*). A similar case can be easily made as well for Gilman's *Dress of Women*. Now that these four works are again readily available for reading, discussion, and critique, we commend them, as a group, to would-be members of twenty-first century Gilman Circles.

Gilman, in working outside the formal academy, provides an alternative model of modern sociological practice, as did Harriet Martineau, Beatrice Webb, Jane Addams, and many other early women sociologists (Deegan 1988, 1991). Gilman engaged the wider world through writing and lecturing. She pushed, pulled, and cajoled her readers and listeners toward new understandings of the social universe and its possibilities for change and improvement.

During sociology's dark era of patriarchal ascendancy (from 1920 to 1965), Gilman's work was rarely considered by sociologists. The highly influential textbook by Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess (1921), *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, notably excluded Gilman, as well as feminism, women's rights, equality, and children, from all discussion. These topics, so central to Gilman's thought, became invisible in the writings of male sociologists for decades (Deegan 1991).

GILMAN'S RECOGNITION BY SCHOLARS OUTSIDE SOCIOLOGY

Gilman self-identified primarily as a sociologist. Nonetheless, most of the books about Gilman on the shelves of college and university libraries have been penned by scholars in departments of English and modern languages. In addition to editions of some of Gilman's substantive works, her more personal output, including her autobiography (1935), diaries (1994, 1998), and love letters (1995) have been published, as well as a detailed and useful bibliography (Scharnhorst 1985b) and her first husband's diaries (Stetson 1985). The literary studies and biographies are numerous (*e.g.*, M.A. Hill 1980; Scharnhorst 1985a; Mayering 1989; Lane 1990; Karpinski 1992; Kessler 1995; Knight 1997, 1999; Rudd and Gough 1999; Golden and Zangrando 2000). The critique of Gilman's prolific work has produced a large body of literary criticism that too often omits Gilman's central sociological purpose and persona.

Scholars in disciplines cognate to sociology have championed Gilman but with mixed results. Carl Degler (1966) and William O'Neill (1972),

for example, damn Gilman with convoluted praise while, importantly, having kept Gilman's books alive in the 1960s and 1970s. Lois N. Magner (1978: 70) reported Degler's apparent "compulsion to issue warnings about taking her [Gilman's] claims to scientific background too seriously." Analogously, O'Neill (1972: xviii) condescendingly wrote that "Mrs. Gilman was, in her prime, the cleverest phrasemaker among leading feminists." Despite these limitations, however, O'Neill and Degler significantly contributed to Gilman scholarship by incorporating her in their other writings. Thus, O'Neill (1967) analyzed Gilman's role in changing ideas about divorce, the family, and the home, and Degler (1956) re-introduced Gilman's social thought to a new generation of scholars.

Andrew Sinclair (1966: 272), by contrast, boldly and unambiguously claimed that Gilman was the "Marx and Veblen" of the woman's movement. Among other writers in cognate disciplines, Polly Wynn Allen's (1988) treatise on Gilman's architectural and domestic theories holds particular relevance for the social sciences.

GILMAN'S RECOGNITION BY CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGISTS

Recent, specifically sociological writing on Gilman began with Alice S. Rossi (1973: 566–72) who, in *The Feminist Papers*, underscored Gilman's social critiques. Mary Jo Deegan (1981: 16) noted the influence on Gilman by the first president of the American Sociological Society, Lester F. Ward, and documented Gilman's early participation in the Society (now the American Sociological Association). James L. Terry (1983) argued for including Gilman's work in the sociology curriculum. Deegan (1987) included Gilman in a list of the top twenty-five most important women sociologists and noted Gilman's professional and personal friendship with Jane Addams, a leading Chicago sociologist (Deegan 1988: 229). She also located Gilman's mature professional sociological career within the Golden Era of Women in Sociology (from 1890 to 1920) and her eclipse, after 1920, during the subsequent Dark Era of Patriarchal Ascendancy in which many women sociologists in the United States were reduced to near oblivion, at least within disciplinary sociology (Deegan 1991: 15–21).

Since the 1990s, Gilman has received close attention by a larger number of sociologists, changing the canon of the discipline. Susan Gotsch-Thompson (1990) made one of the early calls for more integration of Gilman into classical theory. Bruce Keith (1991) succinctly surveyed

Gilman's sociological contributions. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) enacted this suggestion with an integration of Gilman's theory and methods with the work of both her contemporaries and present day feminist methods. Lynn McDonald's (1993, 1994, 1998) outstanding and extensive work in the history of sociology repeatedly includes Gilman's thought and writings. Charles Lemert (1997: 15–17) turned a sociological eye toward Gilman's early classic, *The Yellow Wall-Paper*. Barbara Finlay (1999) analyzed the feminist foundations of Lester Ward's theories of society and mentioned his strong influence on Gilman. Pat Lengermann and Jill Niebrugge-Brantley (1998: 105–48) devote a full chapter of their text/reader to Gilman's treatment of gender and social structure. Michael R. Hill (1996) sketches the sociological dimensions of *Herland*, and Deegan (1997) details at some length the philosophical and theoretical framework of *With Her in Ourland: Sequel to Herland*. Bert N. Adams and R.A. Sydie (2001: 267–77) discuss Gilman's work in the context of other major sociological theorists. In addition to specifically comparing Gilman's work with that of Lester Ward, Émile Durkheim, and Thorstein Veblen, they discuss the contemporaneous theories of Beatrice Webb and Gilman (pp. 288–89). Deegan and Christopher Podeschi (2001) document that Gilman was an historical founder of “ecofeminist pragmatism” who anticipated many positions found in ecofeminist writing today. Joe R. Feagin (2001) and his colleague Hernán Vera (Feagin and Vera 2001) employ Gilman's ideas in their sweeping historical and contemporary discussions of “liberation sociology.” In short, several sociologists are taking Charlotte Perkins Gilman seriously, *as a sociologist*. A few contemporary sociologists, nonetheless, have not welcomed changes in the canon. Jonathan Turner (1998) and Richard Hamilton (2003) are two examples of such resistance to Gilman's incorporation in the sociological enterprise. In discussing this lingering problem, Joan Alway (1995) points to the continuing reluctance of many sociologists to publish feminist theory, either classical or contemporary and Deegan (2003) provides a direct critique of Hamilton.

GILMAN AND SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS

Gilman participated in several important intellectual movements, including cultural feminism, reform Darwinism, feminist pragmatism, Fabian socialism, and Nationalism, that shared an interest in changing the economy and women's social status through social reform movements (Deegan 1997), such as the Dress Reform Movement (Gilman 1935: 234). Some of these movements were national or international in scope

and organization, but their sociological nexus was concentrated in Chicago. Although not manifested in the work of many academic sociologists today, emphasis on institutional change and social reform has a long history and is rooted in the early days of American sociology (see, for example, George Herbert Mead's 1899 important essay on "The Working Hypothesis in Social Reform"). Joe R. Feagin (2001), in his recent presidential address to the American Sociological Association, argues that we have much to gain by celebrating and paying attention to that history. By carefully reading Gilman's corpus, we are offered intriguing pathways for reconnecting with the exciting possibilities for change that once infused and informed sociological practice in the United States. We can also begin to locate Gilman's sociology within the context of other sociological writings.

GILMAN AS A FEMINIST PRAGMATIST

"Feminist pragmatism" is an American theory uniting liberal values and a belief in a rational public with a cooperative, nurturing, and liberating model of the self, the other, and the community. Education and democracy are emphasized by feminist pragmatists as significant mechanisms to organize and improve society. These concepts are defined in terms of human action. Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull-House developed and refined these concepts between 1889 and 1935. Their ideas on social justice, women, and social change permeate Gilman's notions of "social service, labor, feminism, and ethics." These female sociologists' ideas were allied with and strengthened by the formal concepts developed by pragmatists, such as William James and Charles Horton Cooley, and especially by "Chicago pragmatists," including John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (Deegan 1999, 2001; Feffer 1993).

Gilman repeatedly applies the concepts of "conduct, behavior, habit, intelligence, consciousness, function, mind, organism, impulse, brain, and function." This is a list of ideas emerging from the work of all the male pragmatists, especially William James, Dewey (1899), and Mead (1934, 1999, 2001). Suffice it to say, rather than cite each usage, we simply point here to this vital and sophisticated epistemological commonality.

Feminist pragmatism is a processual model concerned with living society and behaviors emerging from social interaction. But in addition to feminist pragmatism, Gilman was concerned with questions of rules, functions, and religions, topics discussed in depth by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim.

GILMAN AS A DURKHEIMIAN STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST

Émile Durkheim developed a complex theory of social order based on an understanding of rules, functions, the division of labor, social evolution, society as an organic whole, and religion. Gilman discussed these topics in depth. She is particularly close to Durkheim's (1915) understanding of religion as the origin of our ideas concerning the sacred and the profane. He argued, as does Gilman, that the notion of God and religion are a result of group processes, experiences, and meaning. Because we lack language to exalt the group, we transfer this reverence and awe to something beyond the group.

Both feminist pragmatists and structural functionalists use the concepts of "social evolution" and "function." Both refer to a Darwinian understanding of society as changing and developing into more specialized tasks or functions (Darwin 1859, 1872). Again, in the latter concept, both refer to the process of fulfilling a need, a useful social process. Thus, although these two theory groups usually define their words with very different meanings, in the case of these concepts, their meanings are surprisingly very similar. Gilman's adoption of "function" is, therefore unproblematic from a Durkheimian perspective, but, her blend of terminology from these two approaches produces a distinctive and innovative language and theory. At some future point, the possibilities inherent in combining pragmatism and structural functionalism require a lengthy exegesis.

SOCIOLOGY AS SOCIAL ETHICS

Social ethics was a core concern for early sociologists. This is particularly true for Chicago pragmatists who actively supported *The International Journal of Ethics* (a journal that continues today). John Dewey and George Herbert Mead frequently published here, as did the feminist pragmatists Jessie Taft (1915) and Jane Addams (1898). Gilman's work meshed not only with general popular interest in ethical issues at the turn of the century (see, for examples, *Lecturers of the Ethical Societies*, 1895) but more importantly was also centrally located within ethical analyses conducted by other sociologists.

Harriet Martineau (1838: 109–13) and Auguste Comte (1853, III: 405–8) early tended to the ethical aspects of society. Significantly, Gilman's sociological contemporaries were deeply interested in the relationships between ethics, society, and sociology: Jane Addams (1898, 1902), Émile

Durkheim (1958), Edward Cary Hayes (1918), Charles Richmond Henderson (1903), Harald Höffding (1905), George Elliott Howard (1905), George Herbert Mead (1908), H.H. Powers (1898), Edward Alsworth Ross (1900, 1907), Henry Sidgwick (1899), Albion Woodbury Small (1903), Amos Griswold Warner (1895), and Max Weber (1946). Full analysis of this exciting and important literature lies well beyond the scope of this introduction, but brief mention of the relationship to Addams' work is mandatory.

Jane Addams (1902), in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, devoted an entire text to social ethics and in many ways should be viewed as a companion volume to Gilman's work here. Both books are deeply committed to exploring the relation between women and moral decisions; the role of democracy; changes in the nature of women's work in the home, family, and industry; and the desire to expand women's political participation in the public sphere.

At the same time, Gilman and Addams also differ in their approaches. Gilman's discussions of Christ, for example, are not found in Addams' book. Gilman repeatedly advances support for Jesus as a religious figure who is a good—even "sociological"—guide. She distinguishes her great respect for Jesus from her response to "Christians" who do not, in fact, follow the precepts of their God. Thus, in Gilman's view, Christians set up rules, virtues, conceptions of evil, and so forth, that are not beneficial to human conduct and social action.

Gilman is harsh in her criticism of all "great religions," but particularly critical of Judaism and the Old Testament, and this also separates her work from that of Addams. Gilman argues that the Old Testament reflects a more primitive stage of society and social guidelines. Gilman also rejects any notion of any group as superior or "chosen" in comparison to any other (*e.g.*, Gilman 1997). Gilman argues for a world society, an organic whole, that is the future of growth and ethics. Gilman's continuing albeit intermittent discussions of world religions are also absent in Addams' analysis. Gilman's critiques, nonetheless, are fundamentally progressive.

In *Social Ethics: Sociology and the Future of Society*, we find a comprehensive and sometimes controversial commentary on—and analysis of—social relations in the world as Gilman experienced them in 1914. Sadly, nearly a century later, her world is still very much our world—a world of possibility and potential too often scarred and disfigured by rampant greed, violent industrialization, and unconscionable militarism; it is still not a world safe for children. If organized religion failed to make the grade in Gilman's estimation, organized sociology has failed

at least as miserably during the last three-quarters of the twentieth century. The advocates of bureaucratized scientism in the social sciences have today abandoned the purposeful search for sound, cooperative, and constructive social action. Gilman and many of her early sociological colleagues remain, in several crucial matters, light years ahead of most of us. They claimed for sociology a social imperative: to improve, to educate, and to humanize the world in which we live, to *progress* from the ethics of the individual to the larger and more consequential ethics of structures, institutions, and societies.

There are at least two ways to use this book. On the one hand, *Social Ethics* (read together with *The Dress of Women* and Gilman's other major non-fiction works) provides the sociological foundation so necessary for understanding and interpreting *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland*. To paraphrase Gilman, our literary colleagues have failed to teach even a simple, child-convincing version of the Herland/Ourland saga, *because they have not understood sociology*. On the other—and we believe far more significant—hand, *Social Ethics* outlines a major American sociologist's critical blueprint for the meaningful and progressive mending and re-weaving of our national social fabric. In offering this edition of *Social Ethics* to our students, our colleagues and the wider public, we offer with it our sincere hope that today's readers will drink deeply of Gilman's sense of urgency, will feel her outrage at injustice and oppression, and will understand her impatience for self-indulgent greed. If reading and thinking about Gilman helps to get us moving again, to rekindle in all of us the spirit of pragmatic feminist reform, we will be gratified indeed.

Finally, a note on the editing and preparation of this edition. We append, in several endnotes, identifications of many of Gilman's referents and sources and correct several obvious typographical/typesetting errors appearing in the 1914 serialized version of *Social Ethics*. We also standardize spellings in those few places where the effect is unobtrusive and contributes to readability and consistency. The more peculiar time-bound spellings of Gilman's era, however, and her occasionally curious word choices, we generally allow to stand. All of the dashes, numbering schemes, and strings of asterisks found in our edition are reproduced, to the best of our ability, exactly as they stood in *The Forerunner*. We acknowledge having added the subtitle: *Sociology and the Future of Society*, as we believe it underscores Gilman's intent and will usefully assist those of our colleagues and students who rely increasingly on keyword-guided bibliographic searches to discover Gilman's remarkable socio-

logical work. With the insight that the publication of *Social Ethics* provides, we look forward to future, expanded understandings of Gilman's work on society and ethical living in our hyper-modern world of consequential realities and increasingly complex and dangerous choices.

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