

Feminism, Utopian and Scientific: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Prison of the Familiar

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In her autobiography, Charlotte Perkins Gilman interjected into an otherwise commonplace account of adolescence a revelation that she believed foretold the course of an uncommon career:

The one real study which did appeal to me, deeply, was Physics, then called Natural Philosophy. Here was Law, at last; not authority, not records of questionable truth or solemn tradition, but laws that could be counted on and *Proved*. That was my delight, to know surely.

Whether or not Gilman truly was stirred by this emotion as she performed experiments in high school physical science, an examination of her mature writings reveals that she adjudged intellectual certainty a lofty—and attainable—goal. By wiring this ambition into her temperament and choosing “Physics” as a model for the knowledge she expected to acquire while pursuing it, Gilman naturalized a lifelong commitment to positivist science. She could in good faith make the “Natural Philosophy” comparison because she believed that social science had recently acquired the capacity for generating knowledge as reliable as the facts of hard science. By “Law” she meant the pattern of necessity created when Darwinian insights were set to work within the domain of sociology. Her desire to “know surely” was that of the reform-minded intellectual convinced that this operation made it possible, as she put it, to see the “sorrows and perplexities” of life as “but the natural results of natural causes.” The clear vision of the social

scientist who, having ascertained “the causes” could “do much to remove them,” thereby displaced the eternal puzzlement of “philosopher and moralist.”¹

Gilman’s determination to follow the dictates of conscience along a scientific rather than religious path represented, in part, an assertion of independence from a family that contained several of New England’s most notorious moralists. The Beechers from Lyman on had played active roles in the transformation of New England Calvinism into a less doctrinal, more reform-minded religion, but none of the more famous would have abided Charlotte’s thoroughly secular declaration of faith.² By flaunting so brazenly the mantle of positivist science, Gilman also acted her part in a generational drama. As Dorothy Ross has pointed out, the eruption in the last quarter of the nineteenth century of “European”-style class conflict in a land where, by Protestant and republican expectations alike, such things were not supposed to happen unsettled those of Gilman’s peers who presumed to discharge intellectual duties. These intellectuals, many with evangelical backgrounds, sought to repair the damage done to the national self-image with tools borrowed from the positivist tradition. Old liberals and new—from William Graham Sumner to Lester Ward, the thinker from whom Gilman claimed to have learned the most—couched their various political prescriptions in the language of Mill, Comte, and, especially, Spencer, the social thinker most in step, as they saw it, with Darwin’s revolution in biology. American radicals, eager to redeem what by the end of the century were adjudged the setbacks of the 1890s, set about synchronizing American theory with another variety of positivism—the “Darwinized” Marxism of the Second Socialist International. All these figures, from aggrieved patriots to committed anticapitalists, expected to trade profitably on the certainty to which they figured their devotion to science entitled them.³

I argue in this essay that Gilman’s desire to “know surely,” however delightful to her, ultimately proved her undoing. The tragedy of her career is that the mode of analysis she chose to fulfill this ambition was unserviceable for the work she most wanted to accomplish. A positivist sociology provided powerful arguments for discrediting the thinking and social arrangements that perpetuated gender inequality, but made their supersession seem the inevitable outcome of an automatic process. With nature so solidly on the side of reform, the reformer was left with little to do but reveal to the as yet uninformed where this lawful process was taking them. After making the realm of the familiar so plainly unnatural, Gilman had difficulty explaining why ordinary women felt more at home there than in the brave new world that she saw social evolution preparing for them. In a wonderfully revealing moment in *Women and Economics* (1898), she ran abruptly into these conundrums but quickly recovered, quieting the misgivings that this encounter provoked with a forced display of scientific bravado. She thereby guaranteed that her most troublesome political problems—finding a role for conscious agency in a deterministic analysis, selling a scientific vision of liberation to those who seemed unaware of their oppression—would continually resurface, unmastered and full of mischief, in the rest of the text.



Figure 1: Photo of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. (Photo courtesy of Bryn Mawr College Library, The C. C. Catt Albums.)

Gilman's only compelling solution to the difficulties she faced as sociologist and feminist was finally to create a world of her own. Only in the utopian novel *Herland* (1915) does she envision a full transcendence of the sorrows and perplexities that most concerned her. Of course, Gilman did not, by turning to utopian fiction, distinguish herself from radical compatriots. Populists like Ignatius Donnelly and socialists from Edward Bellamy to Jack London all took advantage of that genre's usefulness as a stage for dramatizing ideas that, broached in the context of the actually existing, appeared insufficiently plausible to move as many adherents as were required to effect radical change.⁴ In each of these cases, however, the ideas set in motion by the utopian author were the same ones he advocated in real life. A close reading of *Women and Economics* and *Herland* reveals, by contrast, a sharp disjuncture between Gilman's sociology and her utopian fiction: the science that in the former promises a natural liberation assumes in the latter the guise of a menacing alien. Conversely, the scientific point of view embraced by the liberated women of *Herland* resembles a real world conception to which Gilman as social scientist remained indifferent. Utopia for Gilman was an entirely experimental realm—a place for creating new social conditions *and* for testing new ideas, connected by ironic rather than direct juxtapositions with the real. Imaginative writing promised her release not just from an oppressive world but also from the analytic machinery she used in her sociology to make sense of it. The distinctiveness of her project, in short, resides in the disjuncture between the utopian and the real, the wholly imaginary and the all too familiar.

The difficulty of reconciling the demands of science and politics is a common one in any age. By watching closely as Gilman wrestled with it, we gain insight into a dilemma that has long bedeviled reform-minded intellectuals. Her example also suggests that historians committed to delineating the role gender plays in women's intellectual undertakings generally need neither brave the perils of tracking a distinctively female point of view nor, having glimpsed the dangers of essentialism, take the postmodernist detour around them.⁵ Rather, we might set out to investigate the workings of those *additional* ideological constraints under which women *as women* operated while addressing, with such conceptual materials as were available, the questions that men and women alike deemed worthy of attention. From this perspective, Gilman does not so much speak in a different voice as carry an extra burden—that of liberating women with weapons that were used far more effectively to enforce women's confinement. "Knowing surely" precisely as she understood it—through the power of abstract reason—was considered in her day a male prerogative. Gilman used positivism to claim that right for women, but acquired thereby a kind of knowledge that hovered menacingly over the beliefs of the ordinary women she hoped to reach. The concrete world of everyday experience—the place where science and politics alike must finally touch down if they are to win adherents—thus became for her a prison, patrolled on the inside by those whom her favorite abstractions construed as feminism's natural constituency.⁶

When Gilman tied feminist prospects to the reputation of science, she was not so much doing the work of a pioneer as cultivating anew a field that lately had lain fallow. During the mid-nineteenth century, women activists looking for ways to break the stranglehold of tradition found much to admire in positivist rationalism. Elizabeth Cady Stanton regularly cited Comte to support arguments for social cooperation and gender equality. Caroline Dall, as pioneering feminist and co-founder of the American Social Science Association, personified the union of reform politics and engaged social science that marked intellectual life in the two decades after the Civil War. By the mid-1880s, however, the proponents of reason and science occupied the margins of a reform movement dominated increasingly by the revitalized forces of sentimental religion. To the advocates of temperance and moral purity, the great majority of them women, rationalism looked like atheism, the free discussion of sexuality a tawdry disguise for the open promotion of pornography. Such authority as free-thinking rationalists managed to retain in a world populated by high-minded evangelists was undermined further by the professionalization of social science, which discredited their favored methods of truth-seeking. The same forces that made midwifery a crime rendered Comte and Spencer passé and, in the process, weakened the link feminists had forged between positivist science and political reform. With the demise of the ASSA, women became as scarce in the new venues of normal science as they were in the delivery rooms of professionalized health care. As “objective” science and partisan politics went their separate ways, Jesus became more popular than Darwin among those who sought to mobilize women for reform.⁷

American social science, then, was very much a male preserve at the turn of the century, a situation that presented special problems to women engaged during these years in efforts to bolster with social scientific arguments the feminist case against inequality and oppression. Most vexing perhaps, the conceptual inventory with which male progressives tackled the dilemmas of scientific reform looked to feminist intellectuals like a catalog of dangerous propositions. Thorstein Veblen, a thinker with whom Gilman is frequently matched, bled a creative historical agent from his positivist system by a dextrous finagling with instinct theory: the machine process awakened in the consciousness of its designers propensities for “workmanship” and a “live and let live” egalitarianism bred in the human psyche during a prior period of “savagery.” Keenly aware that instinct theory played an important role in scientific legitimations of gender inequality, Gilman dismissed it, although by doing so she foreswore the use of maneuvers like Veblen’s for liberating an agent of change from a system of necessary cause and effect. Second International socialists disguised Marx as an evolutionary positivist so that they might derive from “Marxist” principles a proletariat impelled toward revolution by the simple maturation of industrial conditions, but in the process obliterated the distinctiveness of women’s oppression—the very thing Gilman was trying to isolate. The socialist tradition with which Gilman

identified was thus utopian rather than Marxist, a choice that made good feminist sense but bore poor analytic fruit. The pragmatists, whose rise to prominence coincided with Gilman's, offered release from the essentializing discourse of biology-grounded positivism and, in the persons of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, provided crucial support for women seeking admittance into the academy. Gilman could hardly be encouraged, however, by what resulted when Walter Lippmann—who carried the political torch for pragmatism before Dewey himself took it up during World War I—turned his attention to “the woman's movement.” In addition, pragmatists demanded as the price of intellectual liberation, the abandonment of the quest for certainty—the touchstone of Gilman's intellectual career—and offered as replacement an intersubjective notion of truth, a substitute not likely to tempt someone as aware as Gilman of the verdicts rendered on the relative capacities of men and women by the reigning community of experts.⁸

Women and Economics, at once Gilman's most ambitious work of sociology and her most successful book, constitutes in this context a sustained effort to restore science as the nineteenth century understood it to a position of prominence in the women's movement of the twentieth. Her fondness for old-style positivism is clear from the opening pages. After making the Darwinian assertion that “the human creature is affected by his environment, as is every other living thing,” she proceeded to delineate three kinds of determining “conditions.” The first, a “material/geographical environment,” flags Gilman's formal allegiance to Enlightenment materialism but carried little explanatory weight in her substantive analyses. The second, the transforming “effects” of an organism's own activity, signals her commitment to the Lamarckianism which many social scientists continued to defend—none more doggedly than Ward—even after Weissman had, to the satisfaction of most practicing biologists at least, debunked the theory of acquired characteristics. The environment that Gilman deemed the most powerful “modifier of human life,” however, was the “social” world. This third determining condition, she contended, was alone uniquely human. All three environments exerted their power in human societies “through our economic necessities,” the proposition underlying Gilman's characterization of *Women and Economics* as a “study of the economic relation between men and women as a factor in social evolution.”⁹

After laying this scientific groundwork, Gilman introduced the “peculiar economic condition” which, in the rest of the text, served as the primary cause of women's oppression: “We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation.” As “the feeder of woman,” man becomes “the strongest modifying force in her economic condition.” The woman is thereby “cut off from the direct action of natural selection” and, thereafter, shaped by a condition of dependence. Barred from “the ever-growing human impulse to create, the power and will to make, to do, to express one's new spirit in new

forms," she becomes passive, weak, and incompetent. Finding that she must use "sex-distinction" not only, as all creatures do, to attract a mate, but to gain a livelihood as well, "she is modified to sex to an excessive degree." This modification, Gilman argues in good Lamarckian fashion, she then transmits to her offspring "and so is steadily implanted in the human constitution the morbid tendency to excess in this relation, which has acted so universally upon us in all ages, in spite of our best efforts to restrain it."¹⁰

Thus far, Gilman has managed to translate into a scientific language the old liberal critique of dependency that grounded Seneca Falls feminism and the Puritan dread of sensuality that marked all but the free love advocates in the nineteenth-century women's movement.¹¹ She thereby reappropriated equal rights individualism from those who argued as social Darwinians against women's autonomy and reclaimed the moral high ground from those who battled as Christians against sexual morbidity. She also inherited a predicament peculiar to those who tendered scientific solutions to moral problems: where her evangelical peers could openly declare their partisanship in such matters without risking their intellectual inheritance, Gilman must disguise her normative judgments. For this purpose, she enlisted a "natural/unnatural" distinction which, designed for the no-nonsense work of description, did double duty as a standard of moral judgment. In her discussion of the "sex-relation," for example, she distinguished "two main lines of action." The "gradual orderly development of monogamous marriage," because it advanced "the interests of the individual and society," was a "natural" development. As such, it was "inevitable in the course of social progress, not an artificial condition, enforced by laws of our making." The process that created the conditions of women's dependence, by contrast, was "unnatural" or "morbid." Our "moral concepts," she deduced from this and like examples, "rest primarily on facts"—monogamous marriage is "right" because it is the "best form" for "our racial good."¹² Gilman thus grounded the judgments linking her economic analysis of women's oppression to her political ambition to see that oppression ended in a natural law morality wherein facts were always "patent" and readily appropriable by a transhistorical moral sense.

The natural harmony Gilman orchestrated between her political and scientific ideals collapsed all too quickly into a jarring dissonance. In the most poignant and fateful passage in the text, she turned to confront the difficulties created by entangling a commitment to women's liberation with the mission of positivist science:

The facts stated in the foregoing chapters are familiar and undeniable, the argument seems clear; yet the mind reacts violently from the conclusions it is forced to admit, and tries to find relief in the commonplace conditions of every-day life. From this looming phantom of the over-sexed female of genus homo we fly back in satisfaction to familiar acquaintances and

relatives,—to Mrs. John Smith and Miss Imogene Jones, to mothers and sisters and daughters and sweethearts and wives. We feel that such a dreadful state of things cannot be true, or we should surely have noticed it. We may even perform that acrobatic feat so easy to most minds,—admit that the statement may be theoretically true, but practically false!¹³

Shifting her point of view momentarily from sociological observer to that of “familiar” friends and kin, Gilman glimpsed a credibility gap threatening the easy relationship just negotiated between scientific theory and common sense. The equally “familiar” facts of positivism suddenly became, from this standpoint, either repugnant or illusory; the ethical and political agenda she wanted most to advance seemed to lose its solid footing in natural science. To visualize the “looming phantom” conjured up during Gilman’s sociological analysis, one had to peer through her Darwinian lens. Certainly, the Victorian women Gilman invoked in this moment of doubt could see little of themselves in the image of femininity thus projected.

Having confronted in the world of the ordinary the specter of an irremediable discrepancy between the “theoretically true” and the “practically false,” Gilman immediately sought relief in the realm of theory. To explain why most people seemed not to have noticed facts which her science and her ethics designated “natural” and “undeniable,” she shifted again into a scientific idiom: “Two simple laws of brain action are responsible for the difficulty of convincing the human race of any large general truths concerning itself.” According to the first, “what we are used to we do not notice.” Habitual practices like the wearing of corsets render people insensitive to the most palpable evils. The other mental law asserts that “it is easier to personalize than to generalize.” Thus “the popular mind” moves only with great difficulty from the perception of “individual instances of injustice or cruelty” to that of the “conditions which cause” them. How was it that some minds, beyond the jurisdiction of the laws of brain action, managed to negotiate the difficult path from specific instance to general cause? How, in short, did Gilman reconcile the competing claims of deterministic science and conscious reform? “Darwinian” logic, in a form Darwin scarcely would have recognized, again came to the rescue: “in the course of social evolution there are developed individuals so constituted as not to fit existing conditions, but to be organically adapted to more advanced conditions.” The “heretic, reformer, and agitator” see and feel the injustices of “existing conditions” and raise an outcry against them. As a result, these “advanced individuals” are invariably persecuted by those who have not noticed these conditions.

But this severe process of elimination developed the kind of progressive person known as a martyr; and this remarkable sociological law was manifested: that the strength of a current social force is increased by the sacrifice of individuals who are

willing to die in the effort to promote it. 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'¹⁴

After devising a psychological justification for the apparent incredibility of scientific logic, Gilman here describes a natural scheme for liberating an agent of change from the structure of determinism embedded in that justification. The antidote to "simple" mental laws working against the recognition of "patent" facts and injustices is a "remarkable" sociological law circumscribing the efforts of those individuals who defy simple laws and patent injustices. Truly, no one in *Women and Economics* is beyond the reach of one law or another. By subjecting everyone to a higher, scientific authority, Gilman silenced the voice that doubted the practicality of her own diagnosis of women's oppression. Even as they flee in horror and disbelief from the "looming phantom of the over-sexed female of the genus homo," Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones contribute to the inexorable forward march of human progress. By capturing in analogy the similarities between the Darwinian "advanced individuals" and the evangelical "blood of the martyrs" arguments, Gilman effected a reconciliation with both her imagined feminist constituency and real life friends and kin. In the process she showed how free-thinkers and church-goers—positivist science and sentimental religion—might work together for a common cause.

Gilman joined an esteemed group of Darwinian thinkers by choosing this particular way of finessing the deterministic implications of her scientific convictions. Two decades earlier, William James had made a similar case for "great men," arguing that these individuals, like random "variations" in the natural, were the social world's agents of novelty and change. E.R.A. Seligman, even as he derided James' indifference to social conditions, nonetheless reserved for the "ethical teacher" the same role James filled with his assorted advanced individuals—an exhibition of the difficulties that Seligman and his allies created for themselves by claiming a Darwinian sanction for their efforts to infuse American social science with the spirit of German historicism. Max Eastman, at once the most Jamesian of WWI-era radicals and a practitioner of the economic interpretation of history promoted at Columbia by Seligman and his more famous colleagues in the history department, cast the Industrial Workers of the World as "heralds" of the "civilization of the future" whose persecution in the present secured, by assuaging the violent impulses motivating their persecutors, the "spiritual ease" of the nation. All three thinkers presumed, in James's words, a "remarkable parallel . . . between the facts of social evolution on the one hand, and of zoological evolution as expounded by Mr. Darwin on the other."¹⁵

To situate Gilman's vision of progress by calling up for comparison the likes of James, Seligman, and Eastman is to confront immediately the political liabilities assumed when using biological analogies to explain social development. James used the "great man" as "ferment" argument to give Darwinian

sanction to his fascination with mystics, saints, and anarchists. Such sympathies bolstered his pluralist reputation but hardly constitute a usable politics. Seligman was not shy about calling attention to the political implications of his particular brand of historicism, but invoked at those moments the beneficence of a market economy rather than of ethical teachers. His use of evolutionary language seemed better adapted to securing the scientific credentials of an academic than a political agenda. Eastman suppressed, in his sole attempt at sustained socialist theorizing, the advanced individuals piece of the Darwinian logic that prescribed his practical role as champion for a parade of intellectual heroes—in order, Dewey, Lenin, and Trotsky. He confessed this purposive omission only after adopting, as Cold Warrior, a politics that required neither dissembling on the “great man” question nor leading any battles for substantive reform.¹⁶

The ambition to get right with Darwin led all who pursued it into the snares of the same conundrum. Whether one was an old or new liberal, a feminist or socialist, thinkers who hitched political hopes to this kind of naturalism found themselves thereafter with little to do but wait for nature to breed the appropriate heroes, much like the positivists of the Second International were forever forecasting the spontaneous emergence, from “advanced” industrial conditions, of a class conscious proletariat. In Gilman’s case, resorting to the “advanced individuals” gambit exacerbated the already strained relationship between her sociology and her politics: her conviction that such figures, even as they are persecuted, nonetheless contribute to human progress obviated the need to construct a politics for mobilizing ordinary individuals. Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones, when plugged into Gilman’s formula for social change, need assume no responsibility for consciously seeking their own liberation.

Gilman’s surrender to the temptations of positivist certainty left her in possession of a chronic ambivalence about delegating any political tasks to human will and intelligence. On the one hand, she was fond of statements like this: “The change considered in these pages is not one merely to be prophesied and recommended: it is already taking place under the forces of social evolution; and only needs to be made clear to our conscious thought, that we may withdraw the futile but irritating resistance of our misguided will.” While loyal to this logic, Gilman belittled the efforts of “promulgators of theories and writers of books,” a move commonly made by the Darwinian Marxists of her generation. On the other hand, her ambition to downplay the role of instinct in human affairs led her to assert with equal frequency that as “humanity advances” social evolution became a more conscious process. In these passages she popularized ideas developed more systematically by Ward. For example: “The human creature prospers and progresses not by virtue of his animal instinct, but by the wisdom and force of a cultivated intelligence and will, with which to guide his action and to control and modify the very instincts which used to govern him.”¹⁷

When painting with broad historical strokes, Gilman resolved these apparently contradictory positions by segregating periods of “unconscious” and

“conscious” progress and deploying within each the appropriate characterization—respectively, misguided obstacle or guiding force—of human will.¹⁸ Once she entered the present, however, as in the above passages, the contradiction between these two kinds of statements again materialized. Even after acknowledging in a Wardian way the fact of consciousness, the author of *Women and Economics* still had found no role for purposive, intelligent action beyond “understanding” and “helping” a process that was already moving—and presumably would move, a little more slowly perhaps, without such earthly assistance—in a progressive direction.

Theoretical discrepancies rarely impede the practical activities of even the most scientific reformer, and Gilman was no exception. Throughout her career she combined her work as free-lance sociologist with political endeavors pursued at a frenetic pace. She contributed as writer and lecturer to Edward Bellamy’s Nationalist crusade, the American Fabian movement, and the campaign for women’s suffrage; helped found the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and the vanguard feminist organization Heterodoxy; worked at Hull House; and wrote every word in the *Forerunner*, the magazine she put out singlehandedly from 1909 until 1916. As an activist, Gilman no doubt imagined herself contributing to the “conscious progress” theorized in her sociological texts. Unfortunately, her theory and practice fused at another level as well. The troublesome reality represented in *Women and Economics* by Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones had its real world counterpart in the meager results Gilman saw from her proselytizing. Neither the Nationalists nor the American Fabians ever amounted to much and, by 1920, she had lost her feminist audience as well. These failures—or, in the case of suffrage, hollow victories—must have added to the appeal of the “unconscious progress” scenario that coexisted uneasily with Gilman’s appeals to “a cultivated intelligence and will.” Her tireless propagandizing for feminism at a time when by her own admission “neither men nor women” desired a change in women’s status, finally appears more Christian than Darwinian, the dynamics of historical advance more a cycle of pious martyrdom than of conscious reform.¹⁹

Like so many Progressive-era intellectuals, Gilman anticipated the future with a hope seemingly out of proportion to her prognosis of the present. As her case demonstrates, the faith in progress these thinkers exhibited was more an ideological than a psychological condition—the intellectual complement of a specific political vision rather than a congenital trait shared by an entire, “innocent” generation. Gilman thought her political agenda with two concepts: “interdependence” and “independence.” She used the former to connote the mesh of collective, mutually dependent relations characteristic of an industrialized society and invoked it to urge the adoption of a politics that, in deference to new conditions, subordinated “personal” to “common” interests. Like her Nationalist and Fabian comrades and all but the syndicalists in Debs’ Socialist Party, she defined socialism in these “collectivist” terms. By “independence” Gilman meant “that the individual pays for what he gets, works for what he gets, gives to the other an equivalent for what the other gives him.” If this sounds like it could have been

lifted from *The Wealth of Nations*, there is good reason: no less than Adam Smith, Gilman identified this free market condition with freedom generally and opposed it to the unnatural “dependence” of women. By translating this old liberal ideal into a new industrial language, she manufactured a political component to fit the Darwinian analysis of dependence undertaken at the beginning of *Women and Economics*. Once inside this discursive realm, she promptly spied a collective agent to replace the “advanced individuals” who occupy the scientific portion of the text: it is, she argues at this point, “the increasing army of women wage-earners, who are changing the face of the world by their steady advance toward economic independence.”²⁰ If the achievement of this kind of “independence” was all Gilman required to fulfill her socialist ideal, she was surely justified in anticipating a rosy future.

These wage-earners, like Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones, did not have to be conscious of their revolutionary mission. Even after replacing her imaginary audience of individuals with an actually existing collectivity, Gilman still entrusted progress to a historical agent that would effect its transformations even if the women composing it never read one of her books or attended one of her lectures. Indeed, by consigning her feminist agenda to an agent that neither sought nor desired changes in women’s status, she anticipated in theory the isolation that befell the women’s movement in the 1920s. The women she imagines fleeing from the image of femininity conjured up by her sociology would flee in fact from the image projected by post-war feminists, not in “horror and disbelief” but out of indifference to a movement that continued to define liberation in terms that did not touch the deeper causes of oppression. The recognition that the entrance into the workforce of women wage-workers, like the addition to the electorate of women voters, left intact the conditions that created women’s “sorrows and perplexities” required an altogether different conception of oppression than could be generated by positivist or liberal assumptions. Bound as sociologist and socialist to these assumptions, Gilman remained locked within the prison of the familiar—the ideological rabbit’s hole where the same idea can be “theoretically true” and “practically false,” self-evident to the positivist theorist but incredible to those whom positivist theory casts as liberators.

Ultimately, Gilman managed an escape from this prison only by breaking her commitment to positivism and settling into a worldview of her own design. The science that in *Women and Economics* illuminated the causes of women’s oppression worked in *Herland*, the most successful of her utopian novels, to defeat the cause of women’s liberation. Gilman made this point by investing all three male protagonists who accidentally stumble upon her exclusively women’s utopia with an “interest in science” which, in this world, leads them to defend “theories” and other “clear ideas” that obstruct their understanding of Herland realities. The women of Herland, while not *unscientific*, are committed to an altogether different conception than clouds the minds of the male intruders:

. . . when it came to the simpler and more concrete science, wherein the subject matter was at hand and they had but to exercise their minds upon it, the results were surprising. They had worked out a chemistry, a botany, a physics, with all the blends where a science touches an art, or merges into an industry, to such fullness of knowledge as made us feel like schoolchildren.²¹

This, at first glance, seems a curious move for Gilman to make. Here again is “physics,” but the desire to “know surely” that she associated with real life physics is in Herland an outmoded—and male—prejudice. Similarly, Herland natural philosophy prescribes not the ascetic search for “Law” proclaimed so reverently in her autobiography but a sensuous activity no different in kind from artistic or industrial production. This about face appears all the more surprising when one recognizes that Gilman performed it to enshrine in utopia a conception of women’s science fully consistent with the logic of real world gender ideology. The writer of utopian fiction, whom one would expect to be *least* constrained by the conventions of her culture, authors a perfectly conventional formulation of women’s scientific work.

Why does Gilman, who typically defended against great odds a thoroughly radical position on questions relating to “woman’s nature,” negotiate in her own imagination a compromise with the view that it was not in woman’s nature to reason abstractly?²² Simply put, this move resolved the problem of credibility that nagged her in *Women and Economics*—her suspicion that the “familiar” friends and kin who constituted the natural constituency for a feminist politics could not recognize themselves in the “phantom” conjured up by a naturalist examination of women’s condition. By inscribing practicality in the heart of Herland science, Gilman eliminated the possibility, glimpsed so apprehensively in her sociological analysis, that her scientific prescriptions might be “theoretically true” but “practically false.” Here, in short, was a science with which Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones were already intuitively familiar insofar as they were engaged in creating the artifacts of ordinary life. To have made this kind of “practical” concession in her sociological arguments would have implicated Gilman in confirming male expectations about women’s intellectual capacities, including the one that deemed them unfit for sociology.²³ In utopia, this concession to gender ideology allowed her to turn the tables. The scientist from a world where complexity and abstraction were deemed at once higher and male faculties—and who could therefore without fear of rebuke smile condescendingly at any such “simpler and more concrete science”—found himself in Herland rendered childlike by the comparative thinness and emptiness of positivist knowledge. Where in Gilman’s own world the stubborn fact of gender oppression jeopardized the intelligibility of her scientific project, the egalitarian conditions of Herland made all but the most prosaic scientific practices seem needlessly abstruse. The very connection that in

her sociological texts remained tenuous and abstract—between dispassionate scientific theory and feminist political practice—assumed in the utopian novel the guise of a concrete relationship between archaic men and advanced women. By showing how such relationships were possible, she closed the gap that yawned in *Women and Economics* between the theories of the scientific reformer and the common sense notions of her constituency. Her political task in *Herland* could not have been, to Gilman in particular, more familiar—showing that even such men as these can be made to understand, indeed fall in love with, strong, independent, and eminently rational women.

At first, all three of the tough-minded positivists found such women and the world they created forbidding and inhospitable. Gilman introduced Jeff, however, by noticing that he was “born to be a poet, a botanist—or both—but his folks persuaded him to be a doctor instead.” While no more “‘advanced’ on the woman question” than the others, Jeff begins to take the women’s side in the arguments Gilman staged to highlight the incommensurability of real and utopian worldviews. The two men who remain steadfastly scientific and cynical see Jeff as “something of a traitor,” as if “his medical knowledge gave him a different point of view somehow.” Gilman, in short, made credible Jeff’s conversion to the women’s point of view—including his falling hopelessly in love and deciding to stay after the other two leave—by making him the same sort of humanitarian and practical scientist as was natural to Herland. As the narrator observes at the end, “I never saw an alien become naturalized more quickly than that man in Herland.”²⁴

The narrator, Vandyck, proved a less willing convert. Pointedly, Gilman made him at once a social Darwinian sociologist and a dispenser of “learned” opinions confirming women’s “physiological limitations.” The key moment in Vandyck’s conversion occurs as he confronts his “mixed feelings” for Ellador, the Herlander of whom he has become enamored. On the one hand, he enjoys the “restfulness” that attends his being treated “in a gentle motherly way;” on the other, his “hereditary instincts and race-traditions” make him long for a more “feminine response” to his desire. Gilman added a level of epistemological significance to the narrator’s predicament by bringing him to this conclusion: “Here was I, with an Ideal in mind, for which I hotly longed, and here was she, deliberately obtruding in the foreground of my consciousness a Fact—a fact which I coolly enjoyed, but which actually interfered with what I wanted.” Vandyck is quite clear that the biggest obstacle to his resolving this conundrum is “their confounded psychology.” Having put psychology with “history” rather than with “personal life”—a move which thoroughly baffles the male positivists—the Herlanders are able to show that what the men took to be “physiological necessities” are in fact culture-specific “psychological necessities.” Vandyck’s ability to break the hot spell of the Ideal and at least warmly enjoy the Fact—fall in love with a cool, “de-feminized” Herlander—derives from two circumstances. First, the women of Herland have mastered psychology better than any other science, so as an especially skillful “practical psychologist” Ellador is able to

facilitate Vandyck's change of heart. Second, Ellador gets assistance from a most unlikely source—"under all our cultivated attitude of mind toward women, there is an older, deeper, more 'natural' feeling, the restful reverence which looks up to the Mother sex." The declaration that dissolves the narrator's confusion, then, bridges both a rational and an emotional gap between the two worlds. When he announces "I'd rather have you with me—on your own terms—than not to have you," he sets in motion a marriage of the scientific and the just, the Fact and the Ideal, that Gilman arranged in neither her own life nor her sociological texts.²⁵

In light of the thesis I broached at the outset regarding the role gender might play in women's intellectual pursuits, it is significant that Gilman used an instinct (the "older, deeper, more 'natural' feeling" underlying "our cultivated attitude of mind") as catalyst for Vandyck's conversion. Instinct theory provided her male peers with explanations at once certifiably Darwinian and, applicable alike to the social and the natural world, sufficiently all-encompassing to satisfy positivist longings. Gilman, by contrast, argued explicitly in her sociological texts against attributing causal force to instincts in human development. She referred during discussions of motivation to various "impulses," but by choosing this word she effectively removed such discussions from the realm of readymade meanings prescribed by "instinct" talk. The reader who accesses "instinct" in the index of *Women and Economics* finds only one—the instinctive love of a mother for her offspring. Turning to the cited pages, one finds Gilman mainly engaged in 1) a restatement of Ward's thesis regarding the subordination within the human species of "instinct" to "intelligence," and 2) a debunking of the "Darwinian" concept ("maternal sacrifice") with which Vandyck's real life counterparts justified what they deemed women's necessary hence "natural" confinement to reproductive functions.²⁶

In *Herland*, however, the inbred reverence for the "Mother sex" that helped coerce Vandyck's renunciation of real world sexism carried tremendous analytic and political weight. Specifically, this "mother-love" constituted the bond of affection that united, in thought and action, every inhabitant of Herland.²⁷ Much to the chagrin of the male intruders, who believed that it was "against nature" for women to cooperate, Herlanders were on every issue in total and voluntary agreement and in every situation impervious to jealousy or quarrelsome pettiness. To be sure, Gilman reversed the direction in which maternal affection flowed (in Herland, *to* rather than *from* the mother) and even in utopia took pains to emphasize that the "mother-love" underlying communal unanimity was a "religion," not "a mere 'instinct'." Nonetheless, this sentiment performed the same analytic function that instincts executed in the arguments of male reform Darwinians—a primitive predisposition needing merely to be awakened by the touch of "modern" (in Gilman's case utopian) conditions to become a material force for progress. If anything, Gilman's equation of "mother-love" with religion underscores again the ideological disjuncture between her sociological and utopian reasoning: Herland religion is not that of Lyman or Henry Beecher, but

the cult of motherhood is as distant as her relatives' Protestantism from the emphatically secular stance of *Women and Economics*. Inconsistent alike with that text's disavowal of moralism and of instinct theory, the mawkish sentiment of "mother-love" guaranteed that the problem of credibility which haunted her sociological analysis of women's oppression would not appear in *Herland*. Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones, had they been the ones to chance upon Herland, could not possibly "react violently" to its reigning ideal of femininity—it is programmed into their genetic inheritance. In utopia, where every person is a woman and every woman is "moved by precisely the same feelings, to the same end," the familiar is a holy place, built with analytic materials that in the real world Gilman refused to touch.²⁸

There are prisons in Herland, but no women prisoners. Gilman reserved the fate of involuntary confinement for Terry, the most ruggedly individualist and narrowly empiricist of the three and the only intruder to remain hostile to Herland and its inhabitants to the end. Where Jeff and Vandyck were drawn finally by mother-love into the circle of sisterhood, his steadfast commitment to the facts of real-world science rendered him incapable of seeing women as anything other than objects of desire. A "man's man" to the end, he tried to seduce the first Herlander he encountered by offering a cheap necklace as "bait" and, failing in that as in all subsequent seductions, complained thereafter that Herlanders were not "feminine" and lacked "charm." All three men eventually fall in love and marry, but for Terry the outcome is not Shakesporean. Far from restoring harmony to strained relations, the ceremony added to his determination to take his Herland mate, Alima, "by storm." The latter, bound by Herland cultural prescriptions to suppress any expression of "sex-feeling," refuses to physically consummate the marriage. Terry, loyal to the assumptions of his own culture, believes that "[t]here never was a woman yet that did not enjoy being *mastered*." Set on a collision course by contradictory, and finally incommensurable, conceptions of love and marriage, Terry and Alima come undone in a way that reveals dramatically the gulf dividing the utopian and the real: he attempts by "sheer brute force" to compel her submission but is instead forcibly subdued and imprisoned. Some Herlanders, Alima prominent among them, "wanted him killed" for this "unpardonable sin," but after a lengthy trial he is condemned only to immediate expulsion—back to a land where raping one's wife was not even a misdemeanor.²⁹

Gilman lived and wrote in the world to which Terry was banished. However absurd or anti-social under utopian conditions, Terry's conception of "woman's nature" remained the dominant one in turn-of-the-century America, a circumstance that constrained Gilman's efforts to construct a science-sanctioned alternative. In that world, the common sense credibility of Terry's feminine ideal continually thwarted her intention to promote the feminist ideals which in Herland commanded a consensual loyalty. Her aspiration to secure a scientific

guarantee for the eventual triumph of feminism ran aground on the stubborn fact Terry represented: the scientific community was still in 1915 a male domain and provided critical institutional and ideological support for the ideals Gilman wanted to undermine. More disheartening still, the next generation of rebellious women—the “flappers” of the 1920s—would look for inspiration not to science but to popular culture, adopting in the process an ideal of womanhood closer to Terry’s than to Gilman’s. Indeed, she had as much reason to fear that Mrs. Smith’s and Miss Jones’ daughters would shun the asexual women of her utopia, as their mothers would flee from the “over-sexed phantom” of her sociology. The image of the post-war Gilman—touting the same ideas even as her audience drifted away, castigating from the same Victorian standpoint women of the 1920s as “painted, powdered, high-heeled, cigarette-smoking idiots,” bemoaning what by her own account were the “repeated failures” of her later years—is finally tragic in the classic sense: the necessary outcome of a flaw, present in her vision from the outset, which Gilman discerned but did not correct.³⁰

I invoke here a historical, not an existential, fate. The tenacity with which Gilman clung to positivist desiderata illuminates neither a psychological nor human condition but the predicament of women intellectuals in a man-made world. Where her male peers might stick to their positivist guns for professional or ideological reasons, she had little choice. Where they could with only cognitive discomfort switch their allegiance to some available alternative, she risked by that route her most heartfelt political ideals. Where they entered the realm of the purely imaginative with their realworld commitments in hand, she checked hers at the door, liberating by this act, time and space for testing alternatives to available methods—her own, most trusted sociological ones included—of achieving those ideals.

My case for acknowledging the effects of gender in intellectual life by highlighting such extra constraints and double binds might best be summarized by considering Gilman’s relationship to the alternative that appears, in retrospect, more compatible with her agenda than the old-style positivism to which she remained so fervently faithful. Pragmatism, after all, attracted many who had once consorted with Hegel, Comte, and Spencer and gained during the years spanned by *Women and Economics* and *Herland* considerable credibility among her radical compatriots. The *Masses*, voice of this new radicalism, was an early and outspoken advocate of the modern feminism with which Gilman is typically associated. More striking than these historical connections, Gilman actually created in utopia a worldview that intersects at several key points with pragmatism, Dewey’s version in particular. First, *Herland* scientific and political beliefs are practical, not theoretical, and communally, not individually, verified. Second, Dewey had a hand in the discovery—that psychology belonged with “history” rather than with “personal life,” culture rather than biology—which underlay the distinctiveness of *Herland* social theory. Third, such headway as women made in the new, research universities resulted, in part, from the strategic assistance

offered by young professors like Dewey and Mead, real-world proponents of the kind of psychology Herlanders perfected.³¹ Finally, and in this case more akin to James than Dewey, Gilman treats science itself as if it were just another prejudice, fully as capable of leading one astray as of guiding one to the brutally given.

Outside utopia, however, Gilman remained deaf to what many of her contemporaries deemed the appeals of pragmatism. If sexism is consensual, as it surely was in all but a remote corner of Gilman's world, egalitarian truths require a more secure ground than is provided by either expert or public opinion. To a feminist in Progressive Era America, adopting an intersubjective position on truth meant trading the impartial rule of physical "Law" for the complicit authority of men like Jeff, Vandyck, and Terry. Routing scientific arguments along a path of cultural rather than natural facts meant subjecting the scientist to the blind, if benign, tyranny of Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones. Gilman practiced these pragmatist maneuvers only in the safety of a community and a culture she herself created. Unable, as sociologist or activist, to stay long in this shelter, she armed herself with the remarkable laws and patent facts of positivism—all rendered certain by their analogous relationship to the laws and facts of Darwinian biology but none capable of generating even a concept of culture, let alone a blueprint for the just world Gilman desired—and returned home. Wedded to nineteenth-century conceptions of science and sexuality, Gilman never crossed the conceptual border into the modern.³² Her desire to "know surely," however far it took her from the familiar aspirations of Mrs. Smith and Miss Jones or their daughters, confined her more narrowly than she realized to the sphere inhabited by her own family of believers. Science as Gilman understood it was finally as inhibiting, and as ineffective a remedy for the "sorrows and perplexities" of women, as the religion she claimed to have renounced. An ideological affinity thus strengthened the marriage of convenience that, before 1920, enabled fact-citing feminists and Bible-quoting reformers to work together as suffragists and, after that marriage dissolved, rendered both partners equally unattractive to the free spirits of the jazz age.

Notes

1. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (1935; reprint, Madison, Wisc., 1990), 29; *Women and Economics* (1898; reprint, New York, 1966), 1.

2. For these developments in American religion, and the role of the Beecher family in them, see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976) and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977), 143-196. For Charlotte's relationship to the religion of her family see Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York, 1990), 21-33.

3. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York, 1991), 53-140; for a survey of the varieties and uses of social Darwinism see Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia, 1979); the positivist character of American socialist theory is recovered in Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison, Wisc., 1993) and Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (Baltimore, 1997).

4. For suggestive interpretations of Gilded Age utopias, see Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (New York, 1964) and, more recently, Kenneth M. Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888-1900* (Kent, Ohio, 1976). The exclusion of women authors from these accounts has been remedied by Carol Farley Kessler in *Daring to Dream: Utopian Stories by United States Women, 1836-1919* (Boston, 1984) and id., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings* (Syracuse, 1995). Ann Lane offers a different explanation for the distinctiveness of Gilman's utopian vision in her introduction to Gilman, *Herland* (1915; reprint, New York, 1979), xix-xxiii.

5. Most contemporary debates about the merits and traps of essentialism were sparked by the publication of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theories and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), although the issue has been a live one since the rebirth of feminism in the late 1960s—see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis, 1989). A postmodern approach to gender is articulated in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988). For a critique of Gilligan's perspective, see Judy Auerbach, Linda Blum, Vicki Smith, and Christine Williams, "Commentary: On Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*," *Feminist Studies*, 11 (Spring, 1985), 149-161; for a review of more recent debates over essentialism, see Jane Roland Martin, "Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps," *Signs* 15 (Spring, 1994), 630-657.

6. The Gilman that has most interested scholars has been the fiction writer and feminist. See, for example, Lane's biography cited above and Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860-1896* (Philadelphia, 1980); Gary Scharnhorst, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Boston, 1985); Sheryl L. Meyerling, ed., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work* (Ann Arbor, 1989); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, 1989), 71-82. Carl Degler's "Introduction" to *Women and Economics* places Gilman in a broader context but dismisses rather flippantly her commitment to science (xxix-xxx). For an account that takes this commitment seriously, see Lois Magner, "Women and the Scientific Idiom: Textual Episodes from Wollstonecraft, Fuller, Gilman, and Firestone," *Signs* 4 (Autumn, 1978), 68-77.

7. William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York, 1980); Thomas Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana, Ill., 1977); Mary Roth Walsh, "Doctors Wanted: No Women Need Apply." *Sexual Barriers in the Medical Profession, 1835-1975* (New Haven, 1977), 178-206; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, 1989). As Ellen Fitzpatrick has demonstrated in *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (New York, 1990), the first women to acquire a social scientific training in the modern research university took their civic responsibilities very seriously. Nonetheless, the kind of reform they pursued and their manner of pursuing it differed markedly from the goals and methods of women affiliated with the ASSA. Fitzpatrick concedes as much at the end of her study when she remarks that these pioneers adopted "an academic approach to social change" that "seemed most at home in the universities" (217).

8. For a reading of Veblen as a positivist, see Ross, *Origins*, 204-216, and Lloyd, *Left Out*, 56-83; for an interesting comparison of Gilman and Veblen, see John P. Diggins, *The Bard of Savagery: Thorstein Veblen and Modern Social Theory* (New York, 1978), 158-161; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism* (Urbana, Ill., 1981); Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: The Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1982). Lippmann greeted feminism in 1914 with great enthusiasm, but in the same breath proclaimed that "the presence of women in the labor market is an evil to be combatted by every means of our command . . . [it is an] outrage upon the race."—*Drift and Mastery* (1914; reprint, Madison, Wisc., 1985), 123-134, 127.

9. Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 1-2. The potency of the Lamarckian strain in American evolutionary thought is documented in George W. Stocking, Jr., "Lamarckianism in American Social Science: 1890-1915," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (April-June, 1962), 239-256. See also in this regard Lois N. Magner, "Darwinism and the Woman Question: The Evolving Views of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," in Joanne B. Karpinski, ed., *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York, 1992), 115-128.

10. Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 5, 38, 62, 67, 38-39.

11. For a concise statement of the intellectual underpinnings of the nineteenth-century "woman movement," see Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1987), 16-20.

12. Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 25-26.

13. *Ibid.*, 76.

14. *Ibid.*, 76-77, 80-82.

15. William James, "Great Men and Their Environment," in *The Will to Believe and other Essays in Modern Philosophy* (1897; reprint, New York, 1956), 216-254; E.R.A. Seligman, *The Economic Interpretation of History* (New York, 1902), 96-101; Max Eastman, "The Great American Scapgoat," *New Review* (Aug., 1914), 465-470. For Seligman's participation in the movement to

render American social science amenable to the insights of European historicism, see Ross, *Origins*, 187-88, 190-92; for Eastman's indebtedness to the biological psychology that James pioneered in *The Principles of Psychology*, see Lloyd, *Left Out*, 242-260.

16. See in particular James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902; reprint, New York, 1961), 283-285; Ross summarizes Seligman's political commitments in *Origins*, 187-89; Eastman, "Towards Liberty—the Method of Progress," *Masses* (Oct., 1916), 23, and id., *The Enjoyment of Living* (New York, 1948), 437.

17. Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 122, 137, 195.

18. *Ibid.*, 205.

19. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond*, 158-162, 182-186, 332-334, 278-285, 334-335; Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 167-183, 272-282, 284-290; Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 316.

20. Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 106-107, 11, 63. I am thus in agreement with Walter Benn Michael's argument that a "marketplace" or "free trade" logic governs Gilman's view of human autonomy, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley, 1987), 14-17, and with William Leach's related conclusion that nineteenth-century feminists were betrayed, finally, by their commitment to "possessive individualism"—*True Love and Perfect Union*, 347-51.

21. Gilman, *Herland*, 1, 8, 20, 64.

22. As is now commonly recognized, women reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made many such compromises, particularly when asserting women's innate capacity for nurturance and motherhood. Mary Hill explains contradictions of this sort in Gilman's thinking by reference to her experience with motherhood and to the psychological comfort that even liberated women might draw from performing domestic duties, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 230-31. These explanations, however, are always double-edged: one might just as easily argue that Gilman's personal experiences contributed to her radicalization and that women like her found far more satisfaction in exploding than in perpetuating the myth of domesticity. That she would agonize over these issues in her diaries and correspondence seems only natural. Understanding why she resolved them in particular ways in her published texts would seem to require some attention to the analytic and political advantages she hoped to gain by doing so.

23. The "Darwinian" or "Spencerian" view of women's intellectual capacities is discussed in Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 1-27; Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 78-103 in particular; Magner, "Darwinism and the Woman Question," 117-120; Jill Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution," in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Indiana, 1972), 140-154; and George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1900* (New York, 1992), 74-79.

24. Gilman, *Herland*, 2, 9, 51, 145.

25. *Ibid.*, 63, 9, 127-128, 130, 128, 105, 128, 72, 130, 141.

26. *Ibid.*, 347, 195, 198-99.

27. The harmony that reigned in Herland had a racial dimension as well, as Gilman pointedly made all Herlanders descendants of the same "Aryan stock" (54). Given the pervasiveness of race thinking in Progressive discourse, however, one is struck by how little a role it played, analytically, in Gilman's major works, particularly if compared, for example, to Veblen's discussions of "dolicho-blonds" and the like. As a nativist, Gilman deeply mistrusted those she deemed "unassimilable," but as a feminist she of necessity had reservations as well about the biological arguments used by male peers to justify the oppression of immigrants, African-Americans, and women. For ready examples and a sensible discussion of Gilman's racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, see Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 172-74, 279-281.

28. Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution; The Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941* (Baltimore, 1988), 71-78; Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 347, 194-199; *Herland*, 67, 81, 78. Gilman's mature view of religion is presented in Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 260-64.

29. Gilman, *Herland*, 9, 16, 128, 93, 131-33.

30. Gilman's despondency and isolation in her later years is documented in Lane, *To Herland and Beyond*, 334-335, 341-345.

31. Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, especially xvi-xx, 43-51, and 54-83. For current arguments asserting the philosophical compatibility of pragmatism and feminism, see the set of articles on "feminist pragmatism" published in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 27 (Fall, 1991), 405-74; the special issue "Feminism and Pragmatism," ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Hypatia*, 8 (Spring, 1993); and Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago, 1996). For characterizations of Gilman as a full-fledged pragmatist, see Maureen L. Egan, "Evolutionary Theory in the Social Philosophy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," *Hypatia*, 4 (1989): 102-19; Jane S. Upin, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Instrumentalism Beyond Dewey," *Hypatia*, 8 (Spring, 1993), 38, 56; and Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, 40-41, 65, 225, 257. In line with the argument I have been developing here, we should expect that pragmatism would find favor with women intellectuals only after women were well-represented in academia—after, that is, they were participating members in the community that, by pragmatist lights, validates truth claims and

historical interpretations. We might also expect, during times when a social movement is successfully challenging traditional notions of gender, a narrowing of the gap between the utopian worlds that women create and their actual experience, something I would suggest is discernible, for example, in the relationship between the world Marge Piercy imagines in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York, 1976) and the experience of radical feminists after 1968.

32. In this conclusion, I echo the central theme of Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism*—see, in particular, 96-100, 152-154.