

THE FAMILY, MORALITY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
IN ANGLO-AMERICAN COOPERATIVE THOUGHT,
1813-1890

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T. WESTOVER

This dissertation is the product of my own work and contains nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It also contains no materials that have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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Summary

The family, morality and social science in Anglo-American cooperative thought, 1813-1890

Submitted by: **T. Westover**

This dissertation has as its subject the Anglo-American cooperative response to ‘the family question’, which this project defines as the set of intellectual and practical puzzles deriving from the family’s social and moral dualism. The first chapter examines the family question as framed by eighteenth-century moral philosophy. It considers Smith, Hume, Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Subsequent chapters examine four distinct movements in the Anglo-American tradition, each of which engaged with the family to answer questions about morality, sociability and the role of the new social sciences. These movements include Owenite socialism, Oneida Perfectionism, Mormonism and Modern Times.

It is the contention of this dissertation that to these movements the family embodied a complex set of social, moral and scientific questions that had, in fact, been central to thinkers in the British Enlightenment—questions about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science. Secondary literature has overlooked this rich dialogue, and consequently each of these movements has been labelled myopic in its account of human nature and reductive in its approach to social theory. Secondary accounts oversimplify their ideas about the family in order to reinforce conventional stereotypes about the intellectual boundaries of each movement: Owenite socialists are relegated to the sphere of economic egalitarianism, Oneida Perfectionists and Mormons to that of spiritual fanaticism, and Modern Times is consigned to political anarchism. This dissertation claims, however, that despite the radical nature of their solutions, these movements found no simple or one-sided solution to the family question. Their ambitions were not single-minded, limited to economic, spiritual or political radicalism; rather, in their efforts to provide a coherent account of the family’s moral and social role they engaged with a multitude of moral, social and scientific theories, from economics and moral psychology to physiology and biological theories of racial improvement. It is the conclusion of this dissertation that what is historically and intellectually salient about these movements is not their unmitigated devotion to a single, monistic ideology, but rather their attempt to reconcile the family with two conflicting conceptions of social science: one in which human beings are the natural subjects of scientific principles and methodologies, constrained by the same laws and principles that regulate the immutable physical world, and one in which humanity transcends nature as an entity of limitless self-reflection and perfectibility.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CW</i>	Collected Works of John Stuart Mill
<i>JD</i>	Journal of Discourses
<i>NMW</i>	New Moral World

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the role of the family in nineteenth-century Anglo-American cooperative thought. Its subject matter consists of theorists and reformers who united under the belief that cooperation, not competition, held the key to social progress, and who sought to build self-contained communities on that principle. The communities examined are Owenism, the British socialist movement, and three American movements—Modern Times, Oneida Perfectionism and Mormonism. This dissertation aims to answer two questions: first, it explores why the family played such an important role in each of these movements; and second, it investigates why this role has been relatively neglected by historians, both in histories of the individual movements and in the history of cooperative thought more generally.

To place these movements in a broader intellectual context, the first chapter examines ideas about the family in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. The thinkers it considers are Smith, Hume, Wollstonecraft and Godwin, who struggled to determine whether the natural sympathy that exists within the family is qualitatively commensurable, or at least practically compatible, with the general benevolence or sympathy (what will hereafter be called social love) that makes social life possible. They recognised that the family, with its partialities and particular obligations, is grounded on both benevolence and egotism, and that as such it is both a profoundly social and profoundly unsocial institution. Recognising this dualism, eighteenth-century moral thinkers struggled to determine whether in its relation to society the family ought to be considered a school of sympathy or a school of selfishness.¹ This puzzle evolved into a complex set of social, moral and even scientific questions to which this dissertation will refer collectively as ‘the family question’.

¹ This notion of the family’s dualism was not unique to eighteenth-century moral philosophy and can in fact be traced back to classical antiquity. The binary appears in Plato and Aristotle: Plato’s *Republic* indicts family love as antagonistic to the general love of all, while Aristotle offers the family as a model for the state, claiming that sympathy matures naturally from the family to the village and ultimately to the polis. For Plato the family is a socially fragmenting force; for Aristotle it is the natural academy for social and moral virtues.

It is the contention of this dissertation that these four movements engaged in radical family practices in an effort to solve the family question; consequently, chapters two, three, four and five explore how each movement altered the family in both theory and practice. The case will be made that in modifying the family these movements deliberately aimed to answer broad questions about morality, sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science. This discourse has been disregarded in the individual histories of these movements, and also in the broader history of Anglo-American cooperative thought, because it challenges the descriptive categories in which these movements have been placed: it challenges conventional accounts that dismiss these movements as radicals whose intellectual interests were confined to narrow ideological spheres. In place of reductive caricatures, the family reveals that these movements engaged with broad questions about the nature of social life and social love, the means and limits of human perfectibility, and the methodology and aims of social science.

The first movement considered is Owenite socialism, which is the topic of the second chapter. Owenism was founded by the manufacturer Robert Owen, who aimed to socially and morally regenerate society by modifying the circumstances that form the human character. In the 1830s he condemned marriage as one of the chief evils of the ‘old immoral world’, indicting marriage for most of society’s evils, including ignorance, irrationality and selfishness. But despite the central role that Owen himself assigned to ‘the marriage question’—and by which he also meant the ‘single family of pairs’²—historians have failed to treat his ideas about the family as a serious aspect of his cooperative thought. Secondary accounts either conflate Owen’s ideas about the family with his hostility for private property, thereby reducing Owen’s engagement with the family question to a subsidiary of his economic ideas,³ or omit his views on

² Robert Owen, *Six Lectures Delivered in Manchester* (Manchester: A. Heywood, ca. 1837), 88.

³ The few histories that do attempt to incorporate Owen’s views of the family with his larger philosophy tend to view the family as a mere outgrowth of Owen’s economic ideas, specifically his hostility for private property. See J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 60, 157; Keith Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1982), 86-9.

marriage and the family altogether.⁴ Both neglect the family question in order to preserve the conventional account of Owenite socialism.

The third chapter examines the Oneida Community, a small religious commune in New York State founded by John Humphrey Noyes. Oneida practiced 'complex marriage', a marriage system in which all adults considered themselves married to all other adults of the opposite sex. The community abolished private property, raised children collectively and published extensively about the social, economic and even scientific aims of their movement. But despite the movement's explicit engagement with a wide variety of moral and social questions, historians have treated complex marriage as little more than evidence of spiritual fanaticism,⁵ when in reality Oneida is best understood as a comprehensive effort to provide a coherent scientific account of the family's social and moral role.

Historians have taken a similar approach to Mormonism, the vast religious movement founded by Joseph Smith and the subject of the fourth chapter. Mormons gained notoriety for their practice of polygamy, a marriage system in which Mormon men took multiple wives, and histories of Mormonism and the family focus almost exclusively on polygamy despite the fact that polygamy was only one of many alterations to the traditional family that Mormons made in this period: the Mormon church redefined and restructured relations not only between husbands and wives, but also between parents and children, creating a supra-patriarchal family of the church to

⁴ Historians have given little attention to Owen's ideas about marriage and the family. Most mention marriage and the family only in passing, and others omit them entirely from their account of Owenism. See G.D.H. Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 297; Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 689-91; A.L. Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1962), 49; Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen, A Biography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1923), 488-99; R.G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain, 1825-45* (Manchester University Press, 1972).

⁵ Histories of both the Oneida Community and Mormonism tend to focus on spiritual extremism to account for the origins of their radical family practices. This frequently manifests as a preoccupation with the psychology, charisma and fanaticism of each movement's founder, John Humphrey Noyes and Joseph Smith, and neglect of the larger social and moral justifications behind these practices. For examples of this approach to Oneida see Robert David Thomas, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977); Robert Allerton Parker, *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1935), 253-4. For examples of this approach to Mormonism see Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945); and Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).

which all individuals and individual families were subject. These alterations amounted to a complete renegotiation of family life and family love. But despite the breadth of these reforms to the family, and the rich dialogue taking place among Mormons about the moral, social and scientific benefits of their new family arrangements, historians have dismissed this discourse and instead focused exclusively on polygamy.⁶ Furthermore, examining Mormonism exclusively in the context of other religious movements implicitly suggests that polygamy was a mere manifestation of spiritual fanaticism, an approach that ignores the larger intellectual questions behind these radical theories and practices.⁷

The fifth and final chapter investigates Modern Times, a commune of self-proclaimed anarchists united by the principles of Josiah Warren. Warren had been a follower of Robert Owen, but after the failure at New Harmony Warren concluded that the aims of socialism could never be achieved through the methods of socialism; consequently, he grounded his own community not on socialism but on individual sovereignty. The Long Island commune quickly became infamous for its assault on traditional marriage and tolerance of sexual promiscuity, so much so that John Humphrey Noyes designated it the ‘mother of Free Love’.⁸ Because Modern Times grounded itself on principles of individualism and self-sovereignty, historians have

⁶ Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books: 1986); Kathryn Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage system, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (University of Illinois Press, 1992); B. Carmon Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham, Mormon Polygamy: Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2007).

⁷ That historians have systematically produced reductive accounts of complex marriage and polygamy (and the movements that gave rise to them) is further evinced by the fact that these movements always appear in religious histories but are never included in comparative studies of cooperative thought. Indeed, the most celebrated comparative studies to include either Oneida or Mormonism routinely limit the scope of their comparison to the same three religious movements—Oneida, Mormonism and the Shakers: See Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse University Press, 1991); and Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

⁸ John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1870), 94.

dismissed the community's radical ideas about the family as a mere extension of its political anarchism.⁹

These particular movements have been chosen because they represent the full scope of responses to the family question and its school of sympathy vs. school of selfishness binary. The first two movements, Owenism and Oneida, shared the conventional conception of the family problem, although they embraced opposite solutions. In their account family love is inherently selfish, and consequently accepting the family requires accepting selfishness and partiality as a part of social love. Owenism and Oneida exemplify the two possible solutions to this construction of the family problem: Owenism accepts a 'rational family' grounded on rational love and an enlightened self-interest, and in doing so it accepts this type of partial, self-interested love as the foundation of its new social system. Oneida takes the opposite approach, refusing to incorporate self-interest into its account of ethics and social love and, as a result, rejecting both the family and family love. In the place of traditional family love Oneida embraced a 'communism of love', in which traditional family ties were abolished and the community lived as one 'enlarged family'.

Mormonism and Modern Times rejected this articulation of the family problem. Like Owenism and Oneida they recognised the family's inherent partiality and egotism; however, they came to very different conclusions about the social and moral role that the family would play in their new society. Mormons believed that they could preserve family love, with its partialities and egotism, without allowing the family itself to become a school of selfishness. To do this they strengthened the hierarchal bonds both within the family and without, subjecting the individual family—which they defined as a man presiding over his wife or wives—to the larger patriarchal family of the church. In doing this, Mormons used hierarchy to carve out a space for the partialities of family love without allowing the family to undermine

⁹ This is the approach taken by Roger Wunderlich, who produced the only book-length study of Modern Times. Wunderlich identifies the founding principles of Modern Times (sovereignty and cost the limit of price) but he perceives no philosophical relationship between those principles and the movement's radical family practices. Instead, he dismisses practices like free love, for which Modern Times was famous, as an incidental and unimportant corollary of the sovereignty principle rather than as integral to the cooperative vision of the community. See Roger Wunderlich, *Low Living and High Thinking at Modern Times*, New York (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 54.

social cohesion, and thus Mormonism rejected selfishness as a legitimate source of social love but still preserved the family. Modern Times reversed this solution. It begins by accepting selfishness and partiality as legitimate constituents of social love, but it perceived something particularly pernicious in family love. Ironically, Modern Times rejected the family for precisely the same reason that Mormonism embraced it: its inherent inequality. For Mormonism, it was the family's inherently hierarchical structure that made it morally and socially redeemable; but Modern Times believed that the natural inequalities, particularly those between parents and children, inculcated an unsocial type of selfishness. Thus Modern Times could accept self-interest as a part—and perhaps even the most important part—of social love, but it could not accept the family.

These movements have also been chosen because they demonstrate that the family question transcended both geography and ideology. Thus this dissertation includes religious and spiritual movements as well as movements grounded in politics and economics. It examines vast, amorphous ideological movements and isolated communes. It investigates movements for which the family was always the central question and movements that came to the family question much later in their history. In emphasising these ideological and historical disparities this dissertation aims to show that despite their differences, these movements were participants in a common intellectual dialogue about the family's social and moral dualism. Each movement began with its own assumptions and engaged with the family question according to its own particular priorities, but ultimately they arrived at a similar set of intellectual puzzles about morality, sociability and the role of social science.

Analysing this disparate collection of movements through the family question places them in an intellectual context in which they are not usually seen. Historians have systematically segregated these movements from each other, embracing reductive accounts of their radical family practices in order to reinforce the existing historical categories and stereotypes that separate each movement: Owen's radical ideas about the family are largely neglected in histories of Owenism, and even in the few histories in which they are included, they are treated as a mere outgrowth of his

economic egalitarianism and hostility for private property; Oneida's practice of complex marriage and Mormonism's practice of polygamy are both dismissed as crude and unenlightened products of spiritual fanaticism; and free love at Modern Times is viewed as little more than political and social anarchism.

Such interpretations are untenable. These movements were not reductive in their treatment of the family, and in fact a serious account of their ideas about the family challenges these categories rather than reinforces them. Owenism's emphasis on the moral and social importance of the family reveals that in addition to economic egalitarianism, Owenites engaged thoroughly with sociability, moral philosophy and spiritualism; similarly, the unorthodox experiments with the family undertaken by the American communities formed part of a larger project in pursuit of material equality and the social progression, perhaps even perfectibility, of humanity. Thus a more complex account of the family—one that recognises cooperative thought as struggling with the dual nature of the family, and the social and moral philosophy underpinning that dual nature—reveals that movements like Owenism were as much about ethics as economics, and its spiritual American counterparts were equally as interested in economics as spirituality and ethics. Modern Times, notorious as political anarchists, modified the family to achieve 'equitable moral commerce', demonstrating an interest that transcends politics and ventures far into ethics and economics.

This dissertation restores the family to the centre of nineteenth-century cooperative thought in order to challenge the narrow descriptive categories in which these movements have been placed, arguing that these conventions produce a simplistic account of these movements and their ideas about the family. Primarily, it aims to challenge accounts that depict these movements as utopian in their approach to social science and reductive in their treatment of human nature. Frank E. Manuel describes nineteenth-century cooperative reformers as slaves of the Enlightenment who searched for—and expected to find—Newtonian harmony in the moral world. For Manuel, cooperative theorists suspected no incongruities in nature, either in the physical or the moral world, and consequently they turned to science for 'positive' or 'demonstrable facts', hoping to achieve for the social universe what Newton had for

the physical. In Manuel's account it was only later, with the discoveries of Darwin and Freud, which were 'shattering to those men of the nineteenth century who had had visions of a peaceful, orderly, progressive world', that their unequivocal trust in nature was shaken.¹⁰

Viewing these movements through the lens of the family both supports and challenges this narrative. It tells the story of disparate cooperative movements and their search for a synthesis of moral, social and scientific theory—a 'master science' that would comprehend every aspect of human life, from physiology to ethics. But it also reveals their failure to discover such a science. Furthermore, it suggests that they were, in different degrees, aware of that failure. Instead of showing these movements confidently and deliberately executing their own particular social theories, the family exposes their struggle to reconcile the myriad of nascent social sciences—from psychology to physiology, from phrenology to proto-eugenics¹¹—that were coming of age during this period. It reveals their awareness of the family's inherent moral dualism, and their inability to apply social theory to produce a cogent account of the family's social and moral role: fragments of social theory, when applied to a particular family relation, produced multiple accounts of that relation. Taken together these fragments produced a piecemeal account of the family as a whole.

For some movements the study of human psychology and moral motivation suggested that marriage ought to be an instrument of individual happiness and wellbeing; however, physiological and biological theories, particularly those promising limitless racial improvement if the correct reproductive combinations were achieved, defined marriage as an instrument of large-scale social improvement. In the former account marriage is a private affair whose object is happiness, while the latter account locates marriage squarely in the public sphere, with other social institutions like the state or legislature. These were recurrent intellectual puzzles in the nineteenth

¹⁰ See Frank. E. Manuel, 'Toward a Psychological History of Utopias' *Daedalus* 94 (1965): 310. See also Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, 584.

¹¹ The term 'eugenics' is anachronistic in their context, as it was not used until Galton applied to his own research in 1883. The movements in this dissertation used a collection of other terms to describe their efforts to improve the human species through sexual reproduction, including 'rational propagation', 'scientific propagation', 'stirpiculture', 'race improvement' and 'rational procreation'.

century and by no means limited to these communities only. What distinguishes these movements is not the content of any particular idea, theory or belief about the family but rather the scope of each of their projects—that is, the presence of so many disparate social, moral and scientific theories in each movement’s discourse about the family problem. The breadth of each discourse suggests that in contrast to conventional narratives, which depict these movements as ideological radicals with narrow intellectual interests, these movements were not interested in vindicating any particular social theory or biological concept; they were, rather, interested in situating all true scientific theory within a single, cogent account of the family. Their interest in the family may have originated in their own particular intellectual spheres, from biblical restorationism, as in the case of the Mormons, or in economic egalitarianism as with the Owenites, but it matured into a multi-tonal account of the family’s social and moral role.

Underpinning these discordant accounts of the family were two conflicting conceptions of social science. These two conceptions are best understood as a profound disagreement about the methodology and purpose of social science, and in particular about the social and moral implications of using human beings as a subject for science. In the first account human beings can be studied using the same principles and methodologies as the physical world because they are, in fact, part of the physical world and thus subject to the same natural laws as the rest of the animal kingdom. They are the natural subjects for science. In the second account human beings stand outside nature as rational creatures capable of limitless potential and improvement. This expansive notion of human perfectibility does not accept any aspect of humanity—from its physical constitution to its passions and instincts—as immutable or of inherent moral value. Instinct and passion may be natural, but that does not mean they are admirable or even desirable. Rather, in this account human beings are capable of passing rational and moral judgments on their own behaviour and, if necessary, of altering those behaviours. The family provided an arena for the conflict between these two competing accounts of human nature and social science. Each of these movements appealed to social science to study the natural behaviours of human

beings, and each of these movements appealed to a naturalistic¹² account to make normative claims about family life. But each movement also believed that the aim of social science was the progression, if not the perfection, of humanity. Thus for these movements the family embodied a conflict between the *aims* of social science and its *methods*. The aim of social science was human perfectibility, but its methods required that human nature be relatively immutable.

These two approaches to social science produced very different accounts of the family, and both accounts are present, to a greater or lesser degree, in each of the four movements. Thus the account of cooperative thought offered in this dissertation is less about their absolute faith in the continuity of the physical and moral world and more about the intellectual process by which that faith began to break down. They looked to the sciences to discover the means of human perfection, believing in a harmony of the natural and moral world that could produce a supreme science of humanity. But their trust in that harmony came under assault by some of their own philosophies, particularly those that rejected instinct and doubted the moral continuity between human sociability and natural relations, such as parenthood or sexual love. Even their ostensible worship of science betrays uncertainty, not least because of the vast number of scientific methods and theories, from phrenology to spiritualism, to which they turned in their attempt to codify human behaviour. From this perspective, their pursuit of a ‘master science’ to unify all other sciences is not evidence of a confident conviction in natural and moral homogeneity, but was rather a symptom of the moral and scientific disunity they found in the natural world.

The above lays out the case for a re-evaluation of the historical categories and intellectual attributes applied to these movements in particular and cooperative thought more generally. This will be achieved by adopting a methodology that

¹² I use the term ‘naturalistic’ in this context to refer to the various classifications of ‘nature’ in Enlightenment thought. Dorina Outram outlines three ways in which Enlightenment thinkers used the term ‘natural’: First, as something ‘not socially defined’; second, as something not ‘artificial’; and finally, as something ‘based on the external physical world’. Each of these attached a degree of normative moral value to the discovery of ‘nature’ or the ‘natural’ state of things, and thus, according to Outram, “‘nature’ became a description of a moral ideal as well as of a scientifically discernible order”. See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 87 and 100-102.

reconstructs the interest that the family held for these movements themselves rather than relying on modern anxieties and concerns: first, it rejects narratives that present a reductive account of the family in order to validate existing descriptive categories and stereotypes;¹³ and second, it corrects narratives that view the family solely as a subject of interest for gender studies or feminist history, a method that risks anachronistically fixating on women in order to address modern anxieties about inequality and gender discrimination. This dissertation disentangles the family question from the woman question,¹⁴ recognising that although feminism played an important part in some of these movements, it was only part of the social and moral dialogue taking place in this period. Third, this project takes a broad approach to these

¹³ Examples of this approach are outlined in footnotes 3-7 and 9.

¹⁴ This approach began with histories of French cooperative thought, specifically with histories of Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism (see Leslie F. Goldstein, 'Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism: The St.-Simonians and Fourier', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43 (1982): 91-108; Claire G. Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993)). Due to the importance of women and the woman question to French cooperative thought, this approach to French thinkers may be justified. Evelyn L. Forget and Claire G. Moses have argued that by 1832 women and feminism were the central concerns of the Saint-Simonians. Bee Wilson challenges depictions of Fourier as a feminist, but argues persuasively that women are so central to Fourier that his entire philosophy can be understood through his theories about women (Evelyn L. Forget, 'Saint-Simonian Feminism', *Feminist Economics* 7 (2011), 79; Claire G. Moses, 'Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s France', *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982): 241; B. Wilson, 'Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and Questions of Women' (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2002)). The same cannot be said, however, about Anglo-American cooperative movements, whose interest was in the family as a whole and in the social and moral questions it raised as a complex, multi-faceted institution. Yet historians have applied the same methodological approach to movements in Britain and America that they have applied (and more appropriately applied) to French cooperative thinkers: Barbara Taylor provides the only serious treatment of Owenism and its radical ideas about the family, but she approaches the topic from the perspective of gender studies and women's history, examining the movement's feminist overtones and exploring the social status of women within the Owenite movement (Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, England: 1991); also see Carol A. Kolmerton, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Lucy Delap, 'The 'Woman Question' and the Origins of Feminism', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 325). This approach fails to recognise that for Owenism the woman question was only part of a larger question about the social and moral role of family as a whole. Histories of Oneida and Mormonism have similarly focused on women at the expense of the larger family question: Histories of Oneida eagerly focus on marriage, women and sexuality, categorising Oneida's practices as either 'feminist' or 'anti-feminist' (see Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 105; Kern, *Ordered Love*, 233-43, 270, 275; Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Women in Utopia', *Comparative Literature Studies* 10 (1973), 313). Due to the inherent inequality of Mormon polygamy (which granted men multiple wives while restricting women to one husband), historians or Mormonism are frequently preoccupied with the implications of this practice for women while ignoring the larger discourse about the family (see footnote 6).

movements, examining the wider membership rather than restricting its analysis to the leadership, men such as Robert Owen and John Humphrey Noyes, whose personal opinions have too frequently been accepted as adequate representations of vast, factional movements. To address this oversight, this account is based on both archival manuscripts and published works,¹⁵ and thus an attempt has been made to treat the divisions and disagreements within these movements as carefully as the better known theories of their leaders.

This dissertation examines the Anglo-American perspective on the family instead of the traditional comparison of the ‘utopian socialists’—Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon. There are two reasons for this departure from convention. The first is that the history of French thought already benefits from a rich account of women and marriage in thinkers like Saint-Simon, Fourier and even Comte.¹⁶ This dissertation aims to show that an important discourse about the family was also taking place in the English-speaking world, but that this dialogue has been written out of their histories because it did not fit the narrow descriptive categories in which these movements have been placed. The second reason for excluding the French is that the Anglo-American discourse was not the same as the more familiar discourse taking place in France. This dissertation argues that it was unique to the Anglo-American tradition because it grew out of questions specific to the British Enlightenment—questions about impartiality, disinterestedness, human perfectibility and the role of social science. Because of this unique intellectual genealogy, the Anglo-American discourse

¹⁵ For some of these movements (notably Oneida and Modern Times) the distinction between archival manuscripts and published works is a small one. The Oneida Perfectionists published an enormous amount of material on their social theory, most of which is now only accessible in archives at select universities in New England. The case is similar with Modern Times, whose reformers published many books and pamphlets; however, almost none has survived and the few that do exist can only be found in local libraries and university collections on Long Island, N.Y.

¹⁶ For examples of this discourse on Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism see footnote 14. Secondary accounts on women and marriage in the works of Auguste Comte tend to focus on the role of women in the Religion of Humanity (see Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2-5, 147). For a more general examination of Comte’s ideas about women, see V. Guillin, ‘Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill on Sexual Equality: Historical, Methodological and Philosophical Issues’ (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2005); Mike Gain, ‘Engendering the End of European History: Auguste Comte’s Cult of Woman at the Heart of the Western Republic’, *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 39 (1996): 15-26; Jean Elisabeth Pederson, ‘Sexual Politics in Comte and Durkheim: Feminism, History, and the French Sociological Tradition’, *Signs* 27 (2001): 229-263).

was more interested in the social and moral role of the family as a whole (rather than in women or marriage only) than its French counterpart, and thus although it was influenced by French thought it constitutes a distinct discourse.¹⁷

To demonstrate that this discourse was distinct from its French counterpart, this dissertation begins by placing these movements in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment and the works of two English social and moral philosophers, Wollstonecraft and Godwin. The aim is to show that although radical ideas about marriage and the family are conventionally associated with French philosophy, an equally robust discourse was also occurring in the philosophic traditions of the Anglo-American world. To complete this narrative, this dissertation concludes with a discussion of the family question as it manifested in nineteenth-century moral philosophy in Britain, specifically in the works of John Stuart Mill and John Grote. These thinkers struggled with the moral contradictions inherent in the family, and like the four cooperative movements they also asked broad questions about moral motivation and the relationship between private sympathy and public love. From this perspective, nineteenth-century cooperative thought shared something in common with mainstream moral and political philosophy—not only in the eighteenth century but also in their own—which was lost in twentieth-century accounts: that is, a methodology that approaches the study of human nature and its implications as the very heart of moral and political thought.

This suggests that one reason historians have failed to recognise the full range of cooperative arguments on the family might be their own myopic view of moral and political philosophy, which tends to dismiss nineteenth-century psychological accounts of human morality—from Noyes to John Stuart Mill—as philosophically outmoded. For these thinkers the family question was about human psychology and the scientific study of human nature, and the full complexity of these arguments is imperceptible to a modern disciplinary approach that apports the study of human nature into distinct disciplines and departments, such as psychology, economics and

¹⁷ That Anglo-American thinkers placed a stronger emphasis on the family as a whole will become clear throughout the course of this dissertation. However, for a brief explanation of these differences, see footnote 14.

biology. For thinkers in the nineteenth century, these categories had just begun to emerge and were cognitively differentiated¹⁸ only in a very limited sense. Thus if contemporary historians wish to reconstruct the family question as it appeared to nineteenth-century thinkers, they must set aside modern disciplines and apply a supra-disciplinary approach. However, it is much simpler—and affirming of existing historical narratives—to relegate the study of human nature to psychology or anthropology, even in intellectual histories, and keep moral and political thought in a simplified, pristine state, free from the impenetrable and disorderly study of human beings. But this is not the approach to moral and political thought found in nineteenth-century cooperative thought, and any explanation of the family that fails to recognise this fact invariably devolves into a reductive affirmation of conventional narratives.

Cooperative thinkers attempted to navigate an unfamiliar intellectual climate defined by the birth of new disciplines and scientific perspectives, but they had not yet surrendered their Enlightenment commitment to a supreme ‘science of man’. This struggle becomes clear in their engagement with the family’s social and moral dualism. They embraced scientific knowledge on several plains and from multifarious, often unconventional sources; they accepted a varied and complex account of human nature and human motivation, which they modified and adjusted as they struggled with the family’s inherent moral contradictions. They were not reductive or simplistic in their approach; rather, they represent an exhaustive and methodical attempt to employ the emerging arsenal of ‘social sciences’ to understand and reform one of society’s oldest institutions—the family.

¹⁸ This term is taken from John Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 146.

1. THE FAMILY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The object of this chapter is to explore the family question as it manifested in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. More specifically, it aims to show that for thinkers like Smith, Hume, Wollstonecraft and Godwin, the family question embodied a set of intellectual puzzles about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science. These thinkers have been chosen not only because of their influence on moral and political thought but also because they represent two distinct approaches to the family problem. In the first category are Smith and Hume, who recognised the family's moral and social discontinuities as empirical facts. They perceived the family as, at the same time, both profoundly social and profoundly anti-social, and their moral and social philosophy explores how the family's dual nature might be balanced in such a way as to enable social life. It does not attempt to resolve this inconsistency, or purge the family of its unsocial nature; rather, it provides an empirical account of the family's moral and social dualism, and outlines how society might navigate this discontinuity. In the second category are Wollstonecraft and Godwin, who rejected the dualistic account of the family outlined by Smith and Hume and instead attempted to locate the family within a coherent account of social, moral and political life. They aimed to create a 'rational family'—that is, to reconcile the family with a rationalistic and internally consistent account of human nature, moral motivation and ethics. This project required that traditional family relations be modified according to their new rational standards, so much so that one wonders whether Wollstonecraft and Godwin, in transforming the traditional family into the 'rational family', have purged the family of all those characteristics that most define family life.

These two categories provide insight into how questions about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science played out in the family in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. These questions would be picked up by nineteenth-century cooperative reformers, although not in the same form. Much more than their predecessors, nineteenth-century cooperative thinkers believed they could create a

‘master science’—a universal science that comprehends every aspect of human life. They aimed to apply the principles and methodology of Newtonian science to social and moral questions, and it was in this synthesis that they looked for a solution to the family question. They believed that this science would produce an answer, and they did not shy away from the implications of their social theory, however radical its prescriptions. The questions they asked of their new social theory, however, were the same questions found in Smith, Hume, Wollstonecraft and Godwin—questions about limited sociability, the potential for human perfectibility, and the role of social science in making normative social and moral claims. Thus in this chapter it will be argued that nineteenth-century cooperative reformers took the family problem as outlined by their predecessors seriously, and the extremity of their solutions, the diversity of their experiments, and the fervour of their polemics have their roots in the controversies of this earlier discourse.

i. Smith, Hume and the problem of partiality

For the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, the family question grew out of the debates about sociability. Classical naturalists like Aquinas believed that a natural continuity existed between the interests of an individual and the interests of their community. They supposed that an individual’s happiness derived from the good of the whole; consequently there could be no such thing as individual interests because they were bound up with the interests of the community of which they were a part. This description of the individual’s relationship with their community changed with Hobbes, who posited that individuals have interests entirely distinct, and perhaps even in conflict with, the interests of their society. This altered what it meant to be ‘moral’. According to Jennifer A. Herdt, this evolution ‘made ethics into a distinct sphere of constraints on acceptable action, rather than an all-embracing account of human

action and the goods pursued in human action'. The concepts of 'sympathy', 'impartiality' and 'disinterestedness' emerged from this new dialogue.¹

Smith and Hume belong to the tradition that introduced empirical reasoning into the study of human beings and society, and in doing so they undermined the natural law tradition with its account of natural sociability and its assumption of moral and social harmony. Hume rejected Hutcheson's account of natural sympathy—an account of human sociability in which society derives from universal benevolence—in favour of a Pufendorfian account of limited sociability,² in which society derives from natural sympathy but also from utility and self-love: Hume proclaimed justice an 'artificial virtue' that originates from 'necessity'. In this view justice is not a natural fact about the world. It is neither timeless nor universal. It is a pragmatic response to specific contextual facts about human beings. Smith adopts Hume's concept of artificial justice, describing humanity as minimally social; indeed, much of his moral and social theory can be read as an explanation of the mechanisms and circumstances that make social life possible despite the obvious social limitations of the human animal. The family is problematic in this intersection of ideas,³ as this account of limited sociability produces no obvious conclusion regarding the role of the family in either supporting or undermining society; indeed, it is not at all clear in either Smith or Hume whether the family attachments spring from man's social or unsocial nature, the selfish or the unselfish sentiments.

¹ Jennifer Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24.

² This account of sociability as discussed by Pufendorf, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, Hume and Smith is based on the work of Istvan Hont. See *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-state in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 159-84.

³ Although neither Smith nor Hume wrote about the family question as such, their accounts of limited sympathy gave rise to larger questions about the relationship between sympathy and proximity. Both Hume and Smith recognised that the human capacity for sympathy diminishes as the space dividing individuals increases, and this notion of proximity has been explored by scholars of both Smith and Hume (see Fonna Forman-Barzilai, 'Sympathy in Space(s): Adam Smith on Proximity', *Political Theory* 33 (2005): 189-217); Jacqueline Taylor, 'Hume's Later Moral Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 325; Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 188. What has not been explored in literature on Smith and Hume, however, is how Smith and Hume's accounts of limited sympathy and proximity produced dualistic accounts of the family.

For Hume the family was evidence of both humanity's natural sociability and also of its limits. According to *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), the natural sympathy within a family renders the artificial virtues of society unnecessary, due to the perfect benevolence that exists between its members. 'Between Married persons', Hume explains, 'the cement of friendship is by the laws supposed so strong as to abolish all division of possessions; and has often, in reality, the force ascribed to it'. If this natural sympathy could be expanded, so that individuals make no conscious distinction between their own interests and the interests of others, Hume claims that the 'whole human race would form only one family; where all would lie in common, and be used freely, without regard to property'.⁴ On the other hand, Hume recognises that the natural sympathy between family members may be detrimental to the artificial social virtues. In *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739) Hume wrote that although the natural sympathy between family members 'must be acknowledged to the honour of human nature, we may at the same time remark, that so noble an affection, instead of fitting men for large societies, is almost as contrary to them, as the most narrow selfishness'. Hume further explains that although this natural sympathy is admirable, it 'must necessarily produce an opposition of passions, and a consequent opposition of actions; which cannot but be dangerous to the new-established union'.⁵

Hume's ambivalence towards the family is further complicated by his historicist account of the origins of the artificial virtues, in which the family affections play a crucial role.⁶ According to Hume, the sexual appetite forms families, and it is family life that shows humanity the benefits of association. Eventually the limited practices of familial association become convention, and, in their mature phase, get bound up with questions of morality and obligation. Thus society is born. In this

⁴ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 185-6.

⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 487.

⁶ This account of Hume is informed by James Moore, 'Hume's Theory of Justice and Property', *Political Studies* 14 (1976): 103-19; Knud Haakonssen, 'The structure of Hume's political theory', in Norton, *The Cambridge Companion to David Hume*, 342-80.

account the family is the first school of association. It is the original ‘society’, but it is not synonymous with society. The natural or instinctual virtues allowed for family life and a small circle of kin, but social life on a larger scale required something more—the artificial virtues.⁷ Mankind moves from a state of nature to a state of society with the establishment of convention, not by enlarging the family affections to comprehend all society. The family is the genesis of social behaviour, but it cannot serve as a model for society. In fact, once the evolution to a state of society has taken place (through a recognition and diffusion of the artificial virtues), Hume suggests that the family’s natural sympathy creates an ‘opposition of passions’. Whether those passions are in opposition to each other, or to the more general love that makes social life possible, Hume does not clarify.

Hume’s dualistic account of the family is of particular interest to this dissertation because it was bound up with his efforts to create a ‘Science of Man’, which Rüdiger Schreyer describes as ‘the overruling scientific endeavour of the time’.⁸ This ‘Science of Man’ aimed to establish a new science of human society grounded on the methodological foundations of Newton and Boyle. Such a methodological approach required, at the very least, that one establish the principles of human nature, and in Scotland this took the form of anthropological and sociological studies. These studies employed the established methods of observation and comparison to modern human societies, which they contrasted with primitive or savage societies, which were meant to represent a type of state of nature, or to serve as exemplars of human society at earlier stages of development. Hume’s role in this ‘Science of Man’ is further complicated by the fact that Hume wanted to view mankind as both a natural object, with a fixed nature, and also as a product of culture.⁹ As Christopher Berry has noted recently, Hume’s ‘Science of Man’ relies on

⁷ This account of Hume is informed by Knud Haakonssen, ‘The Structure of Hume’s Political Theory’ and David Fate Norton, ‘The Foundations of Morality in Hume’s *Treatise*’, both in Norton, *The Cambridge Companion to David Hume*, 342-80 and 270-310 respectively.

⁸ Rüdiger Schreyer, “‘Pray what Language did your wild Couple speak, when first they met?’—Language and the Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment”, in *The ‘Science of Man’ in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and their Contemporaries*, ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 151.

⁹ Nicholas Capaldi, ‘Hume as a Social Scientist’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 32 (1978): 100.

a principle of non-contextualism—that is, on the assumption that human behaviour exhibits some uniformities independent of context.¹⁰ And yet the Scottish Enlightenment generally and Hume in particular is celebrated for its emphasis on what Berry terms the ‘process of socialisation’, or the importance of education and culture.¹¹

Of course it is possible for Hume to emphasise the importance of a process of socialisation but also maintain a belief in the existence of a thing called ‘human nature’—that is, a set of immutable principles that define human beings. But if this is the case, Hume is unable to work out whether the family derives from immutable principles of human nature or whether it is best understood as a social convention; consequently, he is unable to coherently define the family’s role in the historical evolution of human society. Because of this, he has some difficulty determining whether the family derives from those aspects of human nature that separate human beings from animals (reason, autonomy, self-determination) or whether the family is, in fact, something that human beings share with animals as a static principle of nature, independent of any process of socialisation. His account of the family in the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry* suggests the latter, but his essay *Of Polygamy and Divorce* (1742) suggests that the family may in fact derive from reason and artifice and ought to be understood as an institution that separates mankind from the animals: ‘Among the inferior creatures’, Hume writes, ‘nature herself, being the supreme legislator, prescribes all the laws which regulate their marriages’. The case is very different with human beings, as ‘nature, having endowed man with reason, has not so exactly regulated every article of his marriage contract, but has left him to adjust them, by his own prudence, according to his own circumstances and situation’.¹²

Recognising that no particular form of the family is prescribed by nature, Hume argues that society ought to determine what type of family is best and devise its own sanctions and regulations: ‘Municipal laws are to supply the wisdom of each

¹⁰ Christopher J. Berry, ‘Hume’s Universalism: The Science of Man and the Anthropological Point of View’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15 (2007): 539.

¹¹ Berry, ‘Hume’s Universalism’, 541.

¹² David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), 183.

individual; and, at the same time, by restraining the natural liberty of men, make private interest submit to the interest of the public'.¹³ Later in the essay Hume clarifies which freedoms require restraint and why, declaring that women are not naturally chaste, and men will not naturally labour to care for children unless they can be guaranteed that such children are their own. The sexual instinct ensures reproduction, but it does not, according to Hume, ensure the establishment of families, which require a type of social artifice. Thus society must impose its own sanctions on women to ensure their chastity: '[W]e must attach a peculiar degree of shame to their infidelity', Hume concludes, 'above what arises merely from its injustice, and must bestow proportionable praises on their chastity'.¹⁴ In this account the family is grounded in social conventions that artificially restrain both sexes.¹⁵

Hume's account of the family is of particular interest because it is grounded on a dualistic account of human nature and bound up with questions about the limits of using human beings as subject matter for traditional methods of scientific inquiry. On the one hand, the family is a source of natural sympathy. It is, in fact, the first cooperative institution that shows human beings the benefits of association. In the second account, however, the family itself is a social construct that society creates in order to ensure that parents care for their offspring. Because the family appears to be a product of both a universal human nature and social artifice, Hume struggles to locate the family within a coherent anthropological account of human society.

Despite this tension it would be an exaggeration to claim that the family was central to Hume's social and moral theory: Hume's references to the family are infrequent and usually ancillary to his other historical, social or moral concepts; consequently, this dissertation makes the far more modest claim that although the family itself was not central to Hume, it was bound up with the questions and puzzles—questions about human nature, sociability and social science—that were at the heart of Hume's philosophy. Thus it could be said that although the family

¹³ Hume, *Essays*, 183.

¹⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 571.

¹⁵ This theme has been explored by Annette Baier but only as it relates to Hume's views on women and not to the artificial nature of the family as a whole. See Annette Baier, 'Hume on Women's Complexion', in Jones, *The 'Science of Man'*, 33-53.

question was not the focus of Hume's thought, there is a sense in which it grew out of the controversies and tensions of his discourse.

This dissertation makes a similar claim about Adam Smith. As with Hume, it would be incorrect to say that the family was the centerpiece of Smith's moral thought. The family was, however, an important corollary to many of the moral questions that interested Smith, and like Hume, Smith was not entirely successful in reconciling his account of sociability with the family's inherent moral dualism. Smith's philosophy struggled with the family because he was interested in sympathy not just as a fact of human nature but also as a process of education and experience. As Duncan Kelly has recently explained, Smith was interested in 'how the actual external spectator we rely upon and from whom we learn as children, for example, eventually becomes the abstract man within our breast, forcing us to consider our judgements in the light of what we know about morality and sympathy'.¹⁶

This project was embodied in Smith's account of the 'Impartial Spectator', which necessarily engaged with the relationship between the partial affections and the universal sentiments that underpin social life. Thus while Smith does not make the family central to his moral thought, like Hume he must reconcile the family with his account of social life, and Smith, much more so than Hume, is interested in creating an account in which the family affections are not only socially and morally neutral, but admirable. He does this by describing the family affections as 'nothing but habitual sympathy',¹⁷ which arises because family members are 'usually placed in situations which naturally create this habitual sympathy'. In describing the family in this way, Smith attributes the family with the creation of 'domestic morals', and thus he laments the rising popularity of boarding schools that separate children from the natural objects of their affection: 'Domestic education is the institution of nature;

¹⁶ Duncan Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 129.

¹⁷ Smith adopted much of Hume's conception of sympathy; he did, however, reject Hume's claim in the *Enquiry* that sympathy is grounded in utility. For a discussion of the differences between Smith and Hume on sympathy, see Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 45-8 and 67-73.

public education, the contrivance of man. It is surely unnecessary to say, which is likely to be the wisest'.¹⁸

In this account family love results from the repetitive interaction between proximal individuals, which generates and intensifies natural sympathy.¹⁹ Love from proximity implies a type of universalism in that it could possibly exist between any two individuals who established a particular relationship. This puts family love in a positive light, describing it as a type of school of natural sympathy that may indeed be a genuine social impulse, deriving from sympathy rather than egotism. In this sense Smith's proximal account of partial love suggests a complimentary relationship between the family and universal love. Furthermore, it suggests that the family might play a central role in the development of the general benevolence upon which society rests.

And yet Smith is careful to clarify that family love is, in fact, not the foundation for the universal sentiments that underpin society. According to Smith, social life is possible because of a universal, natural inclination towards justice; natural or habitual sympathy, on the other hand, is at best an inadequate foundation for society:

Men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for another, with whom they have no particular connexion, in comparison of what they feel for themselves . . . that if this principle did not stand up within them in his defence, and overawe them into a respect for his innocence, they would, like wild beasts, be at all times ready to fly upon him; and a man would enter an assembly of men as he enters a den of lions.²⁰

Natural sympathy only extends justice to those individuals who have a 'particular connexion'. Social life requires a general feeling of fellowship and a universal commitment to justice, both of which are entirely distinct from family or partial love. In fact, Smith deliberately distinguishes family love from the general sentiments that bind humanity, explaining that such a universal sentiment 'does not necessarily

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 258, 261.

¹⁹ This notion of proximity in Smith's thought is outlined by Forman-Barzilai in 'Adam Smith on Proximity', 189-217.

²⁰ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 101-2.

include in it any degree of those exquisite sentiments which are commonly called love, esteem, and affection, and *by which we distinguish our particular friends and acquaintance*'. All that is required for social life, Smith explains, '*is no more than the general fellow-feeling which we have with every man merely because he is our fellow-creature*'.²¹

Society is maintained by justice and a 'general fellow-feeling which we have with every man', and these sentiments do not require love or habitual sympathy. And yet Smith condemns boarding schools because they deprive individuals of the family, the source of 'domestic morals' and the natural objects of the first affections. In this sense Smith's positive descriptions of the family as a school of natural sympathy seem entirely at odds with the impartial spectator and Smith's explicit denial that general benevolence includes 'in any degree' the affections called love that one feels for family. Smith does not explain this enigmatic series of statements—that is, why he venerates the family as a source of affections that, when mature, are entirely unrelated to the general fellowship upon which society rests. Ultimately, Smith seems to want to build a moral system based on impartiality, which explains his claim that love and affection are entirely separate from the general fellowship that supports justice and society; on the other hand, he wants to praise those 'natural' affections that produce such 'natural' examples of love, even if those affections are partial and closely related to that formidable adversary to social stability, self-love. Smith refuses to 'use' the preferential affections as part of his solution to human unsociability precisely because for Smith, as for Hume, such affections were part of why man is unsociable.

There is some suggestion in Smith's writings that the family affections themselves may be 'artificial', i.e. dependent on utility. He explains that nature gives parents a greater share of affection for children, who rely on their parents, than it has given children for their parents. He also asserts that in countries where the law lacks sufficient force to ensure security, large family groups replace the state, uniting for their common defence; however, this '[r]egard for remote relations becomes, in every country, less and less, according as this state of civilization has been longer and more

²¹ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 105-6.

completely established'.²² Still, if the family relation itself derives from utility, and the family affections are in some sense 'artificial virtues', it is still unclear how one ought to view the family affections in Smith's moral philosophy: if they derive from utility it is uncertain whether his use of the term 'natural' contains normative implications. If the family affections are 'natural' in the way that self-love is natural, and the impartial spectator is required to counter the bias of individual perspectives, it is not clear what role Smith means to assign to the family within his moral framework.

This highlights an important symmetry between Smith and Hume: in their accounts of the family, both accept a degree of discontinuity between history, morality and the physical world. They begin their narrative of the family with empirical facts, and even when those facts produce a morally ambiguous account of the family, both Smith and Hume accept those facts and their conflicting accounts of human institutions. Thus although Hume and Smith tacitly recognise and even begin to articulate the family problem, they do not aim to 'solve' it. They do not attempt to refashion the family according to some standard of rational morality; rather, they accept the family's historical, social and moral incongruities, and begin the task of discovering how to navigate social life despite the dual nature of humanity and human institutions like the family.

Smith and Hume are not generally included in histories of cooperative thought. This dissertation contends, however, that the family provides a link between these thinkers and radical cooperative reformers in the nineteenth century. It is not an obvious connection, and consequently it has received far less attention as an intellectual forbear than its French counterparts. However, the following chapters will demonstrate that it was this articulation of the problems of sociability, perfectibility and social science that would draw thinkers like Robert Owen and John Humphrey Noyes into exhaustive discussions about the family's social, moral and scientific role. Thinkers like Owen and Noyes shared with Smith and Hume an approach to social and moral phenomena. They asked broad questions about what makes social life

²² Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 262.

possible; they aimed to extend their philosophic concepts to practice as well as theory; and they were, like Smith and Hume, interested in the social and moral puzzles of ordinary lives as well as in the virtues of civic society or the state.²³ This approach defined much of what was unique about the Scottish Enlightenment, and it is this tradition of social, moral and scientific inquiry that would manifest in the radical cooperative experiments of the nineteenth century.

ii. Wollstonecraft, Godwin and rational love

If Smith and Hume did not attempt to ‘solve’ the family problem, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin did. Both aimed to resolve the family’s moral puzzles by reforming it according to some standard of reason: they aimed to create a coherent account of political, social and moral life, then devise a new type of family to fit neatly into their system. And in some ways they succeeded. The family model that emerges from their efforts is almost certainly more rational than its traditional counterpart, yet the result bears little resemblance to the traditional family, so much so that it raises questions about the foundations of their entire project. Perhaps resolving the family’s moral and social inconsistencies requires abolishing the very elements that most define family life. Thus while Wollstonecraft and Godwin may have reconciled the family with reason, it is less certain whether they successfully reconciled reason with the family.

²³ The civic humanist tradition in Western political and moral thought had traditionally measured moral autonomy according to a person’s ability to live virtuously in civic society. The Scots expanded the notion of virtue beyond civic virtue to include other conceptions of moral autonomy besides political participation. Nicholas Phillipson has offered one explanation for this intellectual shift, suggesting that it might have been the result of the Act of Union in 1707, which removed stripped the Scots of their political institutions and made them politically provincial. Consequently, principles of propriety (virtues that could be acquired and refined in the course of an ordinary life) replaced old ideas of virtue, and thus these principles were at the heart of the Scottish project to create a ‘Science of Man’. See Nicholas Phillipson, ‘The Scottish Enlightenment’, in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 21-22. For another account of the particular conception of ‘human flourishing’ at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, ‘Educational Theory and the Social Vision of the Scottish Enlightenment’, in *Ideas of Education: Philosophy and Politics from Plato to Dewey*, ed. Christopher Brooke and Elizabeth Frazer (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 129-30.

Wollstonecraft believed it was possible to reconcile the family with social love and other social virtues, such as civic duty and patriotism; in fact, Wollstonecraft perceived no inherent conflict between social love and the family's various duties and moral obligations.²⁴ She maintained an Enlightenment belief in a natural continuity between the moral and physical worlds; consequently, she did not see the various forms of partial love, from sexual to filial, as in conflict with each other or with universal benevolence. All that was needed, she believed, was reason to reconcile the family with the highest forms of social and moral virtue. In advancing this notion of moral continuity, Wollstonecraft invoked a dialectic of sentiment and reason in which sentiment is only morally acceptable when it is subject to reason. In this account, all duties grounded on reason will naturally harmonise with each other, because 'genuine duties support each other'. Wollstonecraft compares those loves grounded on sentiment to Cato's 'most unjust love for his country'.²⁵ The story of Cato and Carthage, in Wollstonecraft's narrative, is not a tale of two legitimate but morally conflicting duties; rather, it is a struggle between reason and sentiment, between genuine duty and fleeting passion. Thus to solve the family problem Wollstonecraft redefined family love to suit her dialectic of reason and sentiment. Reconciling family love with universal benevolence and other social virtues required grounding all types of family love—sexual, romantic, parental—predominantly on reason. If sentiment dominated reason in any family relation the result would be the 'unjust love' exhibited by Cato.

Wollstonecraft began with the marriage relation, with sexual and romantic love. If traditional marriages are grounded on passion, Wollstonecraft intended rational marriages to be grounded on mutual esteem and respect. This dialectic

²⁴ Wollstonecraft's ideas about marriage and the family varied considerably throughout her life, but this dissertation will focus on what Eileen Hunt has identified as a middle period in Wollstonecraft's life, a period when she shared Burke's conception of the family as a 'little platoon' that trains individuals in moral and civic virtue. This is also the period in which she wrote her most celebrated texts, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. See Eileen M. Hunt, 'The Family as Cave, Platoon and Prison: Three Stages of Wollstonecraft's Philosophy of the Family', *The Review of Politics* 64 (2002): 81-119.

²⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 288.

between reason and sentiment was at the heart of why Wollstonecraft denounced the ‘coquetry’ of conventional marriage, by which she meant the art of delicacy and grace outlined by Rousseau and Burke. She mourned a state of society in which wives, in order to inflame passion in their husbands, fake weakness and delicacy. ‘I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue’, she declared, condemning a moral system that produces ‘alluring mistresses [rather] than affectionate wives and rational mothers’.²⁶ Underlying Wollstonecraft’s mockery of Rousseau and Burke’s worship of weakness as the essence of beauty and love is the belief that such worship is not only fallacious but socially harmful: passionate attachments ought not come at the expense of more rational bonds, such as those based on equality and independence, respect and esteem.

In this account the aim of marriage is not passion or romance but friendship. Passionate or romantic love is unsustainable. It inevitably fades, being replaced either by rational friendship or by indifference. ‘Love’, she explains, ‘from its very nature, must be transitory. To seek for a secret that would render it constant, would be as wild a search as for the philosopher’s stone’.²⁷ This inevitable fading of friendship is not to be mourned, however, as it is a natural and healthy progression. Wollstonecraft describes passionate love as a type of fever, a state of mind in which ‘chance and sensation take place of choice and reason’. When this fever subsides ‘a healthy temperature is thought insipid, only by those who have not sufficient intellect to substitute the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect, instead of blind admiration, and the sensual emotions of fondness’. Passionate love cannot be sustained. And in the place of passion, Wollstonecraft recommends friendship as ‘the most holy band of society’.²⁸ Friendship provides a stable foundation for the family because it derives from reason: it is the love of virtue, grounded on respect and genuine esteem. Only friendship is an acceptable foundation for the family because only friendship brings the marriage relation into harmony with society. Only friendship, which is grounded on reason and not on sentiment, produces a harmonious

²⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 76, 74.

²⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 99.

²⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 99-100.

and rational affection that complements rather than competes with other social obligations.

Wollstonecraft applies this same dialectic to redefine parental and filial love, denouncing the 'blind love' that parents feel for their children and the 'blind obedience' that children offer their parents. Both lack reason. Wollstonecraft describes parental love as the 'blindest modification of perverse self-love' in which parents 'sacrifice every relative duty' to their sentimental love of their own offspring. '[F]or the sake of their *own* children they violate the most sacred duties, forgetting the common relationship that binds the whole family on earth together' and thus parents who love their children due to passion violate their social duties, as this passion 'eradicates every spark of humanity'.²⁹ In the place of this 'unprincipled prejudice', Wollstonecraft argues that parents, and particularly mothers, must be taught to have a 'rational affection' for their children. It is the absence of this reason that makes many women 'unfit for the task' of motherhood: their irrational affection leads them to either overindulge or neglect their offspring. 'It is want of reason in their affections which makes women so often run into extremes', Wollstonecraft explains, 'and either be the most fond or the most careless and unnatural mothers'.³⁰

After she has denounced the blind love of instinct and passion, Wollstonecraft describes the rational love that parents ought to feel for their children. It is a love grounded on an awareness of the family's larger social purpose, and thus on the parental duty to cultivate the social and intellectual capacities of their child: 'The parent who sedulously endeavours to form the heart and enlarge the understanding of his child, has given that dignity to the discharge of a duty, common to the whole animal world, that only reason can give. This is the parental affection of humanity, and leaves instinctive natural affection far behind'.³¹ The 'parental affection of humanity' cultivates and expands its offspring. It is not a relation of dominance or subserviency, but of growth and, ultimately, equality. Thus children should obey their parents not from 'blind obedience' or some perceived sentimental obligation but from

²⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 243.

³⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 243.

³¹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 246.

a rational understanding of their own adolescent limitations. In an imaginary dialogue between a parent and child in a rational family, Wollstonecraft outlines the child's motivations for filial respect: 'It is in your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself . . . but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only obey me, or rather respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with the light that is breaking in on your own mind'.³²

In articulating this conception of the 'rational family', Wollstonecraft is collapsing the space between the public and private sphere.³³ In her account the family exists not to pursue its own interests or preservation but to cultivate the social virtues. Consequently, she rejects accounts that describe parenthood as the instinctual love of one's own kin. Parenthood has a higher purpose. It is the first school of the social affections. It is a training ground for the social, moral and political virtues. Her point is that the family, when organised by proper principles, is a natural school for the affections. Family love and social love are, in her account, the same, or at least family love can grow into social love under the right circumstances. The parents in this 'rational family' ought to raise not just adults or contributing members of their own particular kinships; they ought to raise citizens. Thus the family itself becomes a type of social or even civic institution.

The problem Wollstonecraft faces is that when the private and public spheres merge, the public sphere dominates. Indeed it is not clear in Wollstonecraft's account whether there is any space remaining for private or personal sentiments. As Ruth Abbey notes, Wollstonecraft's notion of marriage as friendship struggles with sexual intimacy and passion, possibly because the model of friendship that she herself advocates traditionally takes place between two men.³⁴ Wollstonecraft's account of passion as a type of temporary fever seems to preclude the possibility of a long-term sexual relationship between married partners, and the same is true of Wollstonecraft's

³² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 247.

³³ For a more thorough discussion of the ways in which Wollstonecraft accomplished this, see Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of All: The Family', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere 1700-1830*, ed. E. Eger, C. Grant, C. Gallchoir and P. Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 239-56.

³⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 288; Ruth Abbey, 'Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Hypatia* 14 (1999): 87.

notion of parental and filial love: her descriptions of the ‘rational family’ are certainly rational, but there is some question about whether or not they are *familial*.

Wollstonecraft seems to have successfully introduced reason and sociability into the family; however, it is less clear whether she has succeeded in preserving those aspects of the family that most define family life. This question reappears in the intellectual puzzles of nineteenth-century reformers, who also tried to reshape the family according to some standard of reason but struggled to preserve an institution that would be recognised as familial in the traditional sense.

In contrast, William Godwin made little effort to preserve the family and family love in his account of rational morality. Godwin’s utilitarian ethic elevated the public interest as the goal of all moral conduct, which effectively subjugated the private sphere to the public interest, rejecting the conventional notion that one can have private partialities and obligations that stand independent of one’s obligations towards humanity as a whole. To achieve this public spirit, Godwin rejected the account of moral motivation given by skeptics such as Helvétius, Holbach, Mandeville, and La Rochefoucauld, who claimed that human nature is naturally egotistic and, therefore, that the social good must be pursued through appeals to self-love. Instead, Godwin cited Shaftesbury, Butler, Hutcheson and Hume to argue for the existence of genuinely disinterested human actions. Thus for Godwin disinterestedness was the foundation of all morality. It was the standard that determined the morality of all actions. In *Political Justice* Godwin claimed that ‘perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness,’ adding that moralists ought not to condone or ‘add vigour to the selfish passions’. Godwin believed that society had suffered from a moral system that cultivated the selfish passions, believing that appeals to selfishness were necessary to artificially evoke social behaviour. ‘[G]reat mischief has been done by the system of self-love’, according to Godwin, because this system motivates humanity by appeals to the ‘mercenary self-interests’ rather than to the ‘generous and magnanimous sentiment of our natures’.³⁵

³⁵ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 388.

Defining the morality of all acts according to their degree of ‘disinterestedness’—according to their benefits to the public interest and not to those with whom the agent has a particular relationship—necessitates a radical renegotiation of the family’s social and moral role. To achieve this, Godwin admired Smith’s impartial spectator; however, Godwin did not share Smith’s reverence for the family and consequently his commitment to impartiality took him to radical conclusions that are not found in Smith’s philosophy. Smith had appealed to propriety to carve out a space for family love, with its partialities and particular obligations, arguing that family love could fit within the bounds of what Duncan Kelly has described as ‘persuasive mediocrity’, or that level of passionate expression with which others can sympathise.³⁶ Godwin rejected this claim as a dilution of justice. According to Godwin, preference for one’s own family violates justice, as such preferential affections do not withstand the test of impartiality. Such affections are matters of individual judgment, not justice, because individuals ‘are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the whole family of mankind’. Thus an individual’s connection with humanity obligates them to give preference to those who ‘will be most conducive to the general good’ and not to their own kin.³⁷ Individuals ought to value others according to their virtue, defined by their contribution to all humanity, and to illustrate this point Godwin gives what has come to be known as the ‘Famous Fire Cause’, in which an agent is only able to save one person from a fire and must choose between rescuing his own mother or Archbishop Fénelon. Godwin concluded that rational morality requires the agent to abandon his own mother, whose worth was personal and particular, to rescue Fénelon, whose social value was greater. This scandalised Godwin’s contemporaries.³⁸

The familial or partial affections were at the heart of this controversy. Samuel Parr assaulted Godwin’s rational perfectionism, but it was not on the grounds of the

³⁶ Kelly, *Propriety of Liberty*, 156.

³⁷ Godwin, *Political Justice*, 169.

³⁸ Godwin, *Political Justice*, 169-70. Note: In the first edition the choice is between Fénelon and the agent’s mother, while in the second edition it is between Fénelon and the agent’s father.

limits of reason or of human sociability, as might be expected given the classic debate between the selfish and impartial schools. Rather, Parr condemned Godwin's dismissal of the family affections, gratitude, and other 'preferential' sentiments. For Godwin, these are passions unconstrained by judgment and so should not play a role in determining how individuals act: as in the fire scenario, the moral agent is bound to impartiality. Parr disagreed. Parr did not protest the rationalist assertion that one ought to cultivate a general, rational benevolence towards all mankind; but he rejected the implication that social forms of benevolence require the repression of family love and other natural affections of particularity.³⁹ In later editions of *Political Justice*, Godwin allowed the family affections to play more of a role in moral, social and political life. But however Godwin may have later moderated his theory, his early articulation framed the debate through several decades of utilitarian philosophy and its critics: the question evolved into a dialogue about what John Grote would later describe as a problem of distribution—that is, the problem of ranking the individual's moral obligations to society at large versus their obligations to those with whom they have a personal connection.

In the nineteenth century, cooperative reformers engaged with the family using the framework provided by Hume, Smith, Wollstonecraft and Godwin. They produced their own radical solutions to the family problem, but they began with the same set of intellectual puzzles—questions about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science. Thinkers from Robert Owen to John Humphrey Noyes struggled to determine whether the family derives from the social or unsocial sentiments, or whether, recognising that family love is partial and selfish, the family affections could possibly mature into a more generally type of benevolence. Some movements, like Owenism and Mormonism, concluded that such an outcome was possible, if the correct process was used, and they set about to organise their society according to principles that would harness the family's cooperative potential. For

³⁹ See Samuel Parr, *A Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800* (London: J. Mawman, 1801) and Godwin's response, William Godwin, *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the Author of an Essay on Population, and Others* (London: Robinson, 1801).

Robert Owen this meant a rational education emphasising the interconnected nature of humanity, underpinned by a communal social structure that would make this notion of social self-interest a palpable reality; for Mormons what was required was a patriarchal family structure in which individual partialities and family preferences were subjugated to the larger patriarchy of the church. Other movements, such as Oneida and Modern Times, perceived something particularly pernicious in family love that could never be reconciled with a cooperative society, no matter what principles and mechanisms of social theory were applied.

As it had been in the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth century the family question was bound up with the puzzles of social science. For Wollstonecraft the family was not only a question of sociability but also of the proper application of reason and theory in reforming human institutions: Wollstonecraft claimed that, guided by reason, society could transform the family into an instrument of public utility, rationality and social love; she was less sure, however, about whether the resulting ‘rational family’ would be in any way recognisable as the traditional family, or whether in making the family rational, the result would cease to be a family at all. This was of course a question about human nature and social science. For Hume, this question had been about whether the family derived from immutable principles of human nature or whether it was, in fact, a mere product of culture and the process of socialisation. But for cooperative thinkers in the nineteenth-century this question morphed into something else entirely: they aimed to discover what properties of the family were ‘natural’ in the Humean sense (meaning born of immutable aspects of human nature), but they did so because they believed that nature contained normative moral truths about the role the family ought to play in their new societies. On the other hand, they were reluctant to accept the notion of a static human nature—the type of naturalistic account upon which their social theory was grounded—because such a notion would limit the possibilities of human perfectibility.

Thus for cooperative thinkers in the nineteenth century the family came to embody the tensions of social science itself, and although this approach to the family is discernable in Hume and Wollstonecraft, and to a lesser degree in Smith and

Godwin, it peaked in the nineteenth century with the explosion of sociological, physiological, psychological and anthropological theory. Cooperative reformers from Josiah Warren to Brigham Young began applying Newtonian principles and methodologies to the study of human beings, fully expecting to create a ‘Science of Society’⁴⁰ that would encompass, explain and harmonise every aspect of human life. In this storm of conflicting social theory, the family became emblematic of the tension between the principles and methodologies of social science and its ultimate aim—the social, moral and physical perfection of human societies. It came to embody the tension between a naturalistic approach to morality, in which facts about the human animal make normative claims about human society, and a more expansive notion of human perfectibility, in which humanity stands outside of nature, capable of passing moral judgment on its own instincts and behaviours.

In their commitment to positive science these thinkers were heavily influenced by the French, from Saint-Simon and Fourier to Comte, which is perhaps why conventional accounts of cooperative thought have tended to contextualise Anglo-American thinkers with their French counterparts. It is the contention of this dissertation, however, that although the Anglo-American discourse frequently appealed to French philosophers and French ideas, they did so to answer questions deriving from their own intellectual genealogy—questions about the family, impartiality, sociability and the nature of social science. In this sense the Anglo-American cooperative dialogue constitutes its own distinct discourse: a discourse that was informed by the French but was, ultimately, rooted in the intellectual puzzles most clearly articulated in the British Enlightenment.

⁴⁰ This is a term used by several of the cooperative movements in this study, specifically Owenism and Modern Times.

2. OWENISM AND THE RATIONAL FAMILY

i. Owen and the ‘Science of Society’, 1813-1830

The first movement this dissertation explores is Owenite socialism, a movement conventionally associated with economic egalitarianism. Robert Owen, the movement’s founder, spent the greater part of his life and fortune advocating for self-sufficient, egalitarian communities, organised according to his principles of social science. Owen claimed that his social system would eradicate the harmful qualities of human nature, ushering in an enlightened dawn of social cooperation. His theory pledged that ‘Any character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means’. Through modification of social institutions, and thus the circumstances that form the human character, Owen believed his science would morally regenerate society with ‘mathematical precision’.¹

Owen’s interest in the family began with what he termed the ‘marriage question’. Marriage remained the primary focus for Owen throughout his life; however, in discussing marriage Owen frequently meant to refer to the family as a whole—that is, to the ‘single family of pairs . . . and the whole system consequent upon this arrangement’.² Considering Owen’s determination to purge society of institutions that generate inferior motives and behaviours, it is unsurprising that his attention eventually turned to the family, with its unique challenge to sociability and moral theory. What is surprising, however, is that although Owen recognised the family as an instrument of egotism, he did not reject the family on the grounds of unsociability—that is, as a ‘school of egotism’ that cultivates inferior motives of self-love in the form of partiality for one’s family. Instead, to bridge the gap between the

¹ Robert Owen, *A New View of Society; or, Essays on the formation of the human character preparatory to the development of a plan for gradually ameliorating the condition of mankind*, Third Edition (London: 1817), 16 and 28.

² Owen, *Six Lectures Delivered in Manchester*, 88.

family and social love, Owen aimed to purge the family of irrationality, to reform it to reflect his new social science and his scientific understanding of human nature. The result, he hoped, would be a type of ‘rational family’ grounded on enlightened self-interest. Thus Owen’s solution to the tension between family and social love is an unexpected mix of rationalist optimism and practical scepticism: he accepts family love as congruous with social love, but in doing so he does not claim that family love is unselfish, and nor does he attempt to purge the family of its selfish tendencies. Instead, he recognises that self-interest may have a role to play in social love.

The reception of Owen’s family doctrines by the larger Owenite movement tells a different story. Owen’s arguments about marriage swept through the movement, particularly in the period between 1839-1845, when Owenites suffered the greatest persecution from without and the most intense controversy from within due to their radical doctrines on the family. The Owenite movement itself consisted of various factions—economic reformers, spiritualists, atheists, feminists, naturalists—each attracted to Owen’s philosophy because they found in it some justification for their particular perspective. Despite this diversity, many Owenites shared Owen’s interest in the family, and many agreed that the family needed to be reformed according to their new scientific understanding of human nature. The problem, however, was that they could not agree on a coherent notion of human nature that they could alter the family to reflect. Even more importantly, they could not agree about which moral or intellectual sources they should turn to in order to discover the true nature of humanity. Some appealed to nature, using animals as evidence for their claims about human family life, while others denounced any moral comparison of human beings with animals as fallacious. Reason, they claimed, distinguishes humanity from animals, and thus it is only reason that can determine in what ways human social life ought to differ from that of animals.

Part of the fault for this controversy must be attributed to Owen himself, who offered little explanation of the distinction in his philosophy between nature and reason. In condemning the ‘unnatural marriages of the priesthood’ in favour of the ‘natural marriages of affection’, Owen used the terms ‘natural marriage’ and ‘rational

marriage' interchangeably. To justify his new marriage system he appealed to several disparate and perhaps even conflicting sources of moral and intellectual authority, from reason to the natural sexuality of animals; consequently, when the various sects in Owenism interpreted his family doctrines, they highlighted those justifications that best suited their particular philosophy, and as a result, some factions made very different normative claims about the family than others.

This chapter contextualises the development of Owenite thought on the family by pointing out key intellectual and historical landmarks. These landmarks divide Owenism into three distinct periods or stages: 1) Radical rationalism, 1813-1830. This stage begins with Owen's public advocacy of cooperative solutions and his publication of pamphlets advocating his new social science, specifically his economic theories and his doctrine of non-responsibility, known as necessitarianism. 2) Owen and the family question, 1830-1839. The second stage consists of Owen's radical writings and orations on the family. It contains the germ of the family debate that would mature into the controversy of the early 1840s. 3) The crisis, 1839-1845. The third stage begins with Owen's 1839 Address to Congress, in which he rekindled the family question and, consequently, reignited a flame of controversy that would burn through the movement for the following five years. It is in this period that the social missionaries delivered dozens of lectures on the marriage question, the *New Moral World* published a cascade of articles on the family in its various functions, and the Owenites suffered their most vituperative persecutions, notably from the Bishop of Exeter and the Reverend John Brindley.

These landmarks tell a new story about the impact of the family question on Owenism. This history suggests that when Owen first introduced the family question in the 1830s it represented a new direction for his thought, but it was not obvious that it would in profoundly challenge or modify that philosophy. Owen remained convinced that his family doctrines were entirely reconcilable with his social and scientific theories. However, as the family question spread through the movement, undergoing scrutiny and reinterpretation by different factions who highlighted

disparate aspects of family life in relation to their own philosophies, the idea of the family came to challenge some of the core assumptions underlying Owenism.

For example, it challenged the basic assumption of continuity between the natural and moral worlds—between science, morality and perfectibility—that was a central conviction underpinning Owen’s new social theory. The family undermined trust in that continuity because Owenites began to doubt the moral validity of certain human instincts and relations, such as parenthood and sexual love. They accepted Owen’s condemnation of the ‘old immoral world’, but such a historical account delegitimised both the church and the state, and perhaps even history itself, as sources of moral authority; in the absence of traditional authority sources Owenites disagreed about the mechanisms or standards that should determine which human instincts are good and natural and which are immoral and harmful. In the philosophical absence of religious or civil authority, factions within Owenism elevated disparate and often conflicting sources to replace that authority, from nature, to reason, to spiritualism.

Substantiation of these claims will address two oversights in the history of Owenite thought. The first is the absence of the family question from intellectual histories of the Owenite movement. This absence is inexplicable in light of the multitude of Owenite (and anti-Owenite) pamphlets, lectures, articles and debates on the family that surfaced after Owen’s marriage lectures in the winter of 1834-35. Furthermore, historical evidence suggests that this debate developed into a whirlwind of controversy after Owen’s 1839 Address to Congress, in which he called on the social missionaries to redouble their efforts on the marriage question. In that lecture Owen instructed missionaries to abstain from debates on religious subjects, as they ‘tend only to arouse angry feelings’, but he encouraged the missionaries to press the marriage question despite the vituperative contention it produces: ‘[T]he most difficult task which your missionaries have to perform, is to enable the public to have consistent or rational ideas respecting marriage, or the intercourse between the sexes’.³ Owen’s call for a renewed effort was answered. The movement’s mouthpiece, the *New Moral World*, published a steady stream of articles on marriage,

³ *New Moral World* 4 May 1839 (hereafter *NMW*).

and social missionaries frequently lectured on marriage and the family. In fact, between 1839 and 1845, in addition to Owen's own lectures and writings on the subject, the *New Moral World* reports lectures on marriage in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Derby, Cheltenham and Leeds, delivered by key Owenite figures such as James Rigby, Robert Buchanan, T.S. Mackintosh and Charles Southwell—all official social missionaries—and feminists lecturers Emma Martin and Margaret Chappellsmith, who received a salary from the Central Board for their efforts.⁴

This reinvigoration of the marriage question provoked considerable persecution from outside the movement. The Reverend John Brindley made a career from his attacks on the Owenites, whom he accused of spreading atheism and blasphemy, particularly on the sacrosanct issue of marriage; and in 1840 the Bishop of Exeter petitioned the house of Lords to declare socialism illegal on the grounds that it erodes social and moral values, particularly those of religion, marriage and private property. So warm was the marriage controversy in this period that one frustrated Owenite declared, 'we are assailed alike by open opponents and pretended friends, upon the later subject, viz, marriage, and the stability and progress of our Association threatened by these united assaults'. Notwithstanding his or her irritation with the persecution caused by the marriage question, the contributor concedes that Owen's ideas on marriage were among those that 'will be of most importance in all time to come'.⁵

Despite the evident importance of marriage in this period to both Owenites and their critics, these doctrines, and the controversy that they generated, are barely mentioned in the most celebrated histories of the movement: G.D.H. Cole's 322-page biography of Owen devotes only a single page to his views on marriage;⁶ the case is similar with Frank E. Manuel's definitive work, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, which also mentions Owen's family doctrines only in passing;⁷ and A.L. Morton's biography reduces Owen's doctrines on the marriage question to a single

⁴ See *NMW* 28 December 1839, 19 September 1840, 24 October 1840, 16 October 1841, 27 November 1841, 5 February 1842, 29 October 1842, 17 June 1843, and 26 August 1843.

⁵ *NMW* 4 May 1839.

⁶ Cole, *Robert Owen*, 297.

⁷ Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, 689-91.

paragraph.⁸ Other historians omit the marriage question entirely: R.G. Garnett's work includes an entire chapter on Owenism in the 1830s but fails to mention both Owen's 1835 marriage lectures and the controversy they generated.⁹ Barbara Taylor is one of the few historians who has given the marriage question comprehensive attention; however, her scope is limited to a history of socialist feminism and does not address the saliency of the family to the larger movement.¹⁰

Other histories acknowledge the importance of family to Owenism, but in a strange irony these historians fail to take their own claims seriously.¹¹ J.F.C. Harrison's work is, perhaps, the best example of this category: Harrison claims that Owen condemned the family as 'the guardian of all those qualities of individual and self-interest to which he was opposed', and furthermore that Owen 'regarded the family as a fundamentally divisive force, much more so than class'. That, however, is the extent of Harrison's analysis. Harrison nominally recognises the significance of the family in Owenite thought, but his cursory examination is insignificant relative to the weight Owen himself placed on the marriage question.¹² This account aims to correct this imbalance by providing a more thorough intellectual history of the marriage question and its evolution among Owenites and their critics.

This chapter also addresses a second oversight in the history of Owenite thought—namely, the tendency by the few historians who reference the marriage question to describe Owen's views as wholly critical. This approach is easily discernible in the accounts mentioned above. Frank E. Manuel describes Owen's family doctrines as a forthright attack, while Harrison's depiction suggests that Owen indicted the family for all the evils of the 'old immoral world'.¹³ Keith Taylor strengthens this narrative with the claim that Owen intended to supplant the family

⁸ Morton, *Robert Owen*, 49.

⁹ Garnett, *Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain*.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*.

¹¹ See Taylor, *Utopian Socialists*, 86-9 and Podmore, *Robert Owen*, 488-99, and 502-14. Frank Podmore's epic biography of Owen makes several references to the marriage lectures and their profound impact on the movement, but Podmore limits himself to the immediate controversy they caused. He does not follow the debate into its mature phase in the late 1830s and 40s.

¹² Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 60 and 157.

¹³ Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, 678; Harrison, *Owenites in Britain and America*, 60 and 157.

with some other social unit better suited to his cooperative social goals.¹⁴ This second shortcoming relates to the first in that both approaches neglect or oversimplify the family question in order to preserve a conventional account of Owenism. These cursory narratives explore only one side of Owenism's response to the family question; they casually dismiss Owenism's positive recommendations for family life or its normative claims about what role the family ought to play in the new social system. This approach strengthens the established account of Owenites as economic egalitarians by insisting that Owen opposed the family only as a vehicle of capitalism and individualism. Thus Owen's opposition to the family is reduced to an appendage of his economic theory.

But more importantly, this account of Owenism's anti-familialism fortifies conventional stereotypes that regard Owenism as utopian in its worship of social science and reductive in its treatment of human nature. It paints Owenism as the simplistic and untroubled child of the Enlightenment, whose conviction in the moral continuity of reason and science found no serious challenge in the family. It fails to recognise that for Owen, as well as for many of his followers, the family came to represent a complex set of questions about moral psychology and the nature of human motivation, some of which challenged the foundations of Owen's social science.

This chapter offers a new account of Owenism and the family question. Firstly, it contends that Owenites found no simple, one-sided answer to the family because they understood that the family question is, itself, always more than one question. They approached the family as a set of interlocking puzzles, each of which involved different human relationships and had its own set of social and moral implications. They evaluated the family in all of its elements and functions, and only in some of those offices did they oppose it on social, moral or scientific grounds. Indeed, it is nonsensical to characterise Owenism as anti-family because Owenites seldom conceptualised, praised or censured the family as one single entity. Rather, in

¹⁴ See Taylor, *Utopian Socialists*, 2-4, 86-9. When describing Owen specifically Taylor does nominally recognise that Owen's family doctrines were not wholly critical. However, in his descriptions of Owen, Fourier, and Saint Simon, Taylor asserts that all three intended to replace the family with some other social unit, thereby reinforcing the traditional account that these cooperative thinkers were 'anti-family'.

their discussions, Owenite thinkers generally divided the family into four distinct social and moral constituents: 1) marriage, comprising sexual and romantic unions; 2) parenthood, comprehending the care and education of offspring; 3) the family as an economic unit, denoting both inheritance and the family's function as a financial cooperative; and 4) a community founded on a common interest and 'rational love'. In his discussions of the first three aspects of family life, Owen tended to be quite critical; however, he criticised these aspects of family life because he believed that they were, in their present application, irrational. The implication of his criticisms was that these irrational family practices have a rational counterpart, and therefore could be rescued. In Owen's discussion of the fourth function of the family, it is clear that Owen came to believe not only that these aspects of the family could be saved, but that they should be.

In challenging myopic accounts of Owenism, this chapter makes a further claim about the family's significance to Owenite socialism: that although the family question did not initially threaten the movement's solidarity, the controversy surrounding it, particularly in the late 1830s and early 40s, factionalised the movement along ideological lines. Persecution from without highlighted philosophical divisions within. Those divisions had existed earlier, but the family crisis provided a vehicle for discordant views. Thus the family's inherent conflicts called attention to dormant tensions within the various Owenite sects, and these tensions matured into disparate interpretations of the movement's core doctrines.

Ultimately, the family caused divisions within Owenism on important questions such as the role of social science, the moral legitimacy of nature, and what sources of authority ought to fill the moral and intellectual vacuum left by religion, which Owen himself had rejected, and history, which derived from the 'old immoral world' and presumably offered few insights for the new. The family question thus provides a window into Owenism's struggle with the classical doctrine of moral continuity. Factions within Owenism wrestled with the family question but could not make its various aspects harmonise with their accounts of reason, nature and human perfectibility. It was a riddle that, when solved, seemed only to produce more riddles,

and consequently their disagreements are perhaps more revealing than their solutions. Their disparate accounts of moral motivation and moral psychology, their contrary narratives of religion and scientific authority, their antithetical descriptions of nature and reason, all reveal a movement struggling to reconcile a complex human institution—the family—with their belief in absolute harmony between reason, morality, science and perfectibility.

The first stage (1813-1830) begins with Owen's public advocacy of his new social theories, including his economic arrangements and his social doctrine of non-responsibility; this period continues through the 1820s, which witnessed Owen's first experimental community in America, New Harmony. This is the classical phase of Robert Owen's thought. It gives rise to the intellectual figure described by J.B. Burrow and Frank E. Manuel, with his unyielding faith in reason and scientific perfectibility, which ascribed no bad characteristics to humanity that could not be explained and corrected 'by the application of proper means'.¹⁵ This is the social reformer who looked to science and the physical world to discover universal moral truths about human nature and the means of its physical, social, intellectual and moral redemption. It represents the thinker who believed social science could directly control and positively manipulate the sources, and perhaps even the causes, of human motivation: 'Train any population to be rational', Owen promised in 1813, 'and they will be rational'.¹⁶

This period produced many of Owen's most celebrated texts, including *A New View of Society* (1813), *Effect of the Manufacturing System* (1815), *A Plan for the Relief of the Labouring Poor* (1817) and the famous *Address to the Inhabitants of*

¹⁵ This is also the intellectual figure described more recently by David Leopold in his article on Owen's views on education. Leopold's article focuses on the New Lanark period, arguing that 'Whilst the social context of education alters radically in his later writings—schooling is now organised within a global network of cooperative communities rather than the towns and villages of a competition-ridden nation state—Owen's narrowly educational views are relatively unchanged'. Because he limits his study to this earlier period (before Owen engaged with the family question) Leopold's article includes only a single paragraph on Owen's views of marriage and omits the evolution of Owen's ideas about parenthood that occurred later in his life. This preserves a pristine and simple account of Owen as a utopian thinker and social; it does so, however, by neglecting the rich dialogue in Owen's thought about the family's role in social and moral education. See David Leopold, 'Education and Utopia: Robert Owen and Charles Fourier', in Brooke and Frazer, *Ideas of Education*, 179.

¹⁶ Owen, *New View of Society*, 37.

New Lanark (1817), as well as his lectures and pamphlets through the 1820s. In these texts Owen introduces and defends his doctrine of non-responsibility, which claimed that traditional morality rested upon a false understanding of human nature: 'From the earliest stages it has been the practice of the world to act on the supposition that each individual man forms his own character, and that therefore he is accountable for all his sentiments and habits, and consequently merits reward for some and punishment for others'. Owen condemns this notion of individual responsibility as the 'Evil Genius of the world . . . which carries misery in all its consequences'. It is not a trivial mistake, according to Owen; rather, it is a 'fundamental error of the highest possible magnitude'.¹⁷ Consequently, Owen adopts its opposite, the doctrine of non-responsibility, or the notion that individuals do not form their own character but rather it is formed for them by society, as the foundation of his social theory.

This doctrine underlies Owen's reforms throughout the 1810s and 20s. In this period Owen focused on economic measures as the most expedient, but the scope of his reforms soon expanded to social and moral habits: in *Effect of the Manufacturing System* (1815) he recommends reform in the working hours and conditions of children in order to improve their education; in the *Plan for the Relief of the Labouring Poor* (1817) Owen outlines a more comprehensive plan for economic and moral reform, which requires the establishment of self-supporting communities for the lower classes; in *A Further Development for the Plan for the Relief of the Poor* (1817) Owen explains that the organisation of these communities, which puts only those of the same class, religious and political views together, will thereby remove the 'cause' of social disunity. These reforms were primarily economic in nature but Owen made it clear that his theories were intended to regenerate every aspect of human life—physical, intellectual and moral.

Owen intended his new scientific principle of non-responsibility to supersede more traditional sources of moral knowledge and authority. In two addresses delivered in 1825 in Washington D.C. Owen defended his new doctrines as both a 'new science' and a 'new religion', which he intended to replace the corrupt,

¹⁷ Owen, *New View of Society*, 44-5.

supernatural religions that keep humanity in ignorance. While traditional religion derived from ‘imaginary notions’, his religion ‘derived from the facts which demonstrate what human nature really is’. It is, therefore, the only ‘genuine’ or ‘true religion’, or ‘the *universal religion* of human nature . . . justly called *rational religion*’. It is the religion of ‘demonstrable truth . . . derived from the evidence of our senses’.¹⁸

This speech captures the version of Owen that Frank E. Manuel called the ‘normative, rationalist Enlightenment school’.¹⁹ Barbara Goodwin, in her work *Social Science and Utopia*, defines this school as those thinkers who ‘believed that society and men were natural objects to be studied by methods analogous to those of the natural sciences, believed in human perfectibility, and longed to unearth a principle of universal harmony operating in society with the efficiency and totality of Newtonian attraction’.²⁰ Indeed, in 1825 Owen’s confidence in universal harmony between the physical and moral sciences was such that he claimed his new science should serve as both a science and a religion. He declared that his system was ‘in unison with all nature’, and that his principles were ‘nature’s laws and therefore unassailable’.²¹ In 1829, when engaged in a debate on Christianity in the United States, Owen again affirmed his confidence in the ultimate continuity of the moral and physical universe: ‘Truth is always consistent with itself, consequently, each separate truth is in strict accordance with every other truth in the universe’.²²

In this period, Owen’s references to the family were few and largely immaterial. Most of his critiques were limited to the economic inefficiencies of the ‘individual system’ and concomitant declarations that his community system would

¹⁸ Robert Owen, *Two Discourses on A New System of Society* (London: 1825), 19-20.

¹⁹ Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, 680.

²⁰ Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia: Nineteenth-Century Models of Social Harmony* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), 11.

²¹ Owen, *Two Discourses*, 3; Robert Owen, *An Address to the Working Classes*. Quoted in Gregory Claeys, *The Selected Works of Robert Owen* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), 241.

²² Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity: Containing and Examination of the Social System, and of all the Systems of Scepticism of Ancient and Modern Times, held in the city of Cincinnati, for eight days successively, between Robert Owen, of New Lanark, Scotland, and Alexander Campbell, of Bethany, Virginia* (London: Groombridge, 1839), 20. Note: Owen’s interlocutor is not the same Alexander Campbell who served as a social missionary.

considerably reduce the necessary hours of household labour. He questions whether untaught parents have the necessary training to educate their children, but that is the extent of his concern. In this stage of his thought the family is just one of a number of circumstances that could be improved to enhance mankind. Beginning around 1830, however, the family assumes a larger role in Owen's social theory, and in fact, in his writings and orations in this second stage, Owen identifies the family as one of the three most important institutions of the 'old immoral world'. In this new narrative the family, along with religion and private property, are mutually reinforcing institutions designed by the 'priesthood' to hold mankind in ignorance. It is in this second phase that Owen begins to consider the family more carefully, distinguishing between its various parts and functions and forming normative claims about its organisation.

ii. Owen and the family question, 1830-1839

The second stage of Owenite thought on the family question begins around the year 1830, with Owen's publication of *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, and it continues through the 1830s, which witnessed Owen's most thorough and passionate engagement with the family question, including his famous 1835 marriage lectures. This period concludes with Owen's 1839 Address to Congress, in which Owen calls on his followers to spread his doctrines on 'rational marriage', thereby igniting a violent controversy among both Owenites and their critics. It is unclear precisely what prompted Owen to intensify his discussion of the family at this moment. Divorce had been a controversial topic in England for several decades, but there is no obvious historical or biographical event that explains this shift in Owen's philosophy. A decade earlier the public had endured a scandal when King George IV attempted to divorce Queen Caroline. Parliament did not allow it, but the event did serve to remind the public of the inequities of the current marriage laws (the King sued for divorce on the grounds of infidelity, although it was well known that he himself was unfaithful).

Whether these controversies inspired Owen to begin his campaign against ‘indissoluble marriage’ is difficult to determine. What is clear, however, is that Owen’s *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society* represented a distinct turning point in Owen’s approach to the family. In this text Owen offers a more comprehensive history of the ‘old immoral world’, a history in which the priesthood intentionally devised three institutions—religion, private property and marriage—to keep humanity in ignorance, thereby securing its own hegemony. In Owen’s account these institutions soon matured into mutually supporting instruments that kept mankind in a state of irrational barbarism: human error accepted private property, and the priests developed religion to uphold it. The entire system required ‘artificial marriages’ to maintain the power of the priests, which in turn produced the family, an instrument to aid in the accumulation of wealth.²³ ‘It was in this manner’, Owen explains, ‘that the natural intercourse between the sexes was made a crime, and that an *unnatural* intercourse was devised for them by the priesthood’.²⁴

Owen may have used the term ‘the marriage question’ in this period, but in discussing the family in this way—as an institution of ignorance and private property—it is clear that he was referring to the family as a whole and not just to marriage. This was particularly true in the infamous ‘marriage lectures’, delivered in the winter of 1834-35, which, despite their title, discussed the family in several different functions that went beyond the narrow application of marriage. The lectures were first published in the *New Moral World* and later in book form under the title *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World* by one of Owen’s followers in Leeds. In these lectures Owen repetitively claimed that the marriage question—and thus the family—was central to his social system. In one lecture Owen again warned his followers against introducing moral principles into the ‘pandemonium of single-family feuds and mal-arrangements’ that constitute

²³ Robert Owen, *Letters to the Human Race on the Coming Universal Revolution* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1850), 135; Owen, *Six Lectures Delivered in Manchester*, 109-10.

²⁴ Robert Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society* (London: J. Brooks, 1830), 77.

mainstream society. To do so would be to ‘increase, ten-fold, the evils which now reign triumphant throughout almost all the families of mankind’.²⁵

The marriage lectures represent Owen’s most comprehensive and passionate engagement with the family question;²⁶ however, he continued to push the subject well into the late 1830s: in *The Book of the New Moral World* (1836) Owen denounces the family as a violation of the ‘Science of Society’; in 1837 in a series of lectures delivered in Manchester he condemned the ‘single family of pairs’ as a state in which ‘man must be trained to be an enemy to man’.²⁷ These denunciations continued until 1839, after which time Owen himself wrote very little and delivered only a few lectures on the marriage question (although he did perform several rational marriages²⁸), preferring, it seems, to allow his followers to disperse his thoughts on the marriage question, a task which they dutifully discharged in lectures, pamphlets, debates, articles and in the continued performance of rational marriages.

Owen’s identification of marriage and private property as two of the three ‘great evils’, and his suggestion of a high level of collaboration and interdependence between these chief institutions, has led historians to overstate the connection between private property and the family, even to the point of subsuming Owen’s

²⁵ Robert Owen, *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World*, Fourth Edition (Leeds: 1840), 10.

²⁶ Some of Owen’s followers, notably George Jacob Holyoake, disputed the accuracy of the marriage lectures because Owen allowed their publication ‘in a note-taker’s unskillful terms, and did not correct them’. Holyoake disagreed with Owen on the subject of marriage and found it difficult to understand why Owen did not prevent their publication or at least recant the beliefs they expressed, particularly when they generated such controversy and hostility towards the movement. ‘On such a subject’, Holyoake wrote, ‘Mr. Owen should have prevented appearing, or repudiated any statement not his own’. But if Owen objected to the representation of his views as published in Leeds by J. Hobson in 1835—with subsequent editions in 1838, 1839 and 1840, and also reprinted in his own periodical, the *New Moral World*—no evidence remains of it, and it would be strange indeed if Owen neglected to correct a misapprehension that caused so much ill will towards the movement. George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator’s Life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 120-21; George Jacob Holyoake, *History of Co-operation in England: Its Literature and Its Advocates, 1812-1844*, Vol. 1 (London: 1875), 211-12.

²⁷ Owen, *Six Lectures at Manchester*, 88 and 108-9.

²⁸ The formal content of these ceremonies is not known, as Owen did not publish any guidelines on how ‘rational marriages’ ought to be performed. From Owen’s remarks on marriage in *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society* it does seem that the most salient distinction between these ceremonies and their more conventional counterparts was their emphasis on the formation of character by circumstance and thus on the possibility that the union would be dissolved if the couple were poorly suited for each other. See Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, 331-2.

family doctrines under his economic ideas. This view is represented in J.F.C. Harrison's authoritative history, in which Harrison conflates Owen's hostility for capitalism and property with his desire to reform family relations. According to Harrison, Owen condemned the family as the 'main bastion of private property and the guardian of all those qualities of self-interest and individualism to which he was opposed'.²⁹ This account is reinforced, though indirectly, in Keith Taylor's work, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists* (1982). Taylor acknowledges the gravity of the marriage question to Owen, and alludes to at least one non-economic objection that Owen made to traditional marriage; however, Taylor's discussion of the family emphasises private property, specifically Owen's disapproval of inheritance and the family as a 'property-holding unit'.³⁰

This chapter contends that although Owen condemned the family as a mechanism for private property, it is only one of the elements of family life that Owen identified in his struggle with the family question. Furthermore, in condemning the family as an economic interest Owen was concerned less with familial partiality and obligation than with the irrationality of the family interest under a system of private property. Property was Owen's target, not the family. This was, in fact, true of Owen's criticisms of the family in its other two functions: he condemned marriage and parenthood for inculcating an irrational view of nature. There was nothing inherent to family love that Owen found socially or morally objectionable; rather, his objections derived from the family's current irrational structure. He believed that it could be saved. And, as will be shown in the final section of this chapter, after 1850 he came to believe that not only *could* the family be saved, but that it *should* be.

The family as an economic unit

In discussing the family as an economic unit, Owen condemned the family's inherently collaborative nature which, when applied to economics, he believed was tantamount to a conspiracy against the public. In *Lectures on an Entire New State of*

²⁹ Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 60 and 157.

³⁰ Taylor, *Utopian Socialists*, 86-9.

Society (1830), Owen denounces this ‘family interest’ for its tendency to ‘make all the individuals of the family suppose that they have a real interest separate from and opposed to all other families, and to engender individual feelings of ignorant selfishness, which under this system of error, will continue to increase in proportion to the increase of wealth and numbers’.³¹ In the marriage lectures this dilemma—that is, that the intrinsically cooperative nature of the family would, under certain circumstances, produce a system of intense competition—prompted Owen to designate the family as one of the ‘universally disuniting arrangements of society’.³²

What is interesting about this moral and psychological account of the family is that the presence of genuine benevolence within the family makes the family more vexing to Owen, not less. The more sincere a parent’s affection for their own children, the more their family interest undermines a rational understanding of society, due to its false sanction of greed. In the third lecture Owen explains that the family contributes to the irrationality of private property by providing social approbation for selfish, grasping behaviours that society might otherwise condemn. Greed is thus confounded with affection and duty, and a rational understanding of all three is obfuscated. Married couples feel that it is their duty to devote their labour to the exclusive benefit of their own children, and ‘thus they are at once placed in a direct or indirect contest with all other families having the same laudable object, as it is now termed, in view’.³³

The problem with the family as an economic unit, therefore, is not partiality per se but private property and the false moral psychology that this combined system of partiality and greed inculcates. This fusion of property and family obligation produces a moral system that valorises selfishness rather than benevolence. Thus in the fourth marriage lecture Owen denounces the moral education imparted to children in what he termed ‘dens of selfishness’: ‘This family party is trained to consider it quite right, and a superior mode of acting, for each member of it to seek, by all fair means, as almost any means, except *direct* robbery, are termed, to increase the wealth,

³¹ Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, 329.

³² Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 4.

³³ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 26.

honour, and privileges of the family, and every individual member of it'.³⁴ This family selfishness, sanctioned—even celebrated—by moralists, cultivates 'all the inferior qualities, feelings, and passions, which can be implanted in human nature', and its members are therefore rendered unfeeling towards those outside their immediate family circle. They are 'taught to consider their own individual family their own world'.³⁵

According to Owen this 'false interest' undermines a rational understanding of humanity. Rational humanity understands that society has no divided interests, and that the true interests of individuals require them to pursue the happiness of all. This is what Owen understood to be a type of rational self-interest. But mankind in its irrational state misunderstands its true interests and permits the family to form diverse groups of competing interests that constantly undermine or injure one another, creating considerable personal misery and thwarting the intellectual, social and moral progress of humanity as a whole. The problem with the economic interest of the family is not, therefore, that it inculcates selfishness but rather that it inculcates the wrong kind of selfishness. The selfishness that it inculcates is irrational. Because this is a 'false interest' grounded on a false understanding of human nature, Owen believes that it will, ultimately, be consumed by the lust for property. To prove this Owen argues that family affections do not typically survive the internal restructuring of property that occurs on the death of a parent. Even between siblings, Owen warns that enmity will surface 'when the will of the head of a family has been read after his funeral'.³⁶ The family disguises the evils of greed and rapacity under its sacrosanct banner, but it is not exempt from the spirit of competition that it creates. Owen regrets that even within the family, whose economic unity comes at the expense of all other social harmony, love between siblings is not disinterested.³⁷

For Owen, the competition between siblings to acquire their parents' wealth demonstrates that a false or irrational interest is an insufficient bulwark against

³⁴ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 36.

³⁵ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 10.

³⁶ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 40-41.

³⁷ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 36.

selfishness and greed. Family love is weaker than lust for property, he believes, and in asserting this view Owen has taken a completely opposite view of the family and property than Hume: whereas Hume believed that benevolence within a family could be so strong as to negate the need for justice and property, Owen asserts the reverse, that within the family an individual's lust for property develops unhindered, justified by the morally acceptable 'family interest', until ultimately it consumes even the individual's benevolence towards their own family. According to Owen, economic collusion within the family is not social, and in fact, it represents an anti-social act, even when considered from the viewpoint of a family member. The reason it is unsocial, however, is because it is false. Ultimately, the children of a family do not have a shared interest, as they discover at the death of their parents, and pretending that they do inculcates a false and unscientific understanding of human nature.

The solution is, of course, socialism because without property the family cannot become an instrument for the accumulation of wealth. In a society where all are equally dependent on the community for material wellbeing, there is, in the account given above, no reason to fear the family as a combined interest. Thus there is some suggestion that under socialism there may be a social and moral role for partiality and the particular obligations of the family, but only once society has solved the most pressing evil of the current family arrangements—the marriage problem.

Marriage

Owen indicts marriage for virtually all of society's ills, from greed to prostitution, from gender inequality to class distinctions. But despite the scope of his accusations, Owen's critiques of marriage and its harmful social effects can be reduced to one principal charge: that marriage is founded on a falsehood about human nature, that individuals form their own characters and can choose whom they love. This error, when combined with private property, produces a state of misery and corruption that perverts the natural social feelings of humanity. Private property is, therefore, an important element of the degraded and corrupt state of marriage, but at the heart of Owen's critique is not property but a fear that permanent sexual unions

perpetuate a lie about human nature, thereby holding humanity in intellectual slavery. Private property exacerbates this anti-social and irrational tendency of marriage, but it would persist even after the abolition of property.

Owen's principal objection to marriage derives from the permanence of marriage, or what Owen termed the 'indissolubility' of the marriage state, which he found irreconcilable with his doctrine of non-responsibility.³⁸ Owen believed that all human characters are a compound of their original constitution and the effects of their circumstances, neither of which they can control and for which they cannot be culpable. This is the foundation of Owen's doctrine. But for Owen this doctrine could never be reconciled with an institution that requires an oath of perdurable love. As Owen stated in the marriage lectures: '[M]en and women have not been formed with power to create their own feelings, or to love or hate at their own pleasure, but are on the contrary, compelled to receive such feelings as the influence of external objects produce in their organization'.³⁹ If neither party holds command over their own feelings, then neither party ought to be compelled to promise a devotion that is not within their power to give. Owen continues, '[I]t is blasphemy, if anything is blasphemy . . . for man or woman to make any promise or engagements relative to their future feelings of affection or hatred, or of like or disliking, for each other'.⁴⁰ Such changes in circumstance, even simply the changes caused by marriage itself, affect the sentiments and affections of the married couple, and neither partner can prevent such changes through the limited power of the will.

According to Owen, traditional society is composed of married couples—some that were not well suited from the beginning and others so altered by circumstance that they no longer provide suitable partners for each other. But the priesthood forbids divorce and couples endure together. The result is misery, as 'both have placed themselves in a state of bondage to each other', and their unhappiness

³⁸ The first divorce law did not pass in England until 1857. Before that time, divorces were a parliamentary matter.

³⁹ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 16.

⁴⁰ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 16-17.

grows until it evolves into something more sinister.⁴¹ At the least Owen asserts that such relations are hypocritical and reinforce the great falsehood about human nature that individuals form their own characters, while in more severe cases married relations devolve into a power struggle: 'Living, as they do continually, together from morning to night, one or other must become the leader or master-mind'. The 'struggle for this superiority' reduces both to a state of misery, followed by 'hatred, revenge, and quarrels'.⁴² For women the mutilation of their natural sociability is often more severe because marriage assumes that women have no will of their own. Thus if their husband insists on absolute obedience, 'he forces her to learn hypocrisy and deceit'. The result of this unnatural state is that she is 'necessarily forced to become a weak, cunning, deceptive, inferior being'.⁴³

The dilemma here is similar to that of the family's economic interest—that is, that genuinely social affections, like love or kindness, can be changed into jealousy and hatred in unfavourable circumstances. Even couples who begin their marriage from natural affection may, through no fault of their own, find themselves in an unhappy marriage, and in such a state—forced into miserable domestic arrangements by their fidelity to a false conception of human nature—the natural social sentiments of humanity deteriorate. This 'unnatural crime', Owen declares, 'destroys the finest feelings and best powers of the species, by changing sincerity, kindness, affection, sympathy and pure love, into deception, envy, jealousy, hatred and revenge'.⁴⁴ The social disease that is, at first, limited to the afflicted couple eventually infects other segments of society. Whenever possible unhappy husbands seek reprieve outside the home; prostitution is the natural result, and thus Owen indicts marriage for the creation of a sexual underclass designed to correct its errors. Marriage, Owen insists, is the 'sole cause' of prostitution, and well-organised unions could not, in his view, produce such social disorganisation.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 19.

⁴² *NMW* 9 May 1835.

⁴³ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 24-5.

⁴⁴ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 7.

⁴⁵ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 7. See also *NMW* 27 October 1838.

Owen indicts private property for compounding the unsocial tendencies of the marriage relation, but he does not blame private property for creating them, and neither does he believe that the abolition of private property alone will transform marriage into a sociable institution. Owen continually laments that financial considerations are often a motive, even the primary motive, behind marriage unions. In place of ‘natural connections’ derived from sympathy and harmonious constitutions and circumstances, ‘wealth, family, titles, or privileges of some kind, have been the artificial uniting motive’.⁴⁶ But property is only an unfortunate additive; the root of the problem is the permanence of the marriage state, which undermines a scientific understanding of human nature.

Thus Owen did not oppose marriage categorically; rather, he opposed it in its ‘artificial’ and ‘unnatural’ state. Indissolubility and property have produced a system in which chastity, though elevated as a virtue, is ‘entirely misunderstood’. According to Owen chastity gains nothing from two individuals whose union originates in greed and endures without affection; rather, nature’s chastity consists of ‘genuine mutual affection between sexual partners’.⁴⁷ Owen’s modified notion of chastity leads him to the morbid conclusion that all married couples, ‘with a very few exceptions, are living in a state of the most degrading prostitution’.⁴⁸ Civil and religious sanctions provide no real legitimacy to these corrupt unions. Partners who marry for property and greed prostitute themselves, despite whatever meaningless social sanctions they receive and however faithful they remain to their loveless union. Marriages without affection produce prostitution, ‘both legal and illegal’, and neither civil nor religious sanctions can provide moral legitimacy.⁴⁹

In refining his distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ marriages, Owen gestures towards an even more radical interpretation of moral authority: that not only is affection a necessary condition of marriage—a deficiency that neither church nor state authority can rectify—but Owen suggests affection itself may be sufficient, even

⁴⁶ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 9.

⁴⁷ Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, 77-80.

⁴⁸ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 49.

⁴⁹ Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, 77-80.

in the absence of civil or religious sanctions. This distinction may seem trivial; however, this ambiguity caused a serious schism among the Owenites, and it also provoked severe persecution from outside the movement. Many Owenites and Owenite sympathisers supported the notion that love, not money, ought to propel lovers to the marriage altar. But it was difficult for more mainstream Owenites to do away with the altar altogether. For Owen, however, such a doctrine was the obvious conclusion to the clear distinction between the unnatural and artificial unions of the priests and natural marriages of affection. The priests offer only a ‘spurious chastity’, which they only value in females. The irony, Owen regrets, is that society believes that female chastity can only be secured within marriage, while nature proclaims that ‘it never can be secured with the legal bondage of marriage’.⁵⁰ Thus Owen’s distinction between natural and artificial marriages directly challenges civil and religious authority. Natural marriage is, in his account, a marriage of ‘refinement, sentiment, and affection, between the parties’. And in the bestowal of this—the only true legitimate sanction of unions—the church and the state are equally impotent: ‘[I]t cannot be purchased, the priesthood cannot give it; but they may, and often do, destroy it’.⁵¹

Thus far Owen has rejected both legal and religious sanctions of marriage because they violate his social theory. Yet Owen made it clear that he believed marriage could be purged of these irrationalities and, consequently, that he intended for some type of marriage relation to replace traditional marriage. In his 1839 Address to Congress Owen declared, ‘My present impressions are, that for ever there must be rationally devised marriage and divorce, improved as society advances’.⁵² Clearly the key to understanding a large part of Owen’s thought on the family consists in understanding what he means by ‘rationally devised marriage’; however, besides divorce Owen provides few details about what a ‘rational marriage’ requires.

One answer might be found in Owen’s many references to the ‘marriages of nature’, but this raises as many questions as it answers. Firstly, it is not at all clear

⁵⁰ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 49.

⁵¹ *NMW* 4 May 1839.

⁵² *NMW* 4 May 1839.

whether Owen believed ‘natural marriages’ would be more or less permanent than the marriages of the ‘old immoral world’. This opaque doctrine fuelled considerable disagreement among his followers, as a close reading of Owen’s writings supports multiple conclusions. For example, in the spring following the marriage lectures of 1835, Owen opined in the *New Moral World* that under the new moral system there would be ‘no forced association, but perfect individual independence. No association of the sexes, except from choice’.⁵³ While some took this as a sanction of something close to free love, Owen’s other works provide sufficient scope for a more conservative interpretation. In 1842 the *New Moral World* published a few remarks that Owen delivered while performing a rational marriage in London, in which Owen suggested that the couple possessed the ‘strongest inducement to promote each other’s happiness . . . being fully conscious that it is only by so doing they can reasonably expect to be beloved’. This knowledge made the pair ‘much more likely’ to maintain their affection permanently than those who are ‘ignorant of the laws of human nature’.⁵⁴

In the absence of a full description of ‘natural marriages’, Owen’s methodology for deriving such marriages—his ‘Science of Society’ applied to the ‘natural intercourse of the sexes’—becomes particularly important. However, on this question Owen provided no coherent answer, and it is particularly unclear whether Owen believed that ‘natural marriages’ should derive from reason or from ‘nature’. In the seventh marriage lecture Owen describes natural marriages as derived from reason, and he advises his followers to use ‘cause and effect’ logic in order to divine proper marriage relations. But in the eighth lecture, Owen seems to revoke this counsel, claiming that mankind is, in its current state, irrational and consequently nature ought to direct the intercourse of the sexes: ‘Nature, when left to herself, as is seen throughout the whole of the animal creation, directs every faculty and power of each creature wisely for the apparent objects attained by its peculiar nature’.⁵⁵

⁵³ *NMW* 9 May 1835.

⁵⁴ *NMW* 5 February 1842.

⁵⁵ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 65.

Indeed, Owen's most forceful endorsement of nature's moral authority explicitly includes mankind as part of the animal kingdom and therefore describes humanity as a creature best directed by instinct: '[W]ho can doubt that Nature will regulate and direct [the sexual] propensity, which she has formed in man, as wisely for *his* happiness, immediate and remote, as she has ever regulated and directed the same kind of propensity also of her own creation, for that of *all other* races of animals?'⁵⁶ Nature, then, ought to direct human relations until mankind, through the development of reason, gains a rational understanding of its own nature. This rational understanding is acquired, however, through 'experience' and the logic of 'cause and effect', in essence the study of nature and natural law. This reveals a conflict between Owen's homage to both naturalism and perfectionism: Owen seems to want to praise human beings as both a part of nature and the animal kingdom, but also as morally superior to both. Human beings should study and reverence their instincts, but they should also use their rational capacity, which distinguishes them from animals, to evaluate and reject those instincts that fail to measure up to some undefined moral criteria. This is the key to their perfection.

This tension becomes particularly pronounced in Owen's final critique of traditional marriage—that it produces physically, morally and intellectually inferior offspring. Owen's social science defined the human animal as a 'compound being, whose character is formed of his constitution or organization at birth, and also the effects of his circumstances'.⁵⁷ Heretofore, Owen's positive doctrines were directed at improving circumstances after birth; however, it is not surprising that in the quest for human perfection Owen also considered the other determinant of an individual's physical and moral potential, that is, their pre-birth constitution.

As early as 1830 Owen declared that children from 'unnatural unions' are inferior physically, intellectually and morally. In his 1839 lecture before Congress Owen described the 'malformed children' that result from artificial unions. It is

⁵⁶ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 70.

⁵⁷ Robert Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World, containing the rational system of society, founded on demonstrable facts, developing the constitution and laws of human nature and of society* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1836), 1.

unreasonable, he explains to ‘expect a healthy, vigorous, and superior offspring’ from the marriages of the priests. But Owen’s theories to improve the human race through the science of reproduction do not develop fully until his later publications, which, although historically outside the timeframe of this section, for the sake of continuity will be mentioned here. In *Letters to the Human Race* (1850), Owen promises that science will eventually discover the means to ‘produce a full formed, healthy, and superior organisation for infants at birth’. To specify how science will achieve this end, Owen clarifies that ‘The superior gardener, horticulturist, agriculturist, and breeder of domestic animals, have acquired this knowledge to some extent’. As society progresses and becomes more rational, it will adopt ‘efficient measures to improve the germ or seed of humanity, and the soil or bed in which it germinates’.⁵⁸

Owen’s ambiguous descriptions of ‘natural marriage’ raise broad conceptual questions about the moral legitimacy of instinct and the limits of human perfectibility. Indeed, it is difficult to see how—or indeed, if—Owen will reconcile his paradoxical views on the family with his more comprehensive moral project, the Science of Society. This tension between nature and reason, or instinct and perfectibility, plays out again in Owen’s discussion of parenthood, which questions both the moral validity and the social utility of the parental instinct. Indeed, the continuity of Owen’s philosophy suffers—as does the assumption of continuity between nature and morality that underlies it—when Owen tries to justify his own conclusions. He cannot provide an adequate answer as to why some instincts are morally valuable and some are not.

Parenthood

Unlike Owen’s views on marriage and the economic role of the family, which are not a major presence in his philosophy until the 1830s, his critique of parenthood spans his works. It is present in his earliest publications, such as *A New View of Society* (1813) as well as those towards the end of his life, such as *The Revolution of Mind and Practice of the Human Race* (1850) and *Letters to the Human Race* (1850).

⁵⁸ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 65-6.

As with his critique of marriage, Owen's primary concern with parenthood relates to the moral and intellectual education of humanity. But unlike marriage, which spreads irrational ideas implicitly through its organisation and influence, Owen is concerned about the inherent irrationality of parenthood as an instrument of education.

Owen regards parents as the 'least competent' to form strong characters for their children due to the limited size of the family, which fails to provide the diverse experience necessary for a strong moral and intellectual education.⁵⁹ But even if parents possessed the requisite pedagogical machinery on the proper scale, their own prejudices also disqualify them. In the *Book of the New Moral World* (1836), which G.D.H. Cole termed the 'Bible of the Owenites', Owen declares that the 'infants and children of every generation have been the mental slaves of the preceding generations' because they were not 'permitted to have their reasoning faculties cultivated free from parental and national prejudice'.⁶⁰

This part of Owen's critique is practical rather than philosophic: parents should not provide the moral and intellectual education of their offspring because they are simply ill equipped to do so, either due to their limited resources or their own natural biases, which presumably education aims to correct rather than perpetuate. But Owen cites a third characteristic of parenthood that he believes morally disqualifies parents as educators. In the marriage lectures Owen explains that part of parents' incompetence as moral instructors is 'owing to the excess of their ignorant, selfish, animal attachment for [their children]'.⁶¹ In 1842 Owen warned his followers that this partiality is particularly acute in mothers: 'The mere animal affection of mothers for their own children, is greatly too strong for the defective knowledge and weak judgements with which this old system has afflicted all the human race'.⁶² Again, the problem here is that the stronger the affection, the more injurious its influence. In the same 1842 address Owen warns that 'very frequently the stronger the affection, the greater and more injurious are the errors that [mothers] commit upon their poor

⁵⁹ Owen, *Lectures on an Entire New State of Society*, 83.

⁶⁰ Owen, *Book of the New Moral World*, 46. See also Cole, *The Life of Robert Owen*, 297.

⁶¹ Owen, *Marriages of the Priesthood*, 27

⁶² *NMW* 5 February 1842.

suffering offspring, and through them upon society at large'.⁶³ Thus Owen's concern about the parental affections was that he doubted whether they could ever be rationally refined: they derive from instinct, not reason, and thus they cannot be put into the service of a rational social order grounded on a rational self-interest. In this sense the parental affections suffer from the same moral failing as the family's economic interest: both are unsocial because they are irrational in that they derive from a false or irrational understanding of human beings and human society.

Although they fall outside the scope of this section, which focuses on Owen's intellectual evolution in the 1830s, it should be noted that Owen's hostility towards this 'animal attachment' intensifies in his later works. In *The Revolution of Mind and Practice of the Human Race* (1850) he confirms that, regarding parents, their 'affections for their own children are too strong for their judgements ever to do justice to themselves, their children, or the public, in the education of their own children'. Hence the community must parent children and assume all responsibility for their moral and intellectual education. This is because the township is not corrupted by its own instinctual attachment, which gives it an appropriate moral interest in the child; rather, the township 'as the general parental authority of all, has a much wider and deeper interest in the formation of the character of each child, than its immediate physical parents'. Owen confirms that under his new system, although parents and children may interact, there will be none of the 'silly affection and desire for injurious and partial privileges'; society will provide a rational education for children according to the 'Science of Society'.⁶⁴

By replacing traditional parents with the township, Owen hoped to address both of the practical and moral failings of traditional child-rearing. The educational advantages of a communal system were, Owen believed, obvious: the collective knowledge and resources of the community would be better equipped to educate children, and because children would not receive instruction in isolated households they would also be protected from the narrow and particular prejudices of individual

⁶³ *NMW* 5 February 1842.

⁶⁴ Robert Owen, *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race; or The Coming Change from Irrationality to Rationality* (London: Effingham, 1850), 59.

parents. Addressing the moral shortcoming of parenthood—animal affection—was less straightforward, and it is, therefore, not surprising that Owen's descriptions of it are somewhat opaque. Owen wants to preserve parent-child relations, but he wants to ensure that parents are never in a position to discriminate meaningfully in favour of their own children. The township can do this, Owen believes, because in relation to its children it will be impartial. Since the township will provide both physical care and social and moral training, Owen hopes that he can preserve parent-child relations but neutralise the harmful effects of parental love and partiality.

The family and the 'Science of Society'

This section has shown the three distinct functions of the family that Owen identified and critiqued in the 1830s. It has also shown that in each case Owen condemned these aspects of family life not for their partiality or egotism, but because they violated his 'Science of Society', specifically because they inculcated an irrational view of human nature. However, in condemning the family as 'irrational', Owen implied that there was such a thing as a 'rational family'—indeed, he implied that under socialism, there would still be a role for the family affections, despite their inherent egotism and partiality.

The problem is, of course, that no coherent account of the 'rational family' emerges from Owen's critique of its irrational counterpart. In fact, Owen seems to have failed to harmonise the family's dual nature with his account of science, nature and human perfectibility. He wants to treat humanity as an immutable entity whose instincts and natural tendencies have normative value; however, he also wants to treat humanity as a rational creature whose instincts are incidental and transient, with limitless potential for progress. This version of humanity does not turn to its instincts to learn 'facts' about the world or its own organisation. This version of humanity can pass judgments on the moral validity of its own instincts; it can reach conclusions about the normative claims of specific instincts, even of the most powerful, such as those relating to sex and reproduction, and modify its social organisation accordingly.

This is a problem that Owen cannot solve. He cannot reconcile his belief in moral continuity with his piecemeal account of the family, which necessarily dismisses some instincts at the expense of others. Evidence that the family confounds his social science is found in Owen's fragmented and formulaic answers to the most fundamental questions about the nature of the family. For example, Owen cannot determine with any degree of finality whether his philosophy locates the family in the public or the private sphere—that is, as an instrument of individual happiness or of social improvement. He cannot provide a definitive answer because any solution he chooses will cut across his tenuous nature vs. perfectibility dichotomy. Is marriage a private matter—concerned with individual inclinations, instincts and happiness, as with animals—or is it a social matter and therefore bound up with questions of perfectibility, such as education and the science of human reproduction? Owen's entire justification for divorce (that marriage is intended to secure the happiness of the individuals involved and should be dissolved if it ceases to perform this function) suggests the former, but his larger project of human progress, which includes his proto-eugenic theories, claims that marriage and reproduction are social matters to which the individual should be subject. These are broad conceptual questions to which Owen, despite more than two decades of serious engagement with the family question, and despite his confidence in the continuity of all moral and scientific truths, failed to provide coherent answers. And this ambivalence created severe divisions within the larger Owenite movement.

iii. The crisis among the Owenites, 1839-1845

Owen believed that the application of so many new 'sciences' would eventually produce a single, coherent moral solution to the family question; instead, each theory produced its own partial and disjointed account of the family. No single science could explain and evaluate all the various aspects of family life, and taken together they failed to generate a coherent moral account of the family. Thus the

family question began to fracture and partition Owen's indivisible 'Science of Society' into a constellation of independent and dissociated social theories, each with its own moral implications.

The response to the family question among the larger Owenite movement reveals a similar but more severe fragmentation. Various factions interpreted Owen's family doctrines through the prism of their own interests and priorities. Some were more conservative than Owen on marriage and divorce, rejecting Owen's appeals to instinct and individual happiness; others were openly more radical in their claims about sexual variation and the mutability of love. Some rejected Owen's proposition for 'rational reproduction'; while others, such as social missionary Alexander Campbell, went so far as to suggest that women who gave birth to particularly fine children should be awarded a prize.⁶⁵ Some moderated Owen's critique of parenthood, insisting that in the new society the change would be no more invasive than a boarding school; others argued that Owen's plan required a far more radical solution to 'animal instincts'.

These disputes evince the depth of disagreement between Owenites on the application of Owen's social science to particular family relations; however, as these debates matured and intensified through the early 1840s, the family came to represent a more serious source of discord. Owenites not only failed to agree on a single application of the 'Science of Society' to the family, but they also diverged on which sciences or theories ought to be given precedence to interpret the family's social role. In the absence of traditional sources of moral authority—such as civil or religious authority, both of which had come under attack in Owen's history of the 'old immoral world'—Owenites were left to identify a new authoritative moral source. And when their new 'Science of Society' offered disparate and even conflicting solutions to the family question, the movement, which had always been comprised of various parts with their own interests and beliefs, split into factions, according to their account of human nature and which of Owen's theories they elevated above the others.

⁶⁵ John Brindley, *A Report of the Public Discussion on Socialism, held in the theatre, Sheffield, on the evenings of Wednesday, Sep. 2nd, Thursday, 3rd, and Friday, 4th, between Mr. Brindley, the advocate of Christianity, and Mr. Campbell, socialist missionary* (ca. 1840), 18-19.

To grasp the effect that the family question had on the movement as a whole, this section focuses on the years when Owenites were subjected to the most intense controversy, from both within and without the movement, on the marriage question. This period begins in 1839, after Owen delivered his Address to Congress, and continues until 1845, after which time there are far fewer Owenite publications and lectures on the marriage question. Owenites did, of course, engage with the marriage question before 1839. The *New Moral World* contains a few articles on the subject, particularly in response to the 1835 marriage lectures, and, as previously noted, Owenites began performing ‘rational marriages’ as early as 1834. Relative to the firestorm that began after 1839, however, Owenites largely left the marriage question to Owen himself, although after 1839 they could scarcely avoid it. Part of this has to do with the violent criticism levelled at Owenites in this period. In addition to the affair with the Bishop of Exeter, Owenites were further assaulted by a number of clergymen. Public interest and hostility to Owen’s marriage doctrines were such that even before the public contest in the House of Lords, a contributor to the *New Moral World* regretted that ‘On no portion of Mr. Owen’s views has misrepresentation been more abundant, or prejudice more sedulously excited, than that relating to marriage’. Speaking of the inescapable perseverance of the marriage controversy, and specifically of those critics whose favourite topic was marriage, the same contributor lamented, ‘The song of the cuckoo is not more monotonous’.⁶⁶

Whereas the preceding section analysed the marriage question thematically, according to specific types of family relations, this section approaches the marriage question from the perspective of different factions within Owenism. This will highlight how particular interpretations of specific aspects of family life, such as the temporary or permanence of sexual unions, appealed to very different scientific and moral theories, and thus the family question exacerbated the philosophic subdivisions within the movement. Due to the immensity of the Owenite movement, and the physical and topical limits of this dissertation, it is, of course, not possible to undertake a thorough history of the entire movement here; however, an attempt will

⁶⁶ *NMW* 23 November 1839.

be made to represent those thinkers and reformers who engaged with the family question and its implications for Owen's social theories. To meet this more modest goal, this section explores thinkers from two subsets of thought within Owenism: atheism and feminism. Naturally the boundaries between these intellectual communities are not always precise. For example, many of the self-proclaimed atheists, such as Emma Martin, George Jacob Holyoake and Charles Southwell, were also vocal feminists. While recognising these overlaps, an attempt will be made to sketch the intellectual and philosophical convergences—and deviations—of these philosophic groups.

Atheism and secular moralism

This account begins with a constellation of Owenites who focused their efforts on one particular aspect of Owen's doctrines—his hostility for religion. In this pursuit these thinkers wrote pamphlets and delivered lectures to challenge what they termed 'supernatural religion', specifically Christianity. Despite their shared hostility for religion, members of this subset did not share a single view of the family. Some adopted conservative interpretations of Owen, others took a more radical approach. But their treatment of the family question shared a common approach in that all defended Owen's doctrines by challenging the moral legitimacy of Christianity and its sanction of marriage. They diverged, however, on what should replace the moral authority of the Christian faith, and their answers to that question shed light on their particular solutions to the family question.

George Jacob Holyoake, Charles Southwell and Emma Martin were important figures in the Owenite movement: Holyoake was a personal friend to Owen; Southwell was, for a time, an official social missionary; and Martin was one of the more visible and celebrated feminist lecturers. All three lost their religious faith in the 1830s and were, by the early 1840s, challenging the moral authority of the church. Martin joined the Owenite movement in 1839 after hearing a lecture by social missionary Alexander Campbell that shook her Baptist faith. In the following months she abandoned her religious convictions, moved to London, and by 1841 had strayed

so far from her pious upbringing that she was denounced from a Reverend's pulpit as 'a fair, but foul-mouthed infidel'.⁶⁷ Holyoake and Southwell shared Martin's disdain for religious belief, and when the marriage controversy reached its zenith, Holyoake and Southwell were among those to dissent from official Owenite doctrines regarding religion. In 1841 Southwell founded the *Oracle of Reason*, the first atheistic periodical published in Britain. Within a month of its first issue Southwell was arrested on charges of blasphemy, and Holyoake took over as editor. These three figures self-identified as Rationalists, although their interpretations of Rationalism led them to very different conclusions, particularly in its application to the family. Where they did agree, however, is that the best defence of Owen's marriage doctrines—and indeed of Rationalism itself—would require that they first undermine the moral hegemony of the church. And this is the task they set for themselves.

Martin pursued this goal in one of her most celebrated works, *Religion Superseded, or the Moral Code of Nature Sufficient for the Guidance of Man* (ca. 1840-150). Even the title of this work supplants religious with naturalist morality, and in it Martin launches a personal assault on Christian charity, claiming that Christianity has failed to inculcate the benevolence it promised: Christianity's moral system of 'rewards and punishments' constitutes only a vulgar notion of morality, she claimed, but even so it is ineffective: '[T]he hopes and fears of religion have not presented a sufficient motive, else would society have been pure, my pen escaped this effort'.⁶⁸ In this conviction Martin was joined by the social missionary Alexander Campbell, who, in 1839 while debating with the Reverend Bannister, had sarcastically reminded his pious audience that after 1800 years Christianity had failed to inculcate a functional social morality based on Jesus' counsel to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', whereas the socialists 'are seeking to place mankind in those circumstances that shall compel them to love their neighbour as themselves, by destroying all the causes that at present exist, to render man an enemy to man'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *NMW* 3 April 1841.

⁶⁸ Emma Martin, *Religion Superseded, or the Moral Code of Nature Sufficient for the Guidance of Man* (London: ca. 1844), 3. See also Emma Martin, *God's Gifts and Man's Duties* (1843), 13.

⁶⁹ Alexander Campbell, *Socialism: public discussion between Mr. Alexander Campbell, socialist*

Thinkers like Martin, Campbell, Holyoake and Southwell were less preoccupied with Christianity's fallaciousness and more interested in its impotence: true or not Christianity had failed. Thus they agreed with Owen's suggestion that affection is not only a necessary condition for marriage but is also, in itself, sufficient. They rejected all civil and religious justifications for marriage; however, they did not agree on what source of moral authority ought to replace religious and civil injunctions. Martin and Southwell valorised instinct and elevated personal happiness, appealing to nature for justifications of their radical doctrines; Holyoake, on the other hand, rejected appeals to humanity's animal nature, adopting a more conservative interpretation of Owen's marriage doctrines.

Holyoake's brand of atheism precluded the acceptance of nature and instinct as sources of moral authority. In his rejection of religious authority Holyoake turned to the classical critique of natural theology, insisting that nature itself is not wholly good and therefore cannot possibly be the work of a benevolent creator.⁷⁰ Because nature itself does not contain moral truths, morality cannot be derived from nature's principles, and thus Holyoake concludes that morality must be the work of experiential reasoning. Human beings are the natural subjects of that study, but only as beings of 'indefinite moral progression'.⁷¹ Rationalism thus approaches the study of human beings on a grand scale. It studies instinct not to discover moral laws, but to discover the laws of 'cause and effect' in order to improve the human condition.

Owen's perception of human beings as 'germs of indefinite moral progression' resonates with this conservative approach to the family. Holyoake's emphasis is on the obligation that living individuals have to progress the race as a whole, and consequently he rejects all of Owen's doctrines that rest upon claims of individual happiness or the moral jurisdiction of instinct. Marriage is not a matter of individual happiness. It is a social matter and thus Holyoake concluded that

missionary, and the Rev. J.T. Bannister, of Coventry, held in Saint Mary's Hall, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday Evenings, January 14, 15 & 16, 1839 (Coventry: 1839), 16.

⁷⁰ George Jacob Holyoake, *Paley Refuted in His Own Words* (London: ca. 1843), 31.

⁷¹ George Jacob Holyoake, *Rationalism: A Treatise for the Times* (London: 1845), 41.

‘Intelligent society will never look upon divorce lightly’.⁷² In explicating his doctrine, Holyoake places parents in the same social role as legislators, in that both have a ‘great responsibility’ as guardians over the progress of the race. Because he views intimate relations through the lens of reason and perfectibility, Holyoake must reject those narratives of the family that appeal to individual happiness or instinct. The human animal that he has in mind is not any individual in particular, and not any individual’s particular happiness, but that of society.

In this sense Holyoake’s rationalism came into open conflict with Owen’s doctrine of non-responsibility: for Holyoake divorce is not an inevitable result of changing characters and temperaments, alterations that are beyond the control of either party, as Owen suggested; rather, divorce is symptomatic of ‘fickleness or foolishness, and should be understood as such’.⁷³ He understands Owen’s doctrine of non-responsibility as an affirmation that self-understanding will ensure the permanence of marriage unions; it is not a justification for their frequent termination. Speaking of the Owenite position on marriage Holyoake affirms that ‘marriage, whether legally ratified or not, rather wants contracting than relaxing’.⁷⁴ Rationalism ‘reduces morality to a science and teaches, and it alone teaches, how affection may be won, and unions made permanent’.⁷⁵

Not all the self-identified ‘Rationalists’ took this approach. Thinkers like Martin, Southwell and Campbell replaced God’s law with nature. They claimed that if religion is false and marriage derives from religion, then marriage is false, and a new type of marriage and family, dictated by nature, must be discoverable to replace the false notions of tradition. Emma Martin took up this cause with particular dedication. In the absence of religious authority, Martin turned to nature and the animal kingdom to discover moral laws. She acknowledged the family as an important link between the moral progress of the present generation and that of posterity, but human

⁷² Holyoake, *Rationalism*, 41.

⁷³ George Jacob Holyoake, *The Last Days of Mrs Emma Martin, Advocate of Free Thought* (1851), 4; Holyoake, *Rationalism*, 40-41.

⁷⁴ Holyoake, *Rationalism*, 39.

⁷⁵ Holyoake, *Rationalism*, 40-41.

perfectibility was secondary. Her account of the family, and indeed even her naturalistic social science, prioritised individual happiness and continuity with nature.

Many agitators in the Owenite movement had experienced troubled marriages, including Martin and Southwell, and perhaps these unhappy experiences made them less inclined to sacrifice individual satisfaction to collective moral progress.⁷⁶ Martin's marital experiences taught her to value what she termed 'marriages of nature' above those of God. She joins Owen in asserting a new definition of chastity that is entirely separate from civil and religious sanctions: 'Chastity is of the mind, and exists independently of law, or circumstances', she explained. 'The "chaste" person will not consider that a legal marriage can render pure his intercourse with one who has never been married to him by the only true tie, that of the affections'.⁷⁷ To define 'natural marriage', Martin relied on a type of moral naturalism grounded on utilitarian ethics. *Religion Superseded* outlines a distinctly utilitarian moral system in which the natural object of human existence is the 'creation of pleasurable emotions', and to codify this ethic Martin assumes that instincts make normative claims about human life, and particularly about the family.⁷⁸ Martin uses this utilitarian naturalism to assault both religion and marriage, claiming that both have taken humanity out of the natural world and corrupted natural morality.

Martin considered humanity to be part of the animal kingdom in the fullest sense: the human animal was not only subject to natural laws but its proper state was also discoverable through a study of those laws. In an imaginary conversation between an atheist and a Christian, penned by Martin and published around 1850, Martin justifies her comparison of humanity with animals in proto-Darwinian terms. She assaults Christians for their account of creation, insisting that the human race may have 'passed through a variety of stages, each more advanced and complex than [sic]

⁷⁶ Martin had married a husband 'whose company it was a humiliation to endure,' and even Holyoake, conservative on marriage but loyal to Martin, declared that her leaving him was 'so justifiable, that even her religious friends no fault with it'. God had sanctioned her first unhappy marriage, but he was unable to do so with her second. When Martin later lived with Joshua Hopkins, Holyoake confirmed that 'no marriage ceremony was performed, or could be performed . . . Yet no affection was ever purer, no union ever more honourable to both parties'. See Holyoake, *Last Days of Emma Martin*, 4.

⁷⁷ Martin, *Religion Superseded*, 4.

⁷⁸ Martin, *Religion Superseded*, 8.

the previous one'. When her fictional Christian interlocutor asks, 'Do you then imagine that man is but an improvement upon the lower animals?' Martin responds, 'I see no reason to look further for a cause for his existence than [sic] for that of the meanest insect'.⁷⁹ In Martin's naturalistic account, the study of nature and the human instinct determine which behaviours are 'moral' and which are 'unnatural'; consequently, Martin inveighs against those who would oppose nature and suppress natural instincts. Such repressions result in corruption and debasement: 'If the interests of religion require the monitions of nature to be stifled, such religion is the enemy of nature'. Martin applies this logic to the sexual instinct to derive her justification for marriage: 'Celibacy is no virtue by natures [sic] law, for nature when she formed a diversity of sex, when she implanted the instinct of love, when she endowed us with parental sympathies, could use no stronger command to marriage'.⁸⁰ Nature sanctions the family. And because nature is the ultimate source of normative authority, there is no human authority—not the church or state, and not even individual reason—that can delegitimise the proclamations of nature.

Thus in Martin's naturalistic moral system the role of reason is not to dispute or overrule nature but to comprehend it. Reason must distinguish between particular pleasures: to reason whether a particular pleasure will, in the long run, produce more pleasure than pain, and also to discriminate between higher and lower pleasures. This is the sense in which Martin identified herself as a 'Rationalist': 'We must use our reason in the choice of enjoyments, if we would have them preserve [our] character'.⁸¹ The role of reason is to study and comprehend human nature and its needs. Martin believes there is some scope for human perfectibility, but if it occurs it will not be through reason's triumph over instinct (because instinct is immutable) but rather its comprehension of it. And in this sense nature is a timeless source of moral instruction. In contrast to religion's moral code, which applies only to mankind in one social state, Martin claims that 'Nature gives you the same leaf to study, which a

⁷⁹ Emma Martin, *First Conversation on the Being of God* (London: ca. 1850), 5-6.

⁸⁰ Martin, *Religion Superseded*, 6-7.

⁸¹ Martin, *Religion Superseded*, 11.

thousand years ago it would have offered you'.⁸² Human nature is unchanging, and thus perfectibility is limited to self-understanding, not self-perfection.

Of the three Rationalists included in this chapter, Charles Southwell's response to the family comes closest to that of Owen himself. Whereas Holyoake and Martin rejected or ignored those aspects of Owen's marriage doctrines that did not fit with their priorities and philosophical accounts of human nature, Southwell embraced the tension between humanity as an animal whose immutable instincts hold real moral implications, and humanity as a perfectible creature whose reason distinguishes it from other elements of nature. Consequently, Southwell engages with the family in all its functions, though it is questionable whether he resolves this tension any more effectively than Owen himself.

Like Martin, Southwell also had an unhappy first marriage. He waited several years to marry his bride and within a week of the ceremony discovered that his wife had been unfaithful. Unable to obtain a divorce, Southwell cheerfully admitted to at least one mistress during the duration of his disastrous first marriage, which he explained unapologetically with the adage that 'keeping a *good* mistress was more productive of happiness than keeping a *bad* wife'.⁸³ This first experience convinced Southwell that a true marriage requires more than legal or religious sanctions, and indeed, that such sanctions were meaningless without genuine affection. Challenging those who opposed divorce on religious grounds, Southwell replied somewhat dryly, 'Whom *God hath joined together let no man put asunder*, is a good commandment; but what should be done with those unfortunate couples whom the Devil hath joined together?'⁸⁴

In his almost unqualified support for divorce, Southwell seems more like Martin than Holyoake. He embraces an account of marriage that focuses on individual happiness, passion and instinct. Also like Martin he claims that efforts to repress instinct are morally damaging. Southwell explains that the 'instinct of reproduction' is

⁸² Emma Martin, *The Bible No Revelation; or the inadequacy of language to convey a message from God to Man* (London: ca. 1850), 27.

⁸³ Charles Southwell, *Confessions of a Free Thinker* (London: ca. 1845), 34.

⁸⁴ Southwell, *Confessions*, 27.

‘the law applying to man in common with other animals’, and that when such a law is ignored or unnaturally applied, ‘can we wonder that such a palpable contradiction to nature’s injunctions would lead to the most alarming immorality’.⁸⁵ In Southwell’s account of human nature, there was nothing to be gained, and perhaps a great deal to lose, in thwarting human instinct.

But although Southwell’s response to marriage and divorce mirrors Martin’s, his description of rational reproduction has more in common with Holyoake’s account of human perfectibility. In a published letter to the Bishop of Exeter during the marriage controversy, Southwell explained that the needs for divorce are not only ‘moral’, but sometimes also ‘physiological’ due to the ‘principle of hereditary transmission’. Southwell claims that offspring are diseased because there are couples who are ‘morally, but also physically incapacitated for each other’. In an essay published in 1849 titled *The Difficulties of Christianity*, Southwell declared that reason is the distinguishing feature between human beings and the animal world, and that it is reason and reason alone that makes humanity a progressive being. ‘The reason of brutes’, he affirms, ‘will not admit of progressive development—whereas, human reason seems destined to rapidly advance’.⁸⁶

In this Southwell exemplifies the same paradox present in Owen’s response to the family question: that is, that on the one hand he wants to treat human instincts as immutable and morally relevant ‘facts’, while on the other, he wants to elevate human reason to such heights that it can reject or accept instincts depending on their moral implications, determined by some other standard independent of nature. Ultimately, once Southwell had rejected the moral authority of religion, and the history of the ‘old immoral world’, he struggled to determine which ‘science’ or theory could provide a coherent moral account of human life. Biological theories about the ‘principles of hereditary transmission’ produced different answers to the family problem than appeals to utilitarian naturalism, economics or psychology.

⁸⁵ Charles Southwell, *An Essay on Marriage; Addressed to the Lord Bishop of Exeter* (London: 1840), 13.

⁸⁶ Charles Southwell, *The Difficulties of Christianity; stated in a series of letters to the Rev. Hugh M’Neile* (Liverpool: Joseph Shepherd, ca. 1849), 71-2.

Southwell thus illustrates a struggle shared by all three Rationalists, and indeed by Owen himself. Holyoake, Martin and Southwell continually affirmed their faith in the continuity between nature and morality, and between all the various social and physical sciences. In 1845 Holyoake praised Owen as the ‘moral Euclid’, who had ‘collected the scattered wisdom of the earth’s ages and given it to order, system, and practical utility’.⁸⁷ Southwell similarly described socialism as the ‘new science of society’ or as ‘facts systematised, and brought under one head’.⁸⁸ And yet that ‘one head’ seemed to point in many different directions, and ultimately the family question caused schisms within the Owenite movement.

For Southwell and Holyoake, these disagreements ran too deep and eventually they separated themselves from the Owenite movement. It is ironic, however, that although these friends left the movement together due to their devotion to the same atheistic principles, their criticisms of Owenism and its response to the family question could not be more different: in his autobiography Southwell recalled that the marriage affair was ‘admirably mismanaged’ because Owenites shrank from controversy when they should have boldly stood their ground; Holyoake, in contrast, regretted that Owen had broached the subject at all. According to Holyoake, ‘There was no necessity to preach a new doctrine of marriage to render associate life possible’.⁸⁹

Feminism and the ‘family interest’

Barbara Taylor’s seminal work *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (1993) uncovers the robust feminist faction within Owenism, and consequently serves as the foundation for this section. This chapter builds on her work by situating Owenite feminists and their response to the family within an account of other Owenite factions and the larger movement. It contends that Owenite feminists shared a particular interest in the family’s economic

⁸⁷ Holyoake, *Rationalism*, 6.

⁸⁸ Charles Southwell, *Socialism Made Easy; or, a Plain Exposition of Mr. Owen’s Views* (London: 1840), 2.

⁸⁹ Southwell, *Confessions*, 56; Holyoake, *History of Co-operation in England*, 212.

role, one that reflected their ambitions for female equality and economic independence. Whereas atheists concerned themselves with the moral legitimacy of reason and instinct and their relationship to human perfectibility, which focused their discussions of the family on marriage and parenthood, feminists prioritised the family as an economic interest because they believed it was the aspect of family life most relevant to their goals. Their quest for female equality and independence found a great ally in Owen's family doctrines—or at least in some of Owen's family doctrines—and consequently, the most thorough discussion of the family as a unit of economic collaboration and individualism occurs within the works of those Owenites who agitated for women's rights.

This does not mean that feminists fully embraced Owen's description of the family's economic function, nor that they accepted his analysis of the relationships within that group. Rather, the following section explores how Owenite feminists adopted some of Owen's principles while modifying others to produce an account of the family that resonated with their own goals. For many Owenite feminists, the traditional family was indeed the most contemptible aspect of the 'old immoral world', and they supported Owen's critiques of it; however, for these feminists, the key to the family's redemption was to be found in those theories, often economic, that transformed the traditional family into a centre of equality and independence.

Evidence for this claim is found, firstly, in their interpretation of Owen's 'artificial marriages'. Recall that as part of his critique of private property, Owen condemned marriages motivated by pecuniary interests. For Owen, such marriages corrupted genuine human sentiment and frequently produced unhappiness; however, Owenite feminists transformed this particular stricture from a denunciation of private property to a commentary on the enslavement of women in the marriage state. Thus, to those for whom the marriage question was primary, Owen's condemnations of 'legal prostitution' and his appeal to affection as the only true sanction of marriage became a petition for the true independence and equality of women.

Beginning around 1838-39, this interpretation became increasingly common in feminist circles. In 1838 feminist agitator Frances Morrison delivered a lecture on the

marriage question, which she published that same year under the title, *The Influence of the Present Marriage System upon the Character and Interests of Females*. As Owen had done, Morrison condemns traditional marriages as ‘prostitution’; however, like many other feminists, she largely absolves women of responsibility for succumbing to financial considerations in marriage. She claims that women, due to their unequal treatment in society, often have no other choice but to marry for financial security, and furthermore, they pay a higher price for their mistake than their husbands, due to their legal enslavement.⁹⁰ Thus feminists affixed concepts like ‘bondage’ and ‘domestic slavery’ to Owen’s criticism of financial motives for marriage, and this became an important part of the feminist assault on the moral authority of legal and religious marriages. Social missionaries Robert Buchanan and J.G. Clarke both denounced ‘mercenary marriages’ for the particular suffering that they inflict upon women. In a tract titled *Socialism Vindicated* published in 1840 Buchanan derided legal marriage in England, which ‘places every married woman completely at the mercy of her husband’.⁹¹

This is not to say that Owenite feminists did not condemn the relationship between the family and private property. However, their hostility towards private property, and indeed their disapproval of the financial motives of marriage, were not qualitatively the same as Owen’s, although they did derive from Owen’s statements and principles. Owen denounced the family’s economic interest as a force of moral corruption that transformed society into an arena of competition, while feminist Owenites condemned the family’s economic interest as the great obstacle to female equality. These approaches are related but not synonymous. The difference is that Owen considered the abolition of private property essential to the achievement of his end, meaning a cooperative society. But for the feminists cooperation was a means to

⁹⁰ Frances Morrison, *The Influence of the present Marriage System upon the Character and Interests of Females contrasted with that proposed by Robert Owen* (Manchester: 1838), 4-11.

⁹¹ Robert Buchanan, *Socialism Vindicated: in reply to a sermon entitled ‘Socialism denounced as an outrage upon the laws of God and man’ preached by the Rev. W.J. Kidd in Manchester on July 12, 1840* (Manchester: 1840), 7-8. See also Alexander Campbell, *Authentic report of the discussion at the Guildhall, Bath, on the evenings of the 13th, 14th, and 15th of September, 1838, between Mr Alexander Campbell, social missionary, and Mr. W.P. Roberts, on the principles of Mr. Robert Owen* (Bath: 1838), 37-8.

another end—equality and independence. Owenite feminists like Margaret Reynolds, Frances Wright, Catherine Barmby and Frances Morrison—and, to some degree, also their male counterparts like Alexander Campbell, Robert Buchanan and Charles Southwell—shared Owen’s hostility for property because they believed that only under socialism could women achieve the independence necessary to attain genuine equality. For some of these thinkers the socialistic family was important only as the mechanical means to attain equality and independence for women; others took these implications much further, articulating a type of cooperative individualism in which the family represents a false combination of interests that violates individual sovereignty and independence.⁹²

The most forceful articulation of this cooperative individualism appeared in 1825, written by two Owenites, William Thompson and Anna Wheeler. Although this text did not originate in the period that is of immediate interest to this chapter, its ideas formed the foundation of the assaults that later feminists levelled against the family, and consequently it will be discussed briefly here. In 1825 James Mill declared female suffrage superfluous on the grounds that ‘all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals, may be struck off without inconvenience’.⁹³ In response Thompson and Wheeler penned their famous reply, *An Appeal to One Half the Human Race*. In language that anticipates Robert Owen in the 1830s, the *Appeal* claims that the ‘isolated antisocial, *family interest*, must be distinguished from the *individual interest* of members of the family, particularly of the adult daughters’.⁹⁴ In this text, Thompson and Wheeler set about to undermine the conception of the family as an entity whose interests harmonise with

⁹² This account of the family—as a false interest that violates individual sovereignty and autonomy—is remarkably similar to the account of the family found at *Modern Times*, which will be the topic of the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

⁹³ Mill clarifies that this applies specifically to children ‘whose interests are involved in those of their parents’, and also women, ‘the interest of almost all of whom is involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands. See Jack Lively and John Rees, eds., *Utilitarian Logic and Politics: James Mill’s ‘Essay on Government’, Macaulay’s Critique, and the Ensuing Debate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 79.

⁹⁴ William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, *Appeal of One-Half the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men, to retain them in political and thence in civil and domestic Slavery; in Reply to a paragraph of Mr Mill’s celebrated ‘Article on Government’* (London: 1825), 22. Emphasis in original.

those of the individuals that compose it. The *Appeal* dismisses the claim that children have the same interests as their parents, or wives as their husbands, as a ‘mere fiction’.

Like Owen, Thomas and Wheeler claim that the so-called family interest collapses in the face of individual interest and devolves into a community of competing ambitions. Thus the *Appeal* deflates the popular notion, articulated notably by Rousseau and Burke, that weakness and dependence produce an identity of interests with the strong, and that such a bond ensures benevolence on the part of the family patriarch. The *Appeal* denounces such a bond as a fabrication. Thompson and Wheeler admit that the family has a type of unified interests—that is, a ‘common interest against all the world beside’—but members of the family also have ‘their own particular and individual interest’.

The source of this division of interests is inequality. Inequality prevents members of a family from having a true identity of interests. To illustrate this point, Thompson and Wheeler explore the point at which the interests of a farmer depart from the interests of those in his household, in this case, his ox: ‘The ox is better fed when the master is rich: so far the common interest extends:—but wherefore? because it is the interest of the master that the ox should be fattened as speedily as possible in order to be consumed. . . . No comfort is given to the ox but with subserviency to this superior claim of the master’s interest’.⁹⁵ The family interest remains separate from individual interests because good fortune to one member does not benefit all members of that family equally.

Thus in the *Appeal*, inequality prevents the family interest from qualifying as a unified interest. It is inequality, not only of power but also of benefits, that represses individuality and buries it deep within the myth of the family. No party can be said to have a unity of interests if the rewards and welfare are not distributed equally. Thompson and Wheeler define an ‘individual identity of interests’ as ‘an equality of happiness necessarily co-existing between two individuals, so that in promoting the one, that of the other should be promoted *in an equal degree*, not added to in its

⁹⁵ Thompson and Wheeler, *Appeal*, 49.

particular sphere of *unequal enjoyment*'. Anything short of this profound equality is a mere 'family interest' that 'unindividualizes the natural interests of one of the parties' and reduces them to their secondary, slavish interest.⁹⁶

The *Appeal* exposes the family interest as a myth. The thrust of its argument consists, to a great degree, in depicting the family as a sort of fallacy: a fantasy that reduces women to members of a community that proves an insufficient vehicle for their individuality. Feminist assaults on the family's economic interest in the late 1830s and early 1840s relied heavily on this conception of the family: that is, the claim that an individual's interests—and particularly a *woman's* interests—cannot be included in the interests of her family. This is why their treatment of the family question focuses on economic equality and material independence.

This devotion to equality and independence came to be shared by virtually all Owenite feminists in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In 1838, when Frances Morrison decried marriage as 'social bondage' that reduces woman to the 'merest slave of a partial and irrational system', her abhorrence of female repression fused with her resentment of property and its derangement of the family. Ultimately she rests on one solution for these evils: a community of goods where 'money will not be known' and romantic unions are purified from selfish considerations.⁹⁷ Similarly in 1845 Frances Wright declared that until dependence is broken, wives are little more than 'kept mistresses', which morally corrupts both their motives and their behaviour in marriage.⁹⁸ Catherine Barmby, who frequently contributed feminist pieces to the *New Moral World* under the pen-name 'Kate', declared 'industrial independence' just as necessary for women as for men and promised that without this equality, woman 'is ever exposed to the misery of bargaining herself for bread'.⁹⁹ Thus the Owenite charge of prostitution transforms into another plea for a cooperative social

⁹⁶ Thompson and Wheeler, *Appeal*, 60

⁹⁷ Frances Morrison, *Influence of the present Marriage System*, 2, 10-11.

⁹⁸ *NMW* 21 June 1845.

⁹⁹ Catherine Barmby, 'Women's Industrial Independence', *The Apostle and Chronicle of the Communist Church*, Vol. 1, No. 1. (1848). See also Catherine Barmby, 'The Demand for the Emancipation of Women, Politically and Socially', *New Tracts for the Times*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1843).

arrangement: unless women are granted independence through a community of goods, they will be forever prostitutes.

There was little consensus among Owenite feminists on Owen's doctrines relating to marriage and parenthood. Some believed that marriages would be temporary, changing frequently according to instinct, emotion or other human inclinations; others claimed that Owen's doctrine of non-responsibility would render marriage unions more permanent because they would be based on scientific principles. Regarding parenthood, some claimed the township would parent children, thus enabling women to compete equally with men, while others maintained that the parental relationship would be little changed in the new society. They did agree, however, that the family's economic function undermined female equality. But although they shared Owen's hostility for private property and its corrupting influence on the family, in many ways their conception of private property and the 'family interest' was the exact opposite of Owen's. To Owen, individual greed and ambition were too strong and would, eventually, overpower the family interest, which was itself too weak. Owen had made this clear in his descriptions of siblings fighting over family possessions after the death of a parent.¹⁰⁰

Owenite feminists came to a different conclusion. They believed that the family interest was too strong and overpowered the interests of certain individuals, particularly women and children, and consequently their agenda was decidedly different from Owen's. The feminists wanted to rescue society *from* the family—that is, from its anti-social and in some cases its anti-individualistic tendencies. But that was not Owen's goal. As will be seen in the final section, Owen's critique was not intended to weaken or abolish the family, as many of the feminists would have hoped. He was not trying to rescue society from the family but was instead trying to rescue the family from its corruption by society.

¹⁰⁰ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 40-41.

iv. The family as rational love, 1845-1858

This chapter has referenced four distinct roles or functions that Owen identified as germane to the family's social or unsocial nature. Thus far this dissertation has discussed only three. The fourth function—that of a community founded on 'rational love'—appears in some of Owen's earlier works, but it is not until 1850 that Owen gives a full account. This is Owen's positive account of the family and of family love—the rational family that remains once it has been purged of the irrationalities of the 'old immoral world'. It is the notion that he has in mind when he refers to future communities as 'affectionate and intelligent members of one family, having new hearts and new minds, and whose single object through life will be to promote each others' happiness, and thereby their own'.¹⁰¹

This notion is similar to that of the family as an economic unit, but in this account the family is freed from the corrupting influence of property and enlightened by the new 'Science of Society', specifically by the doctrine of non-responsibility. It is this purified notion of the family—with its newly refined affections—that Owen embraced as the foundational social unit that would unite the larger community. His acceptance of this particular form of the family derives from his account of human psychology. In the 1835 marriage lectures Owen speculates that the human desire for love and approbation, 'especially of those with whom we live in daily intercourse', could be used to improve humanity; in the 1837 lectures in Manchester Owen declares that the same affections that unite families could, if expanded, unite the entire human family: 'For, by the same principle upon which the individuals composing one of these social families are held together, may any number of such families be united in friendship cemented by the most palpable interest; and thus may an association be formed, which shall not be limited to mere national objects, but shall eventually embrace the general government and interests of the world'.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Owen and Campbell, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity*, 21.

¹⁰² Owen, *Six Lectures at Manchester*, 88.

This interpretation resonates with Owen's descriptions of private property. In this account, the human tendency to prefer members of our own family to strict impartiality is not in itself unsociable, unless it is adulterated with greed through private property. Separated from private property the family was a model of sociability, and in fact, some Owenites openly based their social organisation on the family model: Lloyd Jones, Owen's friend and biographer, recalls that in the late 1830s the Central Board at Manchester appointed Robert Owen the Social Father, 'the idea being to constitute the society as much as possible on the model of the family, and to blend the authority and kindness of the family tie in the officers of the society'.¹⁰³ Furthermore, in their correspondence with Owen, many Owenites addressed Owen as 'Dear Father' or even 'My dear Social Sire!', signing their letters, 'Your faithful Social Son'. In 1848 social missionary James Rigby addressed his letter, 'My dear Social father', and Alexander Campbell did the same as late as 1855.¹⁰⁴

Owen adopted this notion of the family as the foundation of his cooperative communities because it was, he believed, the only social arrangement that could harmonise both with humanity's inherent psychology and his new social science. This version of the family appeals to the 'rational self-interest' or 'enlightened self-interest' that Owen believed would result from humanity's comprehension of its own nature. Once society understands that individuals do not form their own characters, this knowledge creates a bond between all humanity. This is Owen's 'rational self-interest': individuals with a rational understanding of their formation. Individuals understand that securing their own happiness requires that they 'endeavour to promote the happiness of every other individual within his sphere of action', and this constitutes the 'essence of self-interest'.¹⁰⁵ It is this understanding of human nature

¹⁰³ Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1890), 74.

¹⁰⁴ John Finch to Robert Owen, 7 March 1848; Vincent Cooke to Robert Owen, 25 July 1847; James Rigby to Robert Owen, 22 May 1848; Alexander Campbell to Robert Owen, 15 March 1855. These letters located at the British Library, London, MFR/2888 280.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Owen, *A New View of Society*, 115-16.

that will teach individuals ‘to promote each others’ happiness, and thereby their own’.¹⁰⁶

In this account, Owen recognises that members of a family pursue each other’s interests out of affection or genuine benevolence, but they also do so because of ‘intelligence’, or their own self-interest. Thus Owen recognised the dual nature of the partial affections and declares that his new society will be founded on ‘rational self-interest’—a combination of benevolence and selfishness—rather than the utopian but less morally ambiguous ‘disinterested love’. In fact, in *Letters to the Human Race* (1850) Owen explains that in his mind ‘disinterestedness’ and ‘impartiality’ refer to the social bond of affection that comes from the doctrine of non-responsibility, or society’s rational understanding of human nature: mankind becomes ‘disinterested’ when it recognises that individuals are not responsible for their own character. Thus Owen claims that once society accepts a scientific account of humanity, understanding the role society plays in individual development, it creates ‘what the world calls disinterestedness’ or a ‘spirit of universal charity, which thinketh no evil of any one, but which sympathises with all’.¹⁰⁷

Clearly this is not disinterestedness in the traditional sense. It is, rather, a disinterestedness that derives from both the family’s social and unsocial nature. In the family, members protect the entire unit not only out of affection but also because they recognise the wellbeing of the whole as essential to their own happiness. In Owen’s new society, that sentiment expands to include the community, or perhaps all mankind. This charity teaches individuals to ‘love one another as they love themselves, all knowing that they are members of the same great body of humanity . . . and that, in like manner as when one member suffers, the whole man suffers, so if one man shall suffer, the whole of humanity will also suffer’. With the coming of ‘disinterestedness’, Owen declares that ‘Home, and relatives and friends, will be everywhere in abundance’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Owen and Campbell, *Evidences of Christianity*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 24, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 63-5.

Thus Owen's 'disinterestedness' and 'impartiality' promise an absence of judgment and hostility because the whole takes responsibility for the formation of its parts; it does not promise that all will love all equally. Human associations must be based on inclination, not an extra-rational attachment to all regardless of attraction, and in fact it was society's disregard of preference, inclination and suitability in the uniting of individuals that formed the foundation of Owen's objection to marriage. In place of an impartial system, Owen declares that the 'essence of human happiness consists in having the power to associate with those for whom we are compelled, by the laws of humanity, to have the greatest respect, love, and affection; and that, when society can be made to become rational, or to approach to a state of common sense, it will make arrangements, based on these laws, to secure this happiness to the entire family of man over the world'.¹⁰⁹

This is certainly not Godwinian rational impartiality, or even Smithian benevolence. It is benevolence by inclination, supported by an individual's rational understanding of their unity of interests with general humanity—a unity that derives from mankind's rational understanding of its own interconnected nature. It is a community united by affection when possible, and by rational self-interest and self-understanding when affection is not possible. Much like the family.

Like the other three, this fourth conception of the family does not prove that Owen solved the family problem, only that he struggled with it. The notion of community and 'rational love' does not resolve the dualism between the immutability of human instinct and mankind's endless potential for progress, or reconcile the tension between family affection and justice. In fact, it complicates the dualism further by incorporating instinct into the permanent, utopian account of universal benevolence. In this sense Owen's solution to the moral questions of partiality and disinterestedness was profoundly pragmatic, not utopian. He recognised the inherent selfishness of family love, and the social and moral compromises that the family required of traditional society; however, he believed that those affections could be managed, and perhaps even harnessed, through the application of a rational social

¹⁰⁹ Owen, *Letters to the Human Race*, 129.

science. Selfishness and partiality would not be abolished by this science, or transformed into benevolence; they would only be modified and redirected.

Owen's complex and possibly unresolved solution to the family question demonstrates that his social project went beyond economic theories and ventured far into the realm of moral psychology. He recognised that certain natural facts about human nature might be relevant to his moral science, and, building on that assumption, he recognised that self-interest may have a role to play in social love. Indeed, Owen's solution to the family question identifies him as a philosopher who values passion, in addition to reason, as an instrument of human sociability. Owen accepts the family as consonant with social love, not because the family is itself wholly benevolent, but because he believes that self-interest and partial love may be necessary to human relations, both inside and outside the family.

This is not to question Owen's devotion to a form of rationalism. Owen constantly defends the rational capacities of humanity, and it is reason, in Owen's narrative of human history, that drives humanity to progress. But it is not reason alone that *motivates*; perhaps it is not even primarily reason that motivates cooperative life. In this account of Owen, reason plays a different role: it guides humanity to modify its social institutions to be in accordance with a scientific understanding of human nature; it is not, in itself, the source of benevolence and affection. Reason makes human beings aware of their own interconnectedness, and thus allows their passion for themselves to produce benevolent acts. This harmonises with Owen's doctrine of non-responsibility: mankind is rational and can alter institutions for its own improvement, but it cannot 'will' itself to be more moral, or to love. Affection is not a matter of the will. It is passion.

The family question presented Owenites with a profound challenge to their 'Science of Society' and its underlying assumption of absolute continuity between the physical and moral sciences. And although few Owenites renounced their faith in continuity, or in Owen the 'moral Euclid', their struggle with the family question reveals their sincere and thorough engagement with the disharmony they found between the moral and natural sciences. The foundation of their philosophy claimed

that nature is one harmonic whole, and that all aspects of the moral and physical world are congruous parts of the same melodious universe. But their approach to the family undermined this monistic philosophy. It appealed to various types of moral and physical science, from biology to psychology, in an attempt to make sense of the family question.

In this account, the Owenite movement represents a sincere and thorough confrontation between the Enlightenment and what Heilbron calls the ‘scientization and cognitive differentiation’ of the nineteenth century, in which scores of sciences and disciplines emerged that made no effort to impose consensus on the disparate theories relating to human life.¹¹⁰ It is the contention of this chapter that although Owenism has traditionally been placed squarely in the category of Enlightenment thought, its response to the family question seems more like a conversation between two intellectual traditions, one attempting to re-establish monistic continuity, and the other introducing a new polychromatic order.

This chapter examined a movement that accepted the moral legitimacy of self-interest. Owenism believed that ‘rational self-interest’ has a role to play in social love, and thus it accepted some elements of family love as commensurable with social love. The following chapter investigates the Oneida Perfectionists, whose puritanical account of benevolence rejects self-love and, consequently, all those elements of family life that cultivate selfhood and self-love.

¹¹⁰ Heilbron, *Rise of Social Theory*, 146

3. ONEIDA PERFECTIONISM AND THE ‘COMMUNISM OF LOVE’

i. Oneida and the family

Having examined an economic movement in the first chapter, this chapter investigates a religious one: the Perfectionists at Oneida, N.Y. In contrast to Owenism, Oneida chose the opposite solution to the family problem. Owenism accepted selfishness as a legitimate source of moral motivation and social love; consequently, Owenism accepted the family, even while recognising its inherent egotism. Oneida took the opposite approach. The Oneida Community rejected the notion that selfishness has any social or moral role to play, and in doing so it rejected the traditional family, developing a new communal family according to its social, moral and scientific principles. In exploring Oneida’s new family arrangements, this chapter aims to show that Oneida was interested in social, moral and scientific questions as well as in religious ones. This account connects the Oneida Community with a larger narrative about the history of cooperative thought in this period.

In making this link, this dissertation is undertaking a comparison between two movements that are not conventionally seen as historically or ideologically comparable: Owenism was a vast, amorphous movement while Oneida was small and self-contained; Owenism was highly influential, not only because of its extensive size and reach but also because it directly influenced a number of important thinkers from Marx to John Stuart Mill, whereas Oneida faded into intellectual obscurity. Because of its size and influence, historians have taken Owenism far more seriously than the small band of spiritual radicals who established a ‘communism of love’ at Oneida, N.Y., and thus Owenism features in virtually all nineteenth-century intellectual histories, whereas accounts of Oneida can only be found in histories of spiritual fanaticism and other narratives of radical non-conformity.

The family brings these movements together. Despite the geographical, historical and ideological chasm between them, Owenism and Oneida shared a

common interest in the family and, more particularly, in the set of intellectual puzzles that were bound up with the family's social and moral dualism. In highlighting this shared intellectual interest this dissertation does not mean to challenge or trivialise the conventional distinctions between these movements. It only claims that in their treatment of the family, these movements engaged with the same set of puzzles—questions about sociability, morality and human perfectibility.

Of course these disparate movements did not arrive at those questions in the same way, historically or intellectually. Unlike Owenism, whose interest in the family question grew out of its other social and economic ideas, the family was paramount at Oneida from the beginning of the movement. Oneida condemned marriage as 'egotism for two' and parental love as 'partial, unwise, and strongly tinctured with selfishness'.¹ Family love, they maintained, is profoundly anti-social. It obstructs humanity's social feelings by establishing 'exclusive' relationships that inhibit social circulation, and in this sense it amounts to little more than the 'property of persons', opposed both in theory and practice to a cooperative system. It was these anti-social relations that Oneida meant to abolish in its 'communism of love'. Theirs was a cooperative philosophy in which the role of the family was the central issue—above politics or the economies of production and distribution. Oneida members described themselves as 'Bible Communists' who forthrightly rejected society's competitive economic system as a 'grab game' in which 'the prizes are not distributed by any rules of wisdom and justice';² but although they abolished private property, the family was the principal focus of their campaign for social and economic reform.

John Humphrey Noyes, the founder and undisputed leader of the Oneida Community, began developing his radical sexual theories in the 1830s when, as a young student at Yale Theological Seminary he came into sympathy with the radical doctrines of perfectionism, declaring himself 'perfect' on 20 February 1835. He

¹ 'Egotism for Two', *Circular*, 11 April 1854, 220; 'Relations—Earthly and Heavenly', *The Circular*, 22 July 1854, 376.

² Oneida Community, *Bible Communism: A Compilation from the Annual Reports and Other Publications of the Oneida Association and its Branches; Presented in Connection with Their History, a Summary View of Their Religion and Social Theories* (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the Circular, 1853), 10.

immediately lost his license to preach. Two years later he again scandalised New England with the declaration that ‘The marriage supper of the Lamb, is a feast at which *every dish is free to every guest*’,³ and in the following year Noyes applied his radical theories to his own marriage, offering Harriet Holton, his betrothed, ‘a partnership which I will not call marriage, till I have defined it’. In his letter of proposal he warned Harriet that their marriage would be unconventional, as ‘we can enter into no engagements with each other, which shall limit the range of our affections’, further clarifying that she must love all ‘as freely as if she stood in no particular connection with me’.⁴

In 1846 Noyes’s radical sexual theories became the foundation of his first community at Putney, Vermont. According to Noyes’s nephew, George Wallingford Noyes, in May Noyes went walking with one of his followers, a Mrs Mary Cragin, at which time he ‘took some personal liberties’. That night Noyes called a meeting with Mr and Mrs Cragin and his own wife, and, after Harriet ‘promptly expressed her entire sanction’, the four determine to give each other ‘full liberty’, a new sexual system that Noyes termed ‘complex marriage’.⁵ These four individuals, united by a common commitment to Noyes’s sexual theories, formed the nucleus of the Putney Community, which George Wallingford described as ‘Noyes’s preliminary social laboratory’.⁶ In November 1846 the Putney Community ‘carried through a consolidation of households’, abolishing private property and declaring that ‘All individual proprietorship either of persons or things is surrendered, and an absolute community of interests takes the place of the laws and fashions which preside over property and family relations in the world’.⁷ This announcement made other local residents uneasy, which led to charges of bigamy and Noyes’s flight from Putney. In March 1848, amidst growing hostility from the surrounding townships, the Putney

³ Noyes penned this phrase in a letter to his friend David Harrison, not knowing that it would be published. It sparked instant controversy and became known subsequently as the ‘Battle-Axe Letter’. Oneida republished the letter in full. See *The Circular*, 25 August 1874.

⁴ *The Witness*, 23 January 1839, 56.

⁵ George Wallingford Noyes, ed., *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (Oneida, N.Y.: By the author, 1931), 202.

⁶ G.W. Noyes, *Putney Community*, vii.

⁷ G.W. Noyes, *Putney Community*, 205-6.

family relocated to the more remote location of Oneida, N.Y., where it would quickly grow into a community numbering some 250-300 persons.⁸

Like Putney, the Oneida Community grounded itself on the belief that true communism must extend to the 'property of persons'; thus Oneida maintained that 'there is no intrinsic difference between property in persons and property in things; and that the same spirit which abolished exclusiveness in regard to money, would abolish, if circumstances allowed full scope to it, exclusiveness in regard to women and children'.⁹ Owen had condemned the family as an *instrument* of private property, a mechanism of property distribution and inheritance; Oneida denounced the family affections themselves as 'possession', attacking the family as a *form* of property and not merely as its instrument. Because the family was both a type of possession and a mechanism of property, Noyes and his followers placed the family at the centre of their cooperative philosophy. Noyes's son, Pierrepont, recalled that his father considered the family the 'keystone of the world's social system' that 'had been for centuries the strongest support of individualism and a powerful incentive of self-seeking'.¹⁰ Noyes's radical perfectionism could not tolerate egotism, nor admit self-serving affections into their scheme for a divine society; consequently, egotism became the primary distinction between the unbeliever and those who had surrendered to Christ. Possession of any kind had no place in the Kingdom of God. As one of Noyes's loyal followers later wrote, 'No matter what his other qualifications may be, if a man cannot love a woman and be happy in seeing her loved by others, he is a selfish man'.¹¹

⁸ By January 1849 the community had grown to 87 members; by February of 1851 Oneida boasted of 205 members. In 1878, when the community began to break up, there were 306 members. See Oneida, *Second Annual Report of the Oneida Association: Exhibiting Its Progress to February 20, 1850* (Oneida Reserve, N.Y.: Leonard, 1850), 3; Oneida, *Third Annual Report of the Oneida Association: Exhibiting its Progress to February 20, 1851* (Oneida Reserve, New York: Leonard & Co., Printers, 1851), 4-5.

⁹ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 29. Oneida publications incessantly compared marriage to slavery and claimed that the same principles requiring the abolition of slavery required the abolition of marriage. See Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 125-8; and Oneida, *Third Annual Report*, 27.

¹⁰ Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1937), 8-9.

¹¹ Allan Estlake, *The Oneida Community: A Record of an Attempt to Carry out the Principles of Christian Unselfishness and Scientific Race-Improvement* (London: George Redway, 1900), 25.

Because the family played an important role in Oneida perfectionism, Oneida provides the most radical example of practical experimentation with the family problem and its intellectual puzzles: for more than thirty years Oneida practiced ‘complex marriage’, a variety of free love in which adults consider themselves married to all adults of the opposite sex and thus entitled to all the emotional and physical intimacies of traditional matrimony. In this sexual system individuals were expected to change sexual partners frequently. The Community¹² guarded vigilantly against exclusive romantic or sexual attachments, which were denounced as ‘special love’ and equated with anti-social behaviour or selfishness. As part of their effort to eradicate ‘exclusive love’, Oneida employed other mechanisms of collective control. Members surrendered all private property and lived together in a communal Mansion House, where they worked, ate and entertained together. In order to prevent divisive parent-child relationships, which Oneida believed would threaten communal unity by dividing parents’ allegiance, Oneida instituted its own form of birth control, a variety of *coitus reservatus* which they termed ‘male continence’, that kept the birth-rate remarkably low, and the few children born into the Community were raised collectively in the Children’s Wing, rather than by their biological parents. In 1868, after twenty years at Oneida, the Community began an experiment in ‘scientific propagation’, which they also called ‘stirpiculture’ (meaning ‘race culture’), a eugenics programme in which certain couples were allowed to reproduce, subject to approval by the Stirpiculture Committee. The goal was perfection of the human specimen.

¹² In publications, journals and memoirs, members of the Oneida Community frequently referred to the community as ‘the Community’ or ‘the Family’. The capitalisation of ‘Community’ and ‘Family’ signaled something important about the nature of leadership at Oneida: The Community was the ultimate parental and judicial authority; it was the moral, social and political government at Oneida. The Community was the means by which the collective exercised control over the individual, and consequently it was given the status of a type of entity in itself, a type of authority whose legitimacy derived from the collective will of the group. Members referred to ‘the Community’ or ‘the Family’ when talking about their obligations to the collective, or when discussing disciplinary or other actions taken by movement as a whole. In keeping with this conceptual distinction, this dissertation will capitalise the word ‘Community’ whenever it refers to the Community in this sense (in any context in which Oneida members would likely have capitalised the word).

To explore Oneida's response to the family question this chapter identifies three areas of Oneida's thought on the family. In contrast to the stages of Owenite thought, these phases should be understood as thematic discussions rather than as isolated historical stages. This is because Noyes built his entire sociology around his early sexual theories, and most of his ideas can be found even in his earliest writings. Only their implementation evolved. It makes sense, therefore, to examine Oneida thematically while recognising those historical events, such as the relocation to Oneida in 1848, or the beginning of 'scientific propagation' in 1868, that prompted evolutions and expansions to Noyes's original social theory.

The topics will be discussed in a rough chronological order. Phase 1) Sexuality and selfhood, 1831-1854. This phase traces the origins and development of Noyes's sexual theories, specifically male continence and his moral account of the sexual act, which formed the foundation for complex marriage as it was practiced at both Putney and Oneida. This stage begins in 1831 with Noyes's spiritual conversion and continues through first few years of communal life at Oneida, when Noyes's theories were refined and put into practice on a larger scale. Phase 2) The 'communized' family, 1854-1868. This phase begins after several years of experimentation with complex marriage, when Oneida began applying its theories to the family more broadly, defining what Noyes called the 'communised family'. This period comprehends almost fifteen years of social experimentation at Oneida, during which time the Oneida Perfectionists lived as one vast family, possessing no property, raising children collectively, and recognising no familial institutions or power structures save those of the Community Family. This section explores the physiological and psychological apparatus that Oneida used to break down the traditional family, as well as the social mechanisms that maintained order in the absence of traditional patriarchal authority. Phase 3) Scientific Propagation, 1868-1881. The third and final phase begins with Oneida's campaign for 'scientific propagation' and continues until the dissolution of the community in 1881.

These phases offer a new narrative of the Oneida Community. Although Oneida is infamous for the sexual indulgence of complex marriage, it is the

contention of this chapter that Oneida is best understood as an attempt to liberate the family from its traditional grounding in sexual and reproductive relationships. Noyes's theory of male continence derived from the belief that the social and sexual elements of the sexual act could be separated, both in theory and in practice, from its propagative function, the result being a sexual 'marriage' in which the primary function is social rather than reproductive. The goal at Oneida was, therefore, to establish an enlarged family free from the divisions of sexual unions and reproduction, which create traditional families and subdivisions within the Community Family.

This was the heart of Noyes's sociology. In this new system there were no mothers and fathers, no parents and grandparents. Members referred to the Community as 'the Family', and the only patriarch was 'Father Noyes' himself. In the absence of traditional sources of familial authority, such as parenthood, Oneida devised its own family government to maintain this inflated kinship. Members were required to attend the daily Evening Meeting and submit themselves to 'mutual criticism', a strange practice in which individuals silently accepted formal correction and censure, either from the Community or from an appointed 'committee of criticism'.¹³ The whole system relied on an informal hierarchy known as 'ascending and descending fellowship', which ranked members according to their spiritual attainments and granted particular privileges, often sexual, to those at the top. This communal family lived together for some twenty years until, in 1868, Noyes determined that perfectibility would require a scientific approach to human reproduction; he therefore reintroduced sexual reproduction and childrearing into the communal family.

Implicit in this account is a critique of conventional accounts of the Oneida Community. It challenges those narratives that dismiss the family as evidence of Oneida's spiritual fanaticism: their interest is in free love and other deviations from sexual norms rather than in Oneida's intellectual struggle with broad conceptual puzzles about morality and the role of social science. These accounts attribute

¹³ Oneida Association, *Mutual Criticism* (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the *American Socialist*, 1876), 18.

Oneida's sexual unorthodoxy to a number of different sources: some locate its genesis in Noyes's personal biography, such as his obsession with a woman named Abigail Merwin, or in his psychological need for control and dominance; others classify Oneida's sexual deviancy as a response to the transient and fragmented nature of the nineteenth-century industrialised family. For an example of the former see Robert David Thomas's psychoanalytical account of Noyes in *The Man Who Would Be Perfect* (1977); instances of the latter approach can be found in Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality* (1981) and *Women, Family, and Utopia* (1991) or Louis J. Kern's *An Ordered Love* (1981).¹⁴ More particularly, some narratives designate complex marriage an extreme response to the women's rights movement. Interestingly, these narratives place Oneida on both sides of the woman question—that is, some accounts attribute Oneida's doctrines to radical feminism while others discern a malevolent effort to preserve male dominance amidst calls for feminist social change.¹⁵

These accounts examine Oneida through a variety of lenses, from sexual psychoanalysis to nineteenth-century feminism, but they share a common myopia: they analyse Oneida exclusively as a hotbed of spiritual fanaticism, situating its philosophy relative to other spiritual radicals, most commonly Shakerism or Mormonism, while failing to perceive the larger intellectual project of which Oneida was a part.¹⁶ By situating Oneida exclusively relative to other radical spiritualists and fanatics, these narratives imply that Oneida is interesting only as a specimen of cultish exoticism and not as an intellectual movement. But although Oneida certainly had many of the characteristics associated with the word 'cult' in the modern, deeply

¹⁴ Thomas, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect*; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*; and Kern, *Ordered Love*.

¹⁵ Foster recognises the inherent sexism of Noyes's philosophy; however, he writes that in the context of the nineteenth century, 'one is struck by the extent to which the Community broke down or undercut traditional male and female occupational patterns and authority relations'. See Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 105. Kern analyses Oneida and comes to the opposite conclusion, describing Oneida's sexual unorthodoxies as 'admirably suited to unite the contradictory needs and fears that men felt in their relationship with women'. Furthermore, he interprets stirpiculture and male continence as attempts to control female sexuality. See Kern, *Ordered Love*, 233-43, 270, 275.

¹⁶ Lawrence Foster and Louis Kern both ground their comparative studies on the same three religious communities—Oneida, the Shakers and the Mormons. See Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* and Kern, *Ordered Love*.

pejorative sense of the term, such characteristics only make Oneida's engagement with classical questions about sociability and human perfectibility more striking. Thus to dismiss Oneida as mere spiritual fanaticism is to fail to grasp the larger philosophy underpinning their social experiment. However bizarre and 'cultish' their social practices may seem to a modern observer, any account of the Oneida perfectionists must recognise that they saw themselves as authors of a new 'social theory', a master science designed to comprehend every aspect of human life—social, moral and scientific. They believed that their radical family practices constituted a methodical and scientific approach to serious moral and social questions.

Like Owen, Noyes assembled his social system from a wide variety of moral, social, psychological and physiological theories, claiming that his sociology represented the most complete synthesis of all social and scientific theory. In his *History of American Socialism* (1870), an analysis of seventy-eight cooperative movements, Noyes took particular care to situate his own 'Bible Communism' relative to Owen's 'communism' and Fourier's 'joint-stockism'.¹⁷ In addition to cooperative philosophy, Noyes engaged with the nascent biological and physiological sciences that were coming of age during this period. He attributed his theory of male continence to a synthesis of contemporary physiology, including Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology*, Thomas Malthus and the 'French inventors'.¹⁸ In the 1860s Noyes began to study Darwin and Galton, an investigation that culminated in his own theory of 'scientific propagation', which Noyes himself termed the 'vital center of sociology', thereby situating his own philosophy not only in relation to Darwin and Galton but also to Auguste Comte.¹⁹ The origins of male continence and 'scientific propagation' suggest that Noyes was infatuated with the scientific method and its promise of unlimited progress.

Obviously Noyes saw himself as a purveyor of spiritual, social and scientific theory. Like the Owenites, Noyes and his followers intended their sociology to

¹⁷ Noyes, *American Socialisms*, 195.

¹⁸ John Humphrey Noyes, *Male Continence* (Oneida, New York: Office of the *Oneida Circular*, 1872), 6-8.

¹⁹ John Humphrey Noyes, *Essay on Scientific Propagation with an Appendix Containing a Health Report on the Oneida Community* (Oneida, N.Y.: Oneida Community, ca. 1875), 1.

comprehend every aspect of human life, from physiology to morality. This belief in the absolutism and universality of their social theory escalated their family doctrines from the realm of social improvement to that of scientific perfectibility. They did not aim to simply reform society; they sought to understand it, and the laws that governed it, hoping to reconcile the social and moral sciences to the methodology of the physical sciences. In offering this account of Oneida and the family, this dissertation aims to show that although Oneida and Owenism belong to different intellectual traditions, on different continents and each with their own peculiar intellectual aims, their engagement with the family matured into a set of questions about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science.

Recognition of this intellectual kinship does not requires historians to disregard or downplay the considerable differences between these two movements; indeed, those differences only serve to make their participation in a common project more remarkable. Owenism began in England as an economic movement; Oneida was a product of American spiritual revivalism. They also differed in their physical composition: Owenism was a vast movement, diverse both geographically and ideologically; Oneida was a small, self-contained commune which, in three decades, never went far beyond 300 members. Unlike Owenism, Oneida did not aspire to grow into an immense movement, and consequently after 1856, with very few exceptions, Oneida stopped considering new applicants for admission into its small family. It sought isolation from traditional society in order to perfect its 'social theory' and a sufficiently small membership to live as one family.

This points to another discrepancy between Oneida and Owenism. Both movements considered themselves instruments of immense social change, but they differed in their understanding of the role they believed they would play in that change. Owenites believed that their new family practices would evolve slowly, in step with the rest of society; consequently Owen taught his followers that rational marriage would be 'improved as society advances'.²⁰ Oneida envisioned a different role for themselves. Isolated in their commune, Oneida conceived of itself more as an

²⁰ *NMW* 4 May 1839.

exemplar, what Louis J. Kern classified as a ‘paradigmatic rather than a participatory role in the reform process’.²¹ They aimed to fully work out their social theories and offer the world a paragon of social life, an example that others would voluntarily follow. This provides yet another explanation for Oneida’s practical extremism relative to Owenism: while the Owenites only practiced ‘rational marriages’ in a limited sense, explicitly waiting for the rest of society to embrace their philosophy before making further changes, Oneida worked out its social theory to the fullest possible extent, establishing an isolated social system in which traditional sexual and social mores were replaced by the ‘Bible Communism’ of John Humphrey Noyes.

In suggesting this comparison of Owenism and Oneida this chapter does not contend that the two movements shared a common approach to the family problem. Owen’s ‘rational family’ is not interchangeable with Oneida’s ‘enlarged family’. Both movements aimed to counteract the family’s anti-social tendencies, but they believed those tendencies derived from different aspects of family life. Noyes claimed that the qualities of an ‘ideal marriage, may exist between two hundred as well as two’, and it was by renegotiating marriage and the sexual relationship that he hoped to purge the family of its individuality, insularity and partiality. Owen’s ‘rational family’ was, by contrast, held together by individual partiality and inclination, united by a rational self-interest; Oneida explicitly condemned affections derived from partiality and self-interest, or indeed from any sources that rely on individual or particular experiences not shareable by the community at large.

From this perspective, Owenism and Oneida represent opposite sides of the same question. Both perceived family love as self-interested and partial. The difference is that Owenism accepted self-interest and partiality as sources of moral motivation and Oneida did not. Consequently, Owenism accepted family love, with its selfishness and partiality, as commensurable with social love or the general love of humanity, and Oneida did not. Instead, the Oneida Perfectionists constructed a social system to repress those aspects of the family that inculcate selfishness and partiality. In this sense Owen’s radical familialism amounts to a re-education project in which

²¹ Kern, *Ordered Love*, 4.

self-interest remains intact but family love is grounded on a rational understanding of human nature. Oneida's project went much deeper. It aimed to assault the very sources of selfishness and partiality, and to do this it focused on the origin and expression of human love. Writing to the Putney Community in January 1848, just one month after his flight to escape legal charges, Noyes defined the cause for which his followers would, just two months later, sacrifice their former lives to begin a new life at Oneida: 'The head and front and whole of our offensive is the communism of love' he wrote.²² This was the great project of the Oneida Perfectionists. It amounted to a renegotiation of all types of human love—social, familial, and even the love of one's self.

ii. Sexuality and selfhood, 1831-1854

John Humphrey Noyes was the intellectual foundation of the Oneida Community. In fact, it would be difficult to overstate the community's unfaltering devotion to his doctrines, theories and practices, and consequently the extent to which life at Oneida emerged from the vigour and imagination of this one solitary figure. Noyes held the unqualified devotion and obedience of many of his followers throughout the decades of the community's existence, and in many cases long after its dissolution. His son, Pierrepont, who was born and raised at Oneida, recalls that his father 'seemed a great man, or better perhaps, a great power. I was told that he was my father, but he seemed the father of all of us, just as God is the Father of all of us'.²³

Noyes converted to perfectionism in the 1830s, declaring himself 'perfect' in 1835. It was in the decade following this conversion that Noyes developed his unique physiology and, ultimately, his radical sexual theories—specifically complex marriage and male continence. In 1838 Noyes married Harriet Holton, at which time

²² G.W. Noyes, *Putney Community*, 368.

²³ P. Noyes, *My Father's House*, 28, 81, 160.

he had already expressed his disapproval for the exclusive nature of traditional marriage. After his marriage, in response to a series of unwanted pregnancies, Noyes devised his theory of male continence, a system of birth control that would, in the 1840s, provide the foundation for ‘complex marriage’. Because Noyes developed his sexual theories at the same time that he was developing his own brand of perfectionism, it is unsurprising that there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Indeed, they shared a common social and moral account of human nature, and a common psychological account of moral motivation.

Historians have exhaustively examined and re-examined male continence and complex marriage; far less have undertaken a serious study of Noyes’s perfectionism,²⁴ which sheds light on the social, moral and spiritual motivations behind complex marriage, and, perhaps even more importantly, on the scientific approach to human improvement underpinning Noyes’s new social arrangements. This chapter corrects this oversight by regarding Noyes’s philosophy as the perfectionists themselves did—that is, as one congruous whole that comprehends every aspect of human life, from spirituality to psychology, and from moral motivation to economics. Once Noyes’s perfectionism is understood as a universal science of human life, it becomes clear that Noyes’s radical sexual practices derive from his account of moral motivation and human perfectibility and that no account of Noyes’s sexual theories can be considered complete without an equally robust account of his spiritual and psychological doctrines. Consequently this dissertation explains—and it is the only account that explains—Oneida’s preoccupation with ‘propagation’ because it is the only account that establishes the link between Noyes’s physiological account of sexuality and his psychological account of moral motivation. Male continence and complex marriage explicitly aimed to eliminate reproduction from the marriage relation; however, the social and moral aims behind this practice cannot be understood without first grasping Noyes’s physical and metaphysical

²⁴ Richard DeMaria may be one exception, whose study of the Oneida Community attempts to grasp Noyes’s unique brand of perfectionism; however, DeMaria is not interested in the overlap between Noyes’s spiritualism and his scientific theories. See Richard DeMaria, *Communal Love at Oneida: A Perfectionist Vision of Authority, Property, and Sexual Order* (New York: Mellen, 1978).

account of the sexual act, and why, for Noyes and his followers, sexual intercourse came to symbolise the death of individuality and selfhood.

This approach will highlight one further aspect of Noyes's thought that is of interest to this dissertation—namely, his attempt to reconcile questions about moral and social perfection with the physiological and biological sciences. It will demonstrate that although Noyes is frequently relegated to the realm of spiritual fanaticism, in fact his sexual theories derived from a diverse body of moral, social and scientific theory, from physiology and psychology to moral philosophy and spiritual perfectionism. Noyes believed that he could master them all, shaping the moral, social and physical sciences into one 'vital science' or 'sociology'. Consequently, Noyes uses the language of moral philosophy, applying terms like 'egotism' and 'mutual sympathy', in his discussions of biological and spiritual concepts. It was his belief that the spiritual and moral sciences could fill in the gaps left by the physical sciences, and that, taken together, they could solve the most difficult questions about human life.

Male continence and complex marriage

The stated aim of complex marriage, as it was practiced both at Putney and at Oneida, was to separate the social and anti-social elements of sexual love, which at Oneida meant the separation of the individual and the social aspects of sexual love. Complex marriage was a direct assault on conventional notions of possession, desire and the will, which Noyes condemned as part of the myth of individuality. The goal in complex marriage was social congress without serious or prolonged attachment, and certainly without forming any attachments that might hinder one's social circulation with the rest of the community. Thus the oft-repeated dictum at Oneida was 'love and pass on', meaning that individuals ought to love each other interchangeably, for the same spiritual reasons that they loved any member of the community, and that personal or particular attachments only distract, causing members to base their affections on partiality rather than on spiritual merit.²⁵ To encourage this spirit of

²⁵ 'The National Spirit', *Free Church Circular* 20 March 1851, 70-71.

interchangeability and non-possession, complex marriage meant that every adult was considered married to every other adult of the opposite sex, and thus no particular attachment precluded the development of any other physical or emotional relationship.

This network of interchanging sexual partners was only feasible due to another of Noyes's social innovations—the theory of male continence. The object of male continence was to separate, both in theory and in practice, the social or spiritual function of sexual intercourse from its physical or individualistic counterpart. Noyes believed that the sexual organs serve three distinct purposes, as the 'conductors, first, of the urine, secondly of the semen, and thirdly of the social magnetism'. According to Noyes, 'the amative is as distinct from the propagative, as the propagative is from the urinary'. This tripartite conception of the sexual organs was, Noyes believed, derivable from physiology, as 'the organs of propagation are physiologically distinct from the organs of union in both sexes' and thus 'the sexual conduction of male and female no more necessarily involves the discharge of the semen than of the urine'.²⁶

After identifying and separating out these three distinct physiological functions of the sexual organs, Noyes concludes that the sexual act itself has two distinct functions—the first being the 'conduction of the organs of union, and the interchange of magnetic influence, or conversation of spirits', and second the 'discharge of the semen', which is propagative. In distinguishing between the social and the reproductive functions of the sexual act, Noyes taught his followers to participate in the sexual ritual as a purely social exercise, which Noyes compared to a conversation, without progressing it to the physical or propagative stage. Noyes declared the social function superior to the propagative, and he mourned the state of traditional morality, in which the superior 'amative function is regarded merely as bait to the propagative, and is merged in it'.²⁷

In separating out the propagative from the sexual or social functions of the sexual organs, Noyes was participating in a broader shift in the medical sciences,

²⁶ Noyes, *Male Continence*, 12.

²⁷ Noyes, *Male Continence*, 11.

which had, towards the end of the eighteenth century, begun to disentangle reproduction from female sexual pleasure. In the early eighteenth century it was thought that female orgasms increased the reproductive capacity of women; however, towards the end of the century medical professionals began to regard the female orgasm as irrelevant to conception.²⁸ In developing his own moral physiology, Noyes pushed that separation further, concluding that if the reproductive could be separated from the sexual, then the sexual could be separated from the social. In short, in the separation between reproduction and sexual pleasure, Noyes perceived an opportunity to incorporate social and moral questions into the medical sciences. In devising the specifics of his theory Noyes was particularly influenced by the communal celibacy of the Shakers and the population question as outlined by Thomas Malthus. He also read Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology, or a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question* (1830) and Charles Knowlton's *The Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People* (1832). He rejected Owen's method of *coitus interruptus* as a violation of the Bible and dismissed Knowlton's contraceptive methods, and in fact all contraceptive methods, as 'those tricks of the French voluptuaries'.²⁹

As an alternative, Noyes devised his own account of the sexual act, which he believed would remove the propagative aspect of sexuality altogether. To do this in practice, Noyes divided the sexual act into three distinct parts: first, the 'presence' of the male in the female; secondly, the 'motions'; and finally, the 'nervous action' or the 'crisis'. Noyes maintained that the first two stages existed to serve social and spiritual purposes and could be entirely isolated from the third. The first two stages of sexual ritual were, he concluded, wholly voluntary and only the third and final 'crisis' was outside the perfect control of participants.³⁰ To safely ensure that sexual intercourse remained social and did not progress to the propagative stage, Noyes taught his followers to discipline themselves at the early stages of intercourse, rather

²⁸ Thomas Laqueur, 'Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology', in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth-Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1.

²⁹ Noyes, *Male Continence*, 5.

³⁰ Noyes, *Male Continence*, 7.

than risk losing control. Believing that he had separated out the positive social benefits from the physicality of intercourse, Noyes proposed that there could be no harm in sexual expression, so long as participants limited its practice to its social function.

This new system required impressive control from men at Oneida. According to Noyes, Oneida aimed to apply the same moral restraint that Paul, Malthus and the Shakers advocated to limit propagation; however, instead of applying restraint to prevent intercourse, Noyes introduced restraint at a later stage of the process, after partners had enjoyed the social benefits of sexual union. Isolated from the ‘horrors’ of unwanted pregnancy, Noyes claimed that male continence actually augmented the amative potential of sexual intercourse because it did not climax and terminate in the vulgar, purely physical, propagative act, but remained genuinely social. Noyes repeatedly declared that the ‘separation of the amative from the propagative, places amative intercourse on the same footing with other ordinary forms of social interchange . . . the same in kind with other modes of kindly communion, differing only by its superior intensity and beauty’.³¹

Beginning as a private solution to unwanted pregnancy in Noyes’s own marriage, male continence quickly became a doctrinal pillar of community life at Oneida. And it proved remarkably effective. In her analysis of Oneida, Maren Lockwood Carden concludes that between 1848 and 1869 only thirty-one accidental births took place at Oneida, a community of approximately two hundred adults, who had frequent sexual congress with a variety of partners.³² Like many other practices at Oneida, male continence relied heavily on the notion of ‘ascending fellowship’—the doctrine that those of lesser spiritual achievement ought to subject themselves to the influence and improvement of those more spiritually developed, which often corresponded to age. In theory, the doctrine of ascending fellowship required that individuals balance their spiritual expenses, meaning time spent with those of less spiritual attainment than themselves, with spiritual gains, or time spent with those

³¹ Noyes, *Male Continence*, 16.

³² See Maren Lockwood Carden, *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 51.

spiritually superior. This doctrine applied even to Noyes himself, and Pierrepont Noyes recalls that his father often performed a type of meditation to communicate with the apostle Paul, thereby balancing his fellowship with the community in order to have a balance of ascending and descending.³³

In the case of male continence, this meant that older and more experienced members usually introduced the youth into the practice, with older women introducing young men, and older men introducing young women.³⁴ However extreme or inappropriate this practice may seem, community members defended Noyes and his doctrines, even and perhaps especially his radical sexual notions, long after Oneida's dissolution. Oneida defended its sexual practices on the grounds that they were 'social' and spiritual rather than physical and individualistic. They saw their sexual system as morally defensible and perfectly in harmony with Christian commitments to worship, restraint and fidelity. One member later described Oneida as 'a society, the sexual purity of which shook the wickedness of orthodox prudery to its shallow foundations'.³⁵

The above account is the conventional understanding of complex marriage and male continence: in this narrative these practices were practical efforts to extend the communism of property to the communism of love by abolishing possession and exclusivity. Any further analysis of complex marriage and male continence, and the science of human nature underpinning them, requires a study of Noyes's perfectionism, as it is in this part of his philosophy that Noyes gives his most complete account of moral motivation and human perfectibility. It is, therefore, essential to understanding the importance of the sexual act to Oneida, and thus the social, moral and scientific aims that Oneida hoped to achieve by modifying conventional sexual practices.

³³ See P. Noyes, *My Father's House*, 132.

³⁴ For the theoretical statement of this doctrine, see 'Brother Noyes on Love', *Circular*, 25 March 1867, 10. Obviously this practice created some social tensions, perhaps even instances of very young women introduced into the system by much older men. For an example of this doctrine in practice, see Robert S. Fogarty, ed., *Desire & Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 120.

³⁵ Estlake, *Oneida Community*, 17.

The sexual act

Noyes's theology asserted a dual nature of humanity: a division between the collective or social spiritual self and the physically isolated, egotistical self. He taught his followers that 'individualism appertains to the body, to spirit limited by matter, materialized spirit' and that 'socialism, the principle of universal fellowship, identity of interests, pertains to pure spirit, that is freedom from the limitations of matter'. In Oneida doctrine *physicality* produces *individuality*; the physical constitution of humanity is such that a consciousness of self and personal interests—personal, physical enjoyments experienced only by one's self—creates the isolation of self-existence. From this view, physical matter is an enemy to the unity of spirits, to the literal melding of individual interests into a collective. Thus Noyes condemned humanity's awareness of 'space' as a 'great curse that rests upon mankind'.³⁶ Without space, there is no physical isolation, and without physical isolation, there is no individuality.

Noyes believed that the physical fact of individuality precludes the possibility of genuine altruism: he claimed that so long as there exists a distinct idea of *self* as separate from the *not self*, the 'very powers of nature' make it impossible for an individual to love one's neighbour as one's self. Noyes rejected rationalism as a viable solution to the fact of human selfishness. He warned that although an individual may rationally conclude that he ought to love his neighbour as himself, humankind remains incapable of loving another entity with the same natural devotion it feels for itself, 'however much we may try to reconcile the heart and the intellect with it'. The conscience is too weak to overcome the selfish impulse. This impulse, which Noyes termed the '*I* spirit', cannot be forced to love a neighbour as it loves itself: 'My intellect, my judgment, and all the powers of my nature cry out against me for not loving him as myself; but how am I to find a way to do it? There is the problem that the world have now before them to solve'.³⁷

³⁶ Home talk by J. H. Noyes, 'Concentric and Extrinsic Vision', *Circular*, 18 January 1852, 44 and 'The Social Principle Primary', *Free Church Circular*, 23 September 1850, 249-50.

³⁷ Home Talk by J. H. Noyes, 'We Spirit and I Spirit-continued', *Spiritual Magazine*, 15 October 1849, 278-9.

Due to his pessimistic account of both benevolence and reason, Noyes concluded that the only way to redeem humanity from its inherent egocentrism is to extend the conception of the self beyond the limits of traditional egotism to a type of collective egotism, viz., to expand the object of one's selfishness rather than attempt to eradicate it. In explaining how this 'I spirit' can be transformed into the 'We spirit', Noyes declares, 'My neighbor has got to be brought up into identity with myself, so that he is part of me; then it will be just as easy to love him as myself'.³⁸ Thus Noyes taught his followers that to be 'perfected' meant that individuals no longer conceive of themselves or behave as individuals, and as a result human nature manifests itself to be acutely cooperative and social: '[T]he selfish principle which expresses itself in private property and familism, is secondary nature, not primary; a secondary nature induced by delusion, and perpetuated by the ignorance of men with regard to the innermost secret of their being'.³⁹

Noyes believed that communism would restore mankind to an original, undistorted understanding of itself as a collective entity. This required a process so intense and strenuous that Oneida Perfectionists described it as comparable only to the death and rebirth of a new man. The fall separated mankind's consciousness from God's consciousness, and consequently, only through rebirth could men regain an awareness of their unity with God and with each other. This death involved the passing of the physical element in human nature, or, at the least, the subjection of the physical to the spiritual. Thus Oneida denounced any practice or institution that strengthens the physical element of mankind at the expense of its spiritual counterpart, and Noyes took this philosophy so far as to condemn eating and drinking as a process that 'introduces *matter* into our being' and '*individualizes* us, or makes us animals—full of animal passions, i.e. selfish, individualized, limited passion'. Noyes termed this passion 'alimentiveness', warning his followers that 'It is by eating and drinking that the material part of us strengthens itself against the spiritual, and increases the despotism of the flesh over the spirit, thus establishing the inverted order

³⁸ Home talk by J. H. Noyes, 'We Spirit and I Spirit-continued', *Spiritual Magazine*, 15 October 1849, 278-9.

³⁹ 'The Social Principle Primary', *Free Church Circular*, 23 September 1850, 252.

of things'.⁴⁰ Noyes's solution to the social threat of gluttony was similar to his recommendation regarding amateness: he counselled the community to make this physical, individualised passion more social by bringing it under the control of the community. The aim was to disconnect individuals from their material interests and passions, in the hopes that they would regard themselves as in a type of posthumous state where only their spiritual or socialised interests mattered. Noyes taught his followers that because of Christ's resurrection, the Church, which Noyes refers to interchangeably as 'the Community', exists in a posthumous state free from material, individualised interests. Thus the Oneida Perfectionists asserted that 'as far as worldly interests are concerned, we are dying men all the time'.⁴¹

In light of Noyes's metaphysical account of human nature, his obsession with the sexual relationship takes on new meaning. Because matter is the source of individuality and isolation, bringing one's neighbour into identity with one's self required a type of transcendence over matter. Consequently, Oneida's desire to transcend the natural physical barriers that separate individuals explains, at least in part, its preoccupation with the sexual act generally, and with complex marriage and male continence in particular. Believing the physical subordinate to the spiritual, Oneida concluded that the unity of two beings connected only by contact, by physical touch, is inferior to the unity of beings fused in some way that breaches physical barriers, as they believed God was unified with Christ.

Accordingly, sexual intercourse attained a peculiar status at Oneida. The community venerated sex as a gift—the physical act given to humanity that enables limited, physical beings to approach spiritual unity. They believed that in some real sense, sexual intercourse ruptured the physical partitions between individuals and permitted the physical and spiritual fusion of two beings. Thus complex marriage and male continence were grounded on the same physical/spiritual binary that underpinned Noyes's account of human nature and spiritual perfection. As noted above, the aim of both complex marriage and male continence was to separate the

⁴⁰ 'Organization of the Passions: Alimateness', *Free Church Circular*, 23 September 1850, 243-5.

⁴¹ 'Criticism', *Free Church Circular*, 2 August 1850, 197.

social or spiritual elements of intercourse from its physical or individual aspects. In this sense, the Oneida Perfectionists believed that they could triumph over the physical isolation of individuality through the sexual act. One effect of this belief in the special social faculty of sexuality was a tendency to regard sexual acts undertaken for other than social purposes, such as masturbation, as products of a psychological and social pathology. This view of masturbation was common among nineteenth-century medical professionals,⁴² which suggests that like many of the other psychological, physiological and ethical theories that made up the rich ideology at Oneida, Noyes and his followers did not create their own moral physiology in a vacuum. They intentionally re-appropriated mainstream science for their own purposes, believing that only they understood the true value and application of the scientific discoveries that others had made.

Because Oneida believed the sexual act central to spiritual perfection, and the death of the physical self, they applied highly sexualised language to describe the spiritual unity of God and Christ. In Oneida theology, the relationship between God the father and his son corresponds closely to the relation between males and females, with God being male and Christ female, because ‘The Father fills the Son and is enveloped by him. The Son envelops the father and is filled by him’. With this foundation, Oneida interpreted scriptural references to Christ as the bridegroom of the Church with more literality than its other religious counterparts: the female Church ought to receive Christ the way Christ received God. In the two relationships, Christ plays the role of both the male and the female—the female in relation to God and the male in relation to the Church. Consequently, Oneida declared the complex marriage relation ‘a more perfect illustration of the unity of the Father and the Son, and of the Son and the church, than any other’.⁴³ After elevating the sexual act to a divine act of spiritual cohesion, Oneida declares that complex marriage extends the sexual unity that is now ‘limited to pairs . . . through the whole body of believers’.⁴⁴

⁴² Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 227-9.

⁴³ ‘The Condensation of Life’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 15 March 1846, 3.

⁴⁴ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 27-8.

The sexual act symbolised social unity and the death of the physical self. Intercourse was such an important symbol of spiritual perfection that Noyes described his own perfection—his spiritual unity with Christ—as a sexual experience. In a home talk delivered in 1849, just one year after the relocation to Oneida, Noyes described his own perfection as a ‘courtship’ with Christ that culminated in a ‘crisis’, in which ‘I melted out of self into abandonment to Christ. . . . He pervaded my consciousness so that I could not tell us apart’. At the culmination of this crisis, Noyes reported that he felt a ‘yielding and giving up of my life’, which he also describes as the ‘dying of self’.⁴⁵ This account reveals that Noyes believed the sexual act closely related to death, in particular the death of the physical man and the eradication of individual, physical isolation.

For Oneida, therefore, the sexual act symbolised both the spiritual union of two physically isolated entities, and also the death of that physical element which separates individuals. Oneida maintained that the peculiar joy of sexual relations consisted in the merging of two beings, the ‘one actually existing in the other’, an act in which ‘selfishness is utterly obliterated’.⁴⁶ The spiritual marriage between a believer and Christ was, according to Oneida, this type of sexual relationship, where the female (the believer) surrenders him or herself to Christ. Noyes called this ‘self-abandonment’ or the ‘passing out of self’, and he taught his followers that it alone could constitute their ‘marriage’ to Christ.⁴⁷

Thus Oneida used sexuality to assault individuality on several fronts. First, it assaulted individuality as a conceptual or metaphysical principle. Oneida valorised the sexual act to symbolise the triumph of spiritual unity over physical isolation. In so doing it not only affirmed its doctrine of a collective humanity, but it also employed complex marriage to undermine sexual or romantic connections that relied on individual experience or partialities. Oneida reduced all love, even sexual, to a question of spiritual merit and collective unity. Second, complex marriage undermined individuality in practice by giving the community unprecedented control

⁴⁵ Home Talk by J. H. Noyes, ‘Union with Christ’, 18 September 1849, 242.

⁴⁶ ‘Lessons of Love’, *Circular*, 19 March 1857, 36.

⁴⁷ Home Talk by J.H. Noyes, ‘Union with Christ’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 18 September 1847, 242.

over the sexual lives of its members. Those who openly challenged Noyes or the Community found themselves cut off from the sexual and even social liberties available to their acquiescent and deferential counterparts. Power struggles between individuals and the Community almost always concluded with the individual's public submission to the elders and to Noyes personally. In extreme cases, individuals left the Community, but often they left alone, without the lover or child for which they had set themselves against the collective. In more typical cases, after multiple criticisms for their 'special love', the Community persuaded lovers or parents to separate from their loved ones. Oneida journals make references to cases where the elders sent a man or a woman to Wallingford, a branch-off community, because they had fallen into a special love with a member at Oneida.

Because scholars have not conceived of Oneida's philosophy as the perfectionists themselves conceived of it—that is, as a comprehensive science of society—they have failed to perceive this connection between Noyes's spiritual perfectionism and the practice of complex marriage. They have not identified the common account of moral motivation and human perfectibility that underpinned both Noyes's perfectionist theology and his sexual radicalism, and consequently they have failed to see the larger intellectual puzzles that Oneida aimed to solve with its new family arrangements. However, once the moral, social and scientific underpinnings of Noyes's philosophy are understood, it becomes clear that Noyes and his followers were struggling to answer the same questions about partiality and limited sociability that plagued the Owenites, and, much like the Owenites, the family became the focus of these questions.

Unlike Owenism, however, which accepted self-interest as a source of moral motivation in both social and family love, Oneida took the opposite approach, aiming to repress not only individual interests but actual selfhood. Noyes and his followers rejected rationalism or altruism as possible solutions to the problem of limited sociability, claiming that so long as there remains a distinct idea of self, nature will compel human beings to behave selfishly. To combat the physical reality of individuality, Noyes chose to undermine selfhood, and the sexual act came to

symbolise the process by which spiritual unity triumphed over the physical barriers that isolate individuals. In this account Oneida's sexual radicalism was about neither sexuality nor radicalism; it was, rather, a deliberate attempt to answer complex questions about morality, science and limited sociability.

iii. The 'communized' family, 1854-1868

Oneida's moral physiological account of the sexual act denounced the 'crisis' and 'propagation' as anti-social while venerating the other aspects of sexual congress as profoundly social, the ultimate expression of collective selfhood. From this perspective, the aim of complex marriage and male continence was to establish a marriage relation free of propagation, and to re-establish sexuality as a social and not a propagative activity. The result was an 'enlarged family' free of traditional parental relationships and power structures. Oneida could live as one family because it had, in purging marriage and sexuality of its propagative components, liberated the community family from the threat of the individual family—that is, it had purged itself of familial subdivisions. This section will explore the 'communized' family that resulted from this radical departure from conventional family life.

This period begins in 1854. The early years at Oneida were fraught with difficulties, both financial and social. Noyes, unable to face this chaos and confusion, spent much of this time at a community outpost in Brooklyn, N.Y., until the death of John Miller, who had been leading Oneida in his absence, forced Noyes to return and assume direct leadership of his community. This is also the year in which Oneida achieved stability in the practice of complex marriage, which had caused much difficulty and conflict in its early years. In this period the Oneida Perfectionists built the infamous Mansion House, which allowed the entire community to live as one family because it housed all members under one roof, where they ate at a common table and socialised in the expansive communal areas. Private quarters in the Mansion

House were intentionally small and austere, encouraging members to spend their time in social circulation in the common areas, and thus the Mansion House was a physical manifestation of Oneida's 'communized' family. It allowed the Community, in theory as in practice, to break up individual families and locate individuals within the larger family structure. It also provided space for the collective life of the Community, such as the Daily Meeting and the practice of mutual criticism. These practices were integral to maintaining order in the 'enlarged family' at Oneida: they provided an authoritative framework in the absence of traditional power structures, and they also contributed to Oneida's goal of repressing individuality and selfhood. In that sense, they were integral elements of Oneida's response to the problems of family love, partiality and sociability.

'Special love'

In the 'communized' family Oneida intended to solve the moral and social problem of partiality; however, because Oneida was founded on Noyes's skeptical account of moral motivation—the belief that so long as there exists a distinct idea of self, human beings are incapable of genuine altruism—Oneida's solution to the problem of partiality was extreme: abolishing partial behaviour and partial love would, according to their doctrines, require the abolition of the partial perspective, of those aspects of selfhood that create partial love. To achieve this aim, Oneida denounced all types of love that derive from particular experiences or exclusive sentiments—in short, any experience or sentiment of which the entire Community could not equally take part.

Instead, Oneida taught its members to love each other for impartial reasons, meaning that a person's love for a particular individual ought not be determined by 'personal relations with him, but by his relations to general society and to Christ'.⁴⁸ Oneida used the term 'special love' to denote all those relations that derived from self-will and particularity instead of the communal spirit. 'Special love' could develop between any two individuals in the community, and consequently Oneida restricted

⁴⁸ Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 55.

special attachments wherever it found them, believing that the mischief of ‘amateness’ could occur between lovers, husbands and wives, parents and children or even friends. Pierrepont Noyes recalls that as a child he was separated on numerous occasions from his cousin, Dick: ‘We were by choice inseparable; so much so that we were often “separated” for falling into the spiritual error of “partiality”’.⁴⁹

But although special love might occur between any two individuals it was feared most in the sexual relation, and thus the Community taught its members to only love their sexual partners to the degree that God manifests himself in that person. This was Oneida’s definition of ‘impartiality’. In cases where individuals seemingly placed greater importance on their romantic and sexual relationships than on their relations with the Community, Noyes condemned their relationship as a ‘double kind of egotism’.⁵⁰ This rule applied with equal force to individuals and families, and any other social subgroup. Impartiality at Oneida required the total preeminence of the Community above all other social relations, and members believed that any violation of this principle amounted to ‘idolatry’, or, in keeping with Oneida’s sexual metaphors, a violation of the marriage rights of God.⁵¹

Noyes believed that the frequent exchange of partners was the best means by which to guard against special love in sexual relations; consequently, he taught his followers that true love manifests as self-abnegation, and that couples who attain this higher standard of love would never wish to isolate or hoard the object of their affections. Only in cases of ‘special love’ would a lover wish to hinder the love others felt for the object of their admiration, and consequently Oneida declared that love must only be allowed in so far as it does not obstruct love from developing for others, as this signals that self-will had entered the relationship.⁵² In adopting this definition of love, Noyes denounced traditional conceptions of love as veiled manifestations of selfishness and ownership, and thus he taught his followers to evaluate their love relations according to the degree of possessiveness or exclusivity that they felt

⁴⁹ P. Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 49.

⁵⁰ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 58.

⁵¹ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 115, 118, 122; ‘The Sacrifice of Love’, *Circular*, 9 September 1854, 478.

⁵² ‘Scraps and Talks’, *Circular*, 4 January 1869, 330.

towards their lover: ‘If we detect the self-principle’, he warned, ‘they become to us proper objects of detestation, whatever may be their apparent merits’.⁵³ In teaching abandoning tainted types of love—meaning love corrupted by individualism or possession—Noyes and his followers aimed to discover a perfect type of love free from the moral ambiguity of traditional love relations. They would not accept the slightest manifestation of egotism in love, and their radical practices were designed with the stated intention of reclaiming the family, which, according to Noyes, ‘had been for centuries the strongest support of individualism and a powerful incentive to self-seeking’.⁵⁴

Philoprogenitiveness

Oneida denounced parental love, which Noyes termed ‘philoprogenitiveness’, as a particularly formidable strain of special love. This was because the parental relationship, much like the marriage relation in traditional society, was by its nature exclusive: it was grounded on experiences and sentiments that could not be shared by the Community at large, and consequently it created divisive subgroups that fragmented the whole. Parental love undermined the ‘communism of love’ in two ways: first, in the case of parents, who cared for their own children in exclusive ways and, therefore, might put their children above the Community; and, secondly, in the case of children, who might mistakenly believe that the particular and exclusive duty they owe their parents is of more importance than their obligation to the Community. Noyes had identified this threat as early as 1844, denouncing philoprogenitiveness as ‘one of the strongest passions and one that struggles hardest to maintain its independence from Christ’. Like other forms of ‘special love’, Noyes pronounced parental love a manifestation of selfishness that must be subdued.⁵⁵

⁵³ Home Talk by J. H. Noyes, ‘Faith—Its Conditions—Faith Works and Self-Works’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 15 May 1847, 3.

⁵⁴ This is not a direct quote from J.H. Noyes. It was attributed to him by his son, Pierrepont, and thus although the sentiment certainly reflects Noyes’s general views, the phrasing belongs to Pierrepont Noyes. P. Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 8-9.

⁵⁵ ‘Love of Children’, *Perfectionist and Theocratic Watchman*, 21 September 1844.

In 1854 the *Circular* denounced parental affections as ‘partial, unwise, and strongly tinctured with selfishness’, and evidence suggests that Noyes’s theoretical opposition to parental love lost little potency in application: to protect the community from this selfish love, children lived in a separate wing of the house tended by those considered most fit for childcare. Parents were allowed to take their children out for an hour or two, but generally no more than once a week, and the Community monitored even this practice with great suspicion.⁵⁶ Pierrepont Noyes confirms that he was allowed to visit his mother only once or twice a week. During these reunions he recalls that he ‘often wept bitterly when the time came to return to the Children’s House’. Of these encounters Pierrepont writes, ‘I remember my mother’s terror lest my crying be heard. She knew that Father Noyes frowned on any excess of parental affection, as he did on all forms of “special love”, and she feared that such demonstrations might deprive her of some of my regular visits’. There was at least one occasion where Pierrepont’s crying did indeed result in the Community separating him from his mother, just as it would have done with two lovers who had fallen into ‘exclusive’ love. On that occasion Pierrepont was told by ‘Papa Kelly’, the head of the children’s department, ‘You have evidently got sticky to your mother. You may stay away from her another week’.⁵⁷

Oneida believed mothers more likely to fall into the snare of philoprogenitiveness because they nursed their children and formed unhealthy attachments early on, but they feared special love from fathers as well. Indeed, during the experiment in scientific propagation, the elders of the community frequently ‘reassigned’ fathers to other children if they felt that they had developed a special attachment to their own offspring; however, even before 1868 when parenthood became more common, Oneida guarded against parental affection and attempted, in as much as it was possible, to undermine natural parents and convince children to think

⁵⁶ P. Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 65-7.

⁵⁷ See P. Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 67. It ought to be noted that this section focuses on the years 1848-1868 and that Pierrepont Noyes, as a product of the stirpiculture campaign, belongs chronologically in third and final phase, which begins after 1868. However, due to a fire that consumed most primary materials relating to Oneida, including many journals and letters, he is included here to give a flavour for how Oneida’s doctrines played out in people’s lives.

of the Community as parents. In 1849 the *Spiritual Magazine* published an exemplary letter from a father to his son, written while the father was away from the community and in which he writes with unsentimental satisfaction, 'Your mother and I are both getting away from you more and more. . . . [A]s your father and mother get away from you, you must learn to take God and the Association in their place. They are your best father and mother and will take care of you forever. When you are weaned you will not be my boy, but God's boy'.⁵⁸

It was the explicit object of these practices to replace biological parents with the Community. Oneida aimed to simplify the allegiance of both parents and children by undermining parental and filial duty. What is interesting about Oneida's response to philoprogenitiveness, however, is that it is based on the same account of moral motivation that underpinned complex marriage: that is, on the belief that human beings are incapable of genuine altruism and that, consequently, social behaviour can only be secured by expanding the conception of the self. Applied to parenthood, Oneida believed that if it could expand the individual or traditional family to the enlarged or communised family, then parental love, or the concern for one's offspring, could be redirected towards the community at large.

According to Noyes, the best defence against parental love was to 'throw our children and property into the interests of God'.⁵⁹ By surrendering children to the Community, Oneida believed that parental love could be transformed into social love and social behaviour. In 1855, the *Circular* published an article titled 'A Mother's Experience', in which one woman explains how this principle functioned in her own family: 'I do not see much of my son', she explains cheerfully, adding, 'His character will be formed I see, not by me, but by the whole family influence here. . . . My only way then to fulfil a parent's duty to him and satisfy philoprogenitive care, is to seek the elevation and highest improvement of the whole Community'. Reflecting on her experience she concludes that Oneida's family arrangements are perfectly suited to achieve their aim, which is to neutralise the anti-social influence of humanity's

⁵⁸ *Circular*, 1 November 1849, 302-3. Also see 'A Mother's Experience', *Circular*, 22 November 1855, 175.

⁵⁹ 'Love of Children', *Perfectionist and Theocratic Watchman*, 21 September 1844.

inherent selfishness: ‘Thus, in Communism, that strong instinct which leads all to seek the good of their offspring, works in favour of benevolence instead of selfishness’.⁶⁰ Oneida’s solution is a type of extended egotism. It is not rational altruism or enlightened self-interest. Oneida’s account of human nature and moral motivation is far too pessimistic to accept the Owenite solution. The only solution to the problem of self-interest and partiality is, therefore, to extend the idea of self and of family to include the entire Community.

Mutual criticism

Mutual criticism was means of government for Oneida’s ‘enlarged family’. It was the means by which Oneida maintained order in the absence of traditional power structures, and in this role it encompassed all government at Oneida—familial, social and political. In fact, it was frequently applied to those individuals who showed resistance to the Community’s authority or, more frequently, to the authority of Noyes himself.⁶¹ ‘As a society cannot exist without government’, Oneida declared, ‘so *Communism cannot exist without Free Criticism*’.⁶² The practice itself was quite simple: the subject of the criticism sat quietly while other members told him or her their faults. The Oneida Community believed whole-heartedly in the divine power of mutual criticism, both as a spiritual restorative and also a physical medicine for the sick. They believed that helping individuals see the ‘truth’ about themselves healed the spirit, even if the initial process was unpleasant or painful. Mutual criticism became so important to life at Oneida that in her memoir of community life, Constance Noyes Robertson asserts that although a person could be ‘connected with the family’ at Oneida, they could never be ‘in reality a member of the Association while they did not wholly sympathize with it in the love of criticism’.⁶³

⁶⁰ ‘A ‘Mother’s Experience’, *Circular*, 22 November 1855.

⁶¹ See Robert S. Fogarty, ed., *Special Love/Special Sex: An Oneida Community diary* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 96; and Fogarty, *Tirzah Miller’s Intimate Memoir*, 80-81, 138.

⁶² Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 78-9. Emphasis in original.

⁶³ Constance Noyes Robertson, ed., *Oneida Community. An Autobiography, 1851-1876* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 128.

Secondary accounts of the Oneida Community focus much of their attention on Oneida's sexual practices and, as a result, have paid far less attention to the other aspects of communal life at Oneida. These narratives dismiss mutual criticism as little more than an instrument of collective control, a mechanism 'to check the abuses of the practice of complex marriage'.⁶⁴ Because historians have failed to grasp Oneida's larger intellectual project—that is, the creation of a master science to revolutionise human life according to new moral and scientific standards—they have failed to identify the role that the Oneida Perfectionists intended criticism to play in their new social order. They have failed to recognise that Oneida practiced mutual criticism for the same reasons that it practiced complex marriage: to undermine partiality and individuality. Just as Oneida had reformed sexual relations to purge them of particularity and selfhood, so it intended mutual criticism to purge the Community of individualistic perspectives and sentiments. Thus criticism was not merely a subsidiary of complex marriage; rather, it was an integral part of Oneida's solution to family love and the problem of sociability.

Historical evidence for this claim is found in three sources: first, in Oneida's formal defence of criticism in a pamphlet published in 1876; second, in the many examples of actual criticisms found in Oneida periodicals, journals and pamphlets; third, from descriptions of mutual criticism found in Oneida journals and memoirs. These sources make it clear that criticism played a vital role at Oneida, manifesting itself daily in virtually every aspect of religious and social life. For many years Oneida selected exemplary criticisms to publish in the community's periodicals, and Oneida journals and memoirs are full of references to criticisms, both between individuals, such as between friends, or more formally from the standing criticism committee, or even from the entire community at the Daily Meeting.⁶⁵ Even when criticisms occurred in relative privacy they were frequently read to the entire family at meetings, not just initially but long afterwards, whenever an influential member judged that it would benefit the group in some way.

⁶⁴ Raymond Lee Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: Nineteenth-century America* (Baltimore: Pelican, 1974), 184.

⁶⁵ Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 42.

Similar to complex marriage and the campaign against ‘special love’, the moral and social aim of criticism was the suppression of individuality and selfhood. It was a brutally personal and demeaning process; however, this was part of its appeal to Oneida. In fact, as they had done with the sexual act—in describing how the sexual act signifies the dying of the isolated physical self—the Oneida perfectionists frequently compared the experience of criticism to death.⁶⁶ In applying criticism, Oneida aimed to forge a new collective entity from the fragmented individual and family units that they had rejected. Oneida records reveal that many criticisms consciously assailed behaviours in a purposeful attempt to *correct* the individual’s self-perspective—to take him or her out of themselves, out of their physically limited, atomic viewpoint—in order to consider their behaviour from the Community’s collective frame of reference.

The Oneida Community maintained that mutual criticism enlightened its subjects with the ‘spirit of truth’, which freed individuals from the ‘narrow-mindedness’ of egotism. The physical isolation of the individual identity meant that no person could access a true knowledge of their spiritual, collective self without opening their mind to include the group perspective. Mutual criticism provided that perspective. It rescued the recipient from an ‘*untruthful* attention to self’ and forced the subject to view himself or herself through the disinterested eyes of others, with the stated goal that individuals learn to see themselves ‘without partiality, without flattery, as we love our neighbor’.⁶⁷ To love one’s self without partiality—the unattainable *raison d’être* of Smith and Hume’s moral philosophy—reappears in Oneida theology as a central but solvable obstacle. Self-love remains. But it is possible, they insist, to subdue the *self*, even if nothing can vanquish the *love* of self. Of course this task can only be achieved through a type of collective. The individual by itself is powerless against self-love without the aid of a group.

That Oneida intended criticism to undermine individuality and selfhood is clear from Oneida’s records. The ‘example’ criticisms—those that Oneida published

⁶⁶ Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 16.

⁶⁷ ‘An Evening at Brooklyn’, *Free Church Circular*, 2 August 1850, 203; ‘Egotism—Its Character and Cure’, *Circular*, 2 July 1853, 263; ‘Extracts from Fénelon’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 5 August 1848, 7.

in its own periodicals for the moral education of the community—reveal that Oneida comprehended considerably more in the term ‘selfishness’ than is meant conventionally. In common usage, ‘selfishness’ describes a venial behaviour—a trivial, almost expected defect of character. But at Oneida selfishness was anything but venial, and its suppression was the entire aim of mutual criticism. Oneida believed that in some meaningful sense criticism transformed the individual or isolated self, bringing it into identity with the Community. Oneida claimed that criticism, or the spirit of truth, ‘is the true *solvent* of our individuality’, melding isolated, sovereign units into a ‘communized character’.⁶⁸ In practice, this meant that members were criticised not for wrong or morally objectionable conduct, but often for trifling behaviours that the Community considered inharmonious with the whole. Thus most criticisms addressed fairly trivial characteristics, often mere matters of social nicety. The tone is serious, but the content might seem frivolous to those who fail to grasp Oneida’s preoccupation with what it termed the ‘social virtues’.

In one example member A. is criticised for being too direct in his manner of speaking. His critics admit that this particular fault might be acceptable generally as an individual trait, but they asserts that ‘in our social intercourse, this trait needs some modification’ to achieve the elevated demands of ‘social harmony’. Notably in this case, A. enters a defence of himself, clarifying that before he joined the community he valued debate as an instrument to pursue truth, to which one of his critics responds, ‘That rule will do for the rough-and-tumble of life abroad, but it will not do here, where the very object of our association is harmony. For us, such exhortations as these, are the rule—“Endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit”—“Mind the same things”—“Be of one heart and of one mind”—“forbear one another”’.⁶⁹

The case of member A. reveals that Oneida recognised, in theory and in practice, a distinction between general virtues and what might be called ‘social virtues’. In the community, individualities that may actually bring positive benefits—such as ‘giving intensity to all [one’s] operations, singleness of eye and consequent

⁶⁸ ‘Egotism—Its Character and Cure’, *Circular*, 2 July 1853, 263. Also, Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 86.

⁶⁹ Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 48-50.

success', as in the case of A.—are suppressed in the name of social unity. Consequently, the improvement of individuals did not mean the development of characteristics that, independent of the community, would be called virtuous, but rather the development of those virtues that made community life possible and pleasant. In this way, mutual criticism served both to illuminate individuals with the collective perspective beyond their own limited experience and also to teach members of the community a new collective conception of social virtue.

In practice, this commitment to social virtues meant that individuals could not embrace their collective nature until every individual is 'essentially alike—until they have all had the same development, and until each man finds himself mirrored in every other man'.⁷⁰ Thus unity required the repression of individualities, meaning all those characteristics, opinions and habits that differentiated members from the community and from each other. After all, Oneida believed that self-will isolates individuals from God, and therefore, from each other.⁷¹ Union with God and the Church requires that an individual bring himself or herself into likeness with those around him, sacrificing elements of self that the collective cannot share. This is what Oneida meant by the term 'selfishness'. The term 'selfish' was not only applied to behaviours that proved blatantly self-serving, although it was certainly applied in such cases, but it was also applied to individuals who displayed an overly robust awareness of their own self as an entity distinct from the Community. In the literal sense they were deemed too 'self-ish', meaning they were unduly pre-occupied with their existence as a solitary being while failing to strengthen their collective self.

Thus mutual criticism was integral to Oneida's solution to the family problem. In fact, it derived from the same moral psychology underpinning the practice of complex marriage: an account of human nature in which individuals are incapable of genuinely altruistic behaviour, and the solution is, therefore, to purge human society of individuality, particularity and selfhood. In fact, in as much as Oneida was also trying to solve the problem of limited sociability, mutual criticism can be seen as a

⁷⁰ 'Unity and Universal Culture', *Circular*, 2 November 1854, 571.

⁷¹ 'The Doctrine of Disunity', *The Perfectionist and Theocratic Watchman*, 11 October 1845, 57.

direct attempt to bridge the moral and psychological gap between the partial and impartial perspective. The aim at Oneida was to make individuals impartial spectators of their own lives in the sense that their fallacious, partial, individual perspectives were replaced with the more universal perspective of the Community. For example, in one criticism R. is criticised because ‘his own *individual experience* occupies all his thoughts’. His critics explain that ‘R. cannot expect others to be attracted to the center around which his thoughts revolve—every one must be willing to forsake his own center to find unity’. Continuing, his critics add that ‘Nobody can make their own experience an interesting theme, only as it is an exposition of the truths of general interest. To have fellowship with each other, we must all be interested in THE TRUTH’. The truth in this instance means those thoughts and actions that are in harmony with God and the community. In pursuit of this unity, Oneida chastised individuals for various social faults, from having and expressing unique opinions to having strong likes and dislikes with which the community as a whole could not sympathise.⁷²

Brotherly love

Considering Oneida’s unremitting hostility towards selfishness and partiality, it remains to be seen what role, if any, Oneida allowed the family to play in its divine social order. And yet despite Oneida’s hostility for traditional family relationships like marriage and parenthood, in some sense Oneida admired the family as a model of social love. Like Owenism, Oneida referred to itself as ‘the family’. Noyes described the Community as God’s family, claiming that members are united by a motive similar to ‘ordinary *family affection*’, and, in addition, Noyes stated that the ‘right idea of a church is that of a family’.⁷³ Noyes regarded the traditional family as a divisive structure that curtailed the natural circulation of human sympathy; however, Noyes envisioned a new family organisation that he believed not only harmless but actually vital to communism.

⁷² Oneida, *Mutual Criticism*, 51-2.

⁷³ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 27-8. Emphasis in original; Home Talk by J.H. Noyes, ‘Feeling and Understanding’, *Free Church Circular*, 20 December 1850, 322-5.

Noyes modelled this new family on his moral classification of the affections, which ranked the various types of love according to their social or individualistic tendencies. According to Noyes, children begin life in the first and most inferior of human relations, the blood relation, and primarily feel filial love, although this love naturally surrenders to the amative affections at adulthood. This is a natural and organic process, as the amative affections are superior to both filial love and philoprogenitiveness.⁷⁴ In fact, Noyes declared in 1853 that ‘God himself has in the arrangement of the world provided for the supplanting of this parental affection’. Noyes explained that the ‘first relation is that which comes by blood’, but marriage ‘must be between strangers, as to blood’. Of this process Noyes concludes, ‘The design evidently is, to cause man’s *general* relation to the race—his connection with any possible foreign human being—to become paramount to this relation to mere kindred’. Through marriage, God demands ‘desertion, in one sense, from that primary, partial, limited attachment’.⁷⁵

In this account, sexual or romantic love must itself be subjected to friendship, and eventually to brotherly love. This hierarchy was in place as early as 1845, when Noyes explained that brotherly love ‘must be cultivated before all the other social affections’. It is the love to which sexual love is ‘subordinate’; in fact, according to Noyes, sexual acts are only authorised as ‘conveyances of brotherly love’.⁷⁶ Thus in this hierarchy the lowest forms of love are those that derive from blood relations, such as parenthood or filial duty. These types of love are physical, limited and partial. The next variety consists of amative or romantic love, which draws individuals out of their physical family circle into society; but eventually, as Oneida wrote in 1854, ‘amativeness must come in as the servant of friendship’, a higher form of love that ‘turns in all directions’.⁷⁷ In this new moral ranking, brotherly love trumps conjugal

⁷⁴ ‘Home’, *Circular*, 22 August 1864, 179.

⁷⁵ Home Talk by J.H. Noyes, ‘Friendship, the Superior Affection’, *Circular*, 16 September 1854.

⁷⁶ ‘A Word of Warning’, *Perfectionist and Theocratic Watchman*, 12 July 1845.

⁷⁷ Home Talk by J.H. Noyes, ‘Friendship, the Superior Affection’, *Circular*, 16 September 1854.

relations because ‘Marriage makes of “twain one flesh”, but the brotherly love of heaven, makes all one spirit’.⁷⁸

This concept of brotherly love was not derived from biological consanguinity, but rather from the conviction that all individuals are the children of God; consequently, Noyes’s concept of brotherly love was entirely unrelated to the conventional understanding of affection between siblings. In fact, Noyes’s notion of brotherly love required a new type of family—one free of traditional family divisions, particularly those grounded in the propagative act, like parenthood, sexual love or biological siblings. To achieve this, Oneida embraced a decidedly pro-family but aggressively anti-marriage social philosophy, grounded on the belief that brotherly love imparts a spirit of subjection, subordination and dependence—all social virtues—while sexual love sews seeds of independence and autonomy.

This account suggests that although Oneida’s is infamous for its unique variety of free love, the paramount affection at Oneida was not sexual but brotherly. Furthermore, it suggests that in Oneida’s philosophy the greatest threat to social harmony was not capitalism or marriage, but something more elementary—adulthood. ‘Society under the present system’, Noyes told his followers, ‘is like annual plants, which grow up, scatter seed, and then die’. This death occurs due to the propagative impulses of adulthood, whereby individuals mature and start families of their own. The ‘enlarged family’ of communism requires that individuals remain children in relation to the community. In a home talk titled ‘Becoming as little children’, Noyes warned his followers that ‘Marriage comes into a family, takes the members out, and starts new families which grow for a time, and then, by the same process which gave them a beginning, die out’.⁷⁹

Noyes rejects the propagative family on the grounds that it requires its own death to sustain itself. ‘Every marriage is an act of disorganisation’, Noyes wrote to his followers in 1854, ‘inasmuch as it always breaks up two families to establish

⁷⁸ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 28.

⁷⁹ Home Talk by J.H. Noyes, ‘Becoming as Little Children’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 339; ‘Home in Community’, *Circular*, 24 October 1852, 201. Also see Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 126-7 and ‘The Family and its Foil’, *Circular*, 16 November 1854.

another'. What Noyes proposed for Oneida, however, was a static family in which the Community Family is never fragmented by sexual unions and offspring. In the place of 'families broke up every succeeding generation' by exclusive marriage, Noyes described Oneida as 'a family relation which shall grow right on, like a tree of everlasting growth'.⁸⁰ Such a family is only possible in the 'enlarged' family relation—a social system in which adults surrender their own potential to be parents in order to remain children in the enlarged, communal family. If children cease to be children, nothing preserves communal unity from the divisive, fragmenting tendencies of autonomous adulthood and the resultant atomic families. Childhood is submissive and dependent; parenthood, by contrast, is Godlike, creative and self-determining.⁸¹

And in the divine, perdurable family, only God is an individual in the traditional sense: only God is 'male', self-originating and propagative, while his children are static, 'female' receptors of his original, creative act. To attain their divine, communised self, individuals must never embrace the creative sexual act as paramount. It must remain secondary and restricted. If the propagative capacity of the sexual act could be entirely subordinated to its social function, and marriage and parenthood replaced with non-volitional, non-exclusive love, all members of humanity remain as children in one vast, uninterrupted family.⁸² This explains why Noyes constantly affirmed propagation as the physical and therefore subordinate function of sexuality. According to Oneida theology, allowing the sexual relationship to occupy a central role violates the divine teleology of mankind: it allows the children of God to mature into adults and parents, heads of their own families, and ultimately it leads to social fragmentation.

This explains much of the educational philosophy at Oneida, which emphasised selflessness and submission rather than rationality or autonomy. For Owenism, the problem of childhood was a problem of education: Owenism viewed education as the process by which irrational children are scientifically shaped into

⁸⁰ 'Egotism for Two', *Circular*, 11 April 1854, 220.

⁸¹ See 'Family Communism' in John Humphrey Noyes, *Home Talks by John Humphrey Noyes*, Vol. 1, ed. Alfred Barron and George Noyes Miller (Oneida, N.Y.: Oneida Community, 1875), 283-4. See also Home Talk by J. H. Noyes, 'Becoming as Little Children', *Spiritual Magazine*, 339, 282-3.

⁸² Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 88.

rational adults. At Oneida the process was the opposite: Oneida aimed to take individualised, autonomous adults and transform them into submissive and dependent children, which it accomplished by depriving them of the sexual and parental roles that, in traditional society, define adulthood and signal a state of rationality, independence and autonomy. Perhaps the most interesting example of this re-education process occurred with Noyes's own mother, Polly Noyes. Noyes believed that he must first apply his new doctrines to his own family before applying them to society at large; consequently, he spent much of the 1830s struggling to usurp his mother's parental role in the family. He aimed to persuade her that her propagative function as his *physical* mother was secondary to his *spiritual* paternity over her. She was, he informed her, his 'spiritual daughter', whom he would 'affectionately reprove' when she inappropriately asserted herself above her 'father'. In 1839 Polly conceded, publicly recognising her son as her 'spiritual father in all things'.⁸³

Noyes could not have rejected procreation and parenthood without his conviction that Oneida's 'social theory' would eventually triumph over death. In fact, according to Noyes, after mankind had been reformed spiritually, sexually and industrially, the final step would be the physical regeneration of humanity, which would culminate in the 'victory over death'.⁸⁴ For more than two decades Noyes focused his experiment on the first three of these aims—the spiritual, sexual and economic. Beginning in 1868, however, he turned his attention to physical perfection. He implemented his theory of 'scientific propagation', boldly leading his followers into the brave new world of childbirth and parenthood.

⁸³ Quoted in Thomas, *Man Who Would Be Perfect*, 115.

⁸⁴ Oneida, *Bible Communism*, 41-2.

iv. Scientific propagation, 1868-1880

It has been the contention of this chapter that Noyes and his followers believed that their sociology would comprehend every aspect of human life—spiritual, sexual, economic and physical. Their project derived from a confidence in the ultimate continuity between the moral and physical sciences, that is, from the belief that the principles and methodologies of the physical sciences could be applied to the moral and social sciences. The result would be a ‘master science’ or ‘sociology’, which would synthesise all social, moral and scientific knowledge. The ‘enlarged family’ was the product of this universal sociology. It derived from the methodological synthesis of psychology, physiology and ethics, which Oneida believed required the abolition of the propagative family in favour of a continuous family of non-propagative static children. Thus social and moral perfectibility seemed to require the absence of childbirth and parenthood.

However, a perfectionist such as Noyes could hardly resist the promise of physical perfection through scientific breeding. In fact, as early as 1848 Noyes had declared, ‘We are opposed to random procreation, which is unavoidable in the marriage system. But we are in favor of intelligent, well-ordered procreation . . . We believe the time will come when involuntary and random propagation will cease, and when scientific combination will be applied to human generation as freely and successfully as it is to that of other animals’.⁸⁵ In the 1860s, when Oneida had achieved financial stability and was, in fact, producing a surplus, Noyes began to turn his attention to this topic in earnest. He studied Darwin and Galton, concluding that science had paved the way for physical perfection, but society’s unscientific attachment to traditional marriage obstructed it. The traditional family conflated social, romantic and sexual love; it conflated marriage and parenthood. Thus it could never embark on a campaign in scientific human breeding without abolishing home and family life. This was, according to Noyes, the one thing that science must not do, because human beings, unlike animals, require the socialisation that happens in the

⁸⁵ Cited in Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 253-4.

home. This, according to Noyes, was the ‘hard question which science has now to solve’: how to achieve the scientific perfection of the race through reproduction without destroying the foundations of social life.⁸⁶

It was a problem that Noyes believed he had already solved, and the solution was the ‘enlarged family’. In his essay on *Scientific Propagation* (1872), Noyes explains that ‘If home could be enlarged to the scale, for instance, of the Shaker families, and if men and women could be taught to enjoy love that stops short of propagation, and if all could learn to love other children than their own, there would be nothing to hinder scientific propagation in the midst of homes far better than any that now exist’. According to Noyes the Shakers⁸⁷ had a partial solution. But they lacked the means of scientific perfection, because their enlarged family failed to include ‘propagation in the self-denying way which science requires’.⁸⁸ The scientific genius of Oneida’s ‘enlarged family’, according to Noyes, was twofold: first, it separated sexual and propagative love both in practice and in theory, which allowed individuals to engage in sexual intercourse without producing offspring; second, by expanding the concept of home, it provided a social foundation for those specimens who were not selected for scientific breeding. Thus the ‘enlarged family’ overcame both obstacles to scientific breeding in traditional society. It allowed for sexual intercourse without propagation, and it provided a home for childless individuals.

With this conceptual foundation, Oneida began its experiment in ‘scientific propagation’, which it also called ‘stirpiculture’ (meaning ‘race culture’), a eugenics programme wherein certain couples were allowed to reproduce, subject to approval by the Stirpiculture Committee. To demonstrate their absolute commitment to Noyes and this new phase of his perfectionism, fifty-three young women signed a resolution renouncing their individual interests regarding their propagative partners (‘That we

⁸⁶ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 23.

⁸⁷ It is unfortunate that it was not possible to include the Shakers in this study. The nature of their social and sexual radicalism locates them within the purview of this dissertation; however, I determined not to include them because in addition to different types of sexual radicalism I also wanted to examine different types of movements (ranging in size, ideology, influence, etc.). In view of these considerations I chose Oneida Perfectionism and Mormonism because they offer the sharpest contrast between a small, self-contained spiritual commune and a vast, proselytising spiritual movement.

⁸⁸ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 23.

have no rights or personal feelings in regard to child-bearing which shall in the least degree oppose or embarrass him in his choice of scientific combinations') and that they would willingly abstain from propagation ('that we will, if necessary, become martyrs to science, and cheerfully resign all desire to become mothers, if for any reason Mr. Noyes deem us unfit material for propagation').⁸⁹ These 'martyrs to science' were joined by thirty-eight young men, who signed a similar statement.

Noyes believed that the moral attributes and attainments—even the moral education—of an individual could be passed on biologically to its offspring, and thus 'scientific propagation' represented the culmination of Noyes's efforts to reconcile the moral, social and physical sciences. This is, perhaps, why Noyes declared scientific propagation the 'vital center of sociology' or 'the science around which all other sciences are finally to be organised'.⁹⁰ He believed that scientific propagation was to be the means by which moral and social attainments were preserved and improved upon scientifically—that is, by the proper application of the biological and physiological sciences, society would at last have the means of scientifically cultivating moral and social characteristics. 'Education is waiting for its printing-press', Noyes declared with satisfaction, 'and its printing-press is to be scientific propagation'.⁹¹

This 'printing press' would also contribute to Oneida's central project—the abolition of particularity, variation, and, eventually, individuality and selfhood. According to Noyes, the aim of the stirpiculture project was, in fact, quite similar to the aim of mutual criticism: to improve children it would be necessary 'to find out wherein they deviate from the true model, and then to set at work influences which, under the laws of reproduction, shall directly tend to induce conformity thereto, instead of deformity'.⁹² In this account variation and particularity are deformities, and just as individual perspectives and opinions were 'untruths' that were made to conform by the application of mutual criticism, so these physical variations would be

⁸⁹ Quoted in Parker, *A Yankee Saint*, 257.

⁹⁰ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 1.

⁹¹ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 1.

⁹² Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 3.

made to conform by scientific propagation. Perfection was, according to Oneida, a single, uniform standard: it was a physical and psychological state in which all individuals shared a common perspective and a 'perfected' physical and moral constitution. As Noyes wrote, 'We labor to perfect the individual, but what we want is the art of multiplying copies of our work'.⁹³

Noyes's methodology to achieve this uniformity included what he termed 'breeding in', meaning the experiment should begin with a single pair, whose progeny would procreate exclusively with each other. 'It is an attempt to create a new race by selecting a new Adam and Eve', Noyes explained, 'and separating them and their progeny from all previous races'. Thus even Noyes's stirpiculture focused on the family: it was the unit that he thought most important for scientific breeding. 'There can be no doubt', he wrote in 1872, 'that by segregating superior families, and by breeding them in and in, superior varieties of human beings might be produced which would be comparable to the thoroughbreds in all domestic races'.⁹⁴

It is ironic, of course, that Noyes would abolish all biological and propagative relationships from his 'enlarged family'—all in an effort to undermine the traditional individual family—only to name the individual family the natural unit of scientific procreation. Traditional society forbids propagative relationships within a family; Noyes, however, seems to abolish all propagative relations *except* within a family. In practice, Noyes did not focus exclusively on a single pair, or even indeed on his own family, although in 1874 he did tell his niece, Tirzah Miller, that he intended to have a child by her, as that would be 'intensifying the Noyes blood more than anything else he could do'. Noyes told Tirzah that it was his duty to 'pursue stirpiculture in the consanguineous line' and, in Tirzah's words, 'God willing, he intends to have a child by Helen, Constance, and me'.⁹⁵ Helen and Tirzah were both his nieces; Constance was his daughter.

Noyes's commitment to *breeding in*, in addition to his belief in the superiority of his own bloodline, produced what Tirzah would describe in her diary as 'an

⁹³ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 1.

⁹⁴ Noyes, *Scientific Propagation*, 12 and 15.

⁹⁵ Fogarty, *Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*, 72.

aristocracy of Noyes blood', which Tirzah dismissed as contrary to the 'genius of communism' because it prioritised physical superiority over spiritual merit and thus went against the community's spiritual perfectionism. 'One of our dominant ideas is that the natural should be subjected to the spiritual', Tirzah wrote. 'Is not Mr. Noyes as likely and even more likely to transmit his spirit to those who have adopted his faith than to those who are of his seed?' Reflecting on this contradiction between Oneida's spiritual perfectionism and the physical perfection promised by scientific procreation, Tirzah concludes that 'The only kind of aristocracy possible among us is a spiritual aristocracy'.⁹⁶

Because the Noyes bloodline was considered the most perfect or pure, there was a real danger at Oneida that their ideal of universal selflessness was in practice selfish universalism—that is, that Noyes was using the ideas of universalism to promote the interests of himself and his children. And because of this formidable, almost 'cultish' devotion to Noyes, there was always some risk that instead of being 'martyrs to science', the members at Oneida were actually martyrs to Noyes's own ego. Thus in writing against the 'aristocracy of Noyes blood', Tirzah had stumbled upon what was, perhaps, the central difficulty of the Oneida Community—that is, the tension between the 'enlarged family' and the traditional propagative family. 'We are taught to consider the children as belonging to all the Community with equal claims on our love', Tirzah wrote. 'Why should not this doctrine be applied to the Noyes children?'⁹⁷ This struggle between traditional propagative relationships and spiritual collectivism was constant at Oneida. It manifested in all their various practices and doctrines from mutual criticism to complex marriage; in fact, there is a sense in which the Oneida Community is a story of the struggle between two competing ideas of the family: first, that of the traditional propagative family, which consists of biologically defined parents and siblings, existing within a larger network of similarly constituted families; and second, that of the 'enlarged family', where propagative or biological ties are secondary and all are equally children of the Community.

⁹⁶ Fogarty, *Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*, 106-7.

⁹⁷ Fogarty, *Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*, 106-7.

This conflict found the greatest expression in the relationship between the Noyes family and the Community Family. For years Noyes struggled to overcome his own partiality and integrate his own family into the community. He had limited success. Theodore was his only legitimate son by traditional standards, as all his other children by Harriet had died, but by his own doctrines he ought to have loved all the children of the Community as he loved his own son. At the least he ought to have loved the products of his 'complex marriages' as much as those of his legal marriage. But he did not. He treated Theodore with obvious partiality and displayed cool indifference towards Pierrepont, his scientific offspring, whom he fathered as part of the experiment in scientific propagation. His excuse for this partiality was, of course, the superiority of the Noyes bloodline, yet even that doctrine only served to segregate the legal or 'legitimate' Noyes family from the rest of the Community, and to identify it as particular, special and distinctive—all qualities that Oneida hoped to repress. Thus Oneida's goal to purge itself of the individual family may have succeeded in all but one respect. There remained, at least, one family at Oneida that defined itself according to propagative, biological relationships: the 'aristocracy of Noyes blood'.

'Martyrs to science'

Ultimately, Oneida failed. The perfectionists believed the world would easily perceive the superiority of their social doctrines and quickly adopt their improved sexual, family and community relations. But although the marriage institution has evolved since Oneida's breakup, it has not moulded itself to fit the idealistic template that Oneida offered. Yet Noyes and many of his followers maintained the imminent dominance of their social doctrines long after their experiment had collapsed. After the breakup Noyes himself fled to Canada, where he died in 1886, and although he never again visited the remains of his community, he also never admitted defeat. At the end of the great experiment, Noyes recorded, 'We made a raid into an unknown country, charted it, and returned without the loss of a man, woman, or child', to which his scientific progeny, Pierrepont, responded, 'Could anything be more dramatic—a

man now in his seventieth year, standing amid the ruins of his lifework, shouting, “Victory!”?”⁹⁸

That Oneida failed to synthesise the century’s heterogeneous moral, social and scientific theories, and that the movement eventually crumbled under the strain of these diverse and sometimes contradictory ‘sciences’, is perhaps less relevant than fact that like the Owenites, Noyes and his followers believed that such a synthesis was possible. In this sense they really did see themselves as ‘martyrs to science’—as pioneers of a master science or ‘vital center of sociology’ that would comprehend all of human life. And in their efforts to work out this master science, Oneida engaged with the same intellectual puzzles that plagued Owenism: questions about the family, limited sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science. But their solution was quite different. Oneida’s non-propagative, ‘enlarged family’ aimed to abolish self-interest, rational or otherwise, while Owenism had accepted a type of reasoned self-interest as a proper foundation for social life. Yet despite their differences, Owenism and Oneida were part of the same story, the same effort to reconcile the social, moral and physical sciences and solve the family problem.

Historians have failed to perceive this link because they have consistently refused to view the Oneida perfectionists as they viewed themselves—as ‘martyrs to science’. Instead, they have relegated Oneida to the realm of spiritual radicalism and free love. If they had taken Oneida’s intellectual claims seriously, they would have seen that Oneida not only engaged with the family to answer serious moral and intellectual questions, but also that Oneida’s solution to the family problem undermines the conventional account of Oneida’s sexual-spiritual radicalism: it was Oneida—a movement conventionally associated with free love and boundless sexuality—that aimed to abolish the sexual and propagative relationship. Their goal was not limitless sexuality but rather to take the sexual element out of the sexual act, and their entire project derived from their pessimistic account of moral psychology, an account in which the human self is entirely incapable of genuine altruism and must therefore be subdued to make social life possible.

⁹⁸ P. Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 176.

4. MORMONISM AND THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

i. Mormons and the family

This chapter explores another spiritual movement, Mormonism. But although Mormonism and Oneida were both products of American revivalism they shared little in common structurally: Oneida deliberately limited its numbers to approximately 300 persons, producing an isolated and tight-knit commune; by contrast Mormonism proselytised aggressively, producing tens of thousands of converts that extended through the whole of the Utah Territory. Mormonism represents another movement that, like Oneida, has conventionally been regarded as self-contained within the history of cooperative thought. Mormons practiced polygamy, a marriage system in which Mormon men married multiple wives, and because of the spiritual origins of this practice historians have treated polygamy as little more than a manifestation of religious fanaticism. To counter this conventional account, this chapter will argue that polygamy was only one of many changes that Mormons made to the conventional family, and that in reforming the family Mormons engaged with the same set of intellectual puzzles as Owenism and Oneida.

That is not to say that Mormons shared Owenism or Oneida's assessment of the family. In fact, Mormonism rejected the family question as outlined by Owenism and Oneida, both of which recognised the inherent selfishness of family love and assumed that their acceptance or rejection of family love would be predicated on the moral and social role that they assigned to selfishness in their new society: Owenism accepted that selfishness has a role to play in social life and thus accepted family love, while Oneida rejected both selfishness and the family. Mormonism embraced a third option—the patriarchal family. In doing so Mormonism accepted the same fundamental premise as Owenism and Oneida, i.e. that family love is inherently selfish, but it rejected the conclusion that Owenism and Oneida deduced from that premise, namely that accepting family love requires accepting selfishness and

partiality as constituents of social life. Instead, Mormons set about to discover how they could preserve family love without allowing the family to become an instrument or school of selfishness.

This was a novel articulation of the family problem, and the Mormon solution to it was hierarchy. Mormons strengthened family love and duty within the individual family (which, in Mormonism meant a man and his plural wives and children), but it also created a supra-patriarchal family—a body that comprehended the whole church—in which each family occupied a particular place within the hierarchy. In this new social system, Mormons welcomed concepts like partiality, duty and obligation: children obeyed their parents and wives their husbands; such partiality was acceptable, even admirable, because husbands and fathers obeyed their own religious leaders, who in turn obeyed the supra-patriarch, the prophet Brigham Young. Thus Mormons believed that through patriarchy it had transformed the traditional notions of partiality and familial obligation, which before had undermined social solidarity, into adhesives of the collective social bond.

The central claim of this chapter is that Mormonism's radical family practices amounted to more than spiritual radicalism; rather, that they were part of Mormonism's struggle with broad conceptual questions about sociability, morality and the role of social science. Making this case for Oneida required only a serious examination of the social, spiritual, ethical and scientific theories that underpinned John Humphrey Noyes's sexual and familial radicalism from the beginning of the movement; however, making this case for Mormonism requires a different historical narrative because Mormonism came to the family question much later in its history than Oneida did. At Oneida, even from the earliest years of the movement the family was part of a dialogue about larger social, moral and scientific questions. Complex marriage was, from the beginning, a social theory bound up with moral psychology, physiology and human perfectibility.

This was not the case with Mormon polygamy. Evidence suggests that at its genesis polygamy was, in fact, little more than a manifestation of spiritual extremism: Joseph Smith, the founder and prophet of the Mormon religion, instituted polygamy

after reading in the Old Testament that God had commanded Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses to have many wives. Smith became convinced that this doctrine was integral to the organisation of the primitive church.¹ Like other biblical restorationists in this period, Mormons believed that through them God intended a ‘restoration of all things,’ meaning he intended to restore all the truths of the Old and New Testaments, and consequently, Mormons modelled themselves after the Bible in many particulars, having apostles, priests, bishops, patriarchs and calling themselves the ‘House of Israel’. Smith’s desire to style himself after the great biblical patriarchs and take many wives fit comfortably with the restorationist currents already present in Mormon spiritualism. In 1843 Smith received an additional ‘revelation’—which to his followers meant a directive from God—about polygamy, in which he quoted the Lord’s promise to Abraham, adding, ‘This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham, and the promise was made unto Abraham’.² This theological and syntactic justification for polygamy would remain central to the church’s defence of polygamy into the late 1880s, which suggests that Mormonism’s self-identification with ancient Israel remained an important justification for polygamy long after Smith’s death.

This is the conventional account of Mormon polygamy offered by historians of American religious movements and implicitly accepted by historians of cooperative thought. The effect is to dismiss Mormonism’s radical familialism as mere spiritual fanaticism, and thus to exclude Mormonism from historical accounts of nineteenth-century cooperative thought. But Mormon polygamy has a very different story to tell. The conventional account may accurately describe the origins and practice of Mormon polygamy under Joseph Smith, but it is the contention of this chapter that after Smith’s death Mormonism experienced a series of crises that forced the movement to justify their radical practices in broader terms, and this discourse cannot be dismissed as mere spiritualism: the first crisis was the trek across the

¹ The precise date when Smith began to practice polygamy is a source of great contention among historians; however, there is some consensus that he first conceived of plural marriage in 1831. B. Carmon Hardy estimates that it began between 1830-1833. See Hardy, *Works of Abraham*, p. 34.

² Doctrine and Covenants, 132:31.

American plains, which occurred after the death of Joseph Smith; the second was the 1852 proclamation, when the church formally recognised the practice of polygamy.

The first event—the mass migration across the American plains—began in 1846. Mormons had been driven from their homes in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois, and in 1844 their prophet was murdered at the hands of a mob. Under the leadership of Smith's successor, Brigham Young, some 70,000 Mormon converts undertook the long and arduous journey to the Utah Territories, mostly in wagons and handcarts. The collective trauma of crossing the plains required a restructuring of Mormon family life that went beyond polygamy; it required an intellectual renegotiation that merged Mormonism's spiritual notions of the family with its economic and social aspirations, prompting a re-evaluation of every aspect of family life, including but not limited to sexuality and marriage. Many Mormons had lost their property when they fled their homes. Furthermore, some 20,000 were poor converts recently arrived from England, who often had very few personal possessions and no resources to undertake the thousand-mile march west. Under these circumstances, property and kinship became fluid: the poor were often assigned to live and travel with more solvent families, and thus it was common to find multiple families living under one roof. Even after the Mormons arrived in the Utah Territories, surviving on the American frontier required an unprecedented level of social and economic cooperation.

This shift manifested most clearly in Brigham Young's leadership, and in the patriarchal function that Young fulfilled as prophet of the church. Once in the Territories, Young directed the great body of the Mormons Saints³ as a father might direct his children.⁴ He was a spiritual mentor, but he also assumed responsibility for the economic, social and moral wellbeing of the entire body of the Saints, and,

³ Mormons frequently referred to themselves collectively as 'Saints', a reference to their belief that they were the 'Latter-day Saints' sent to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ before his second coming. Any references to 'Saints' in subsequent commentary or primary material should be understood in this sense (as a reference to the membership of the Mormon church).

⁴ This process began even in the 1840s in the Nauvoo period. However, the difficulty of crossing the plains and arriving in the Utah Territories allowed Brigham Young to exercise unprecedented patriarchal authority. For another treatment of why Mormons might have turned to patriarchy in this period, see Benjamin Park, 'Early Mormon Patriarchy and the Paradoxes of Democratic Religiosity in Jacksonian America', *American Nineteenth Century History* 14 (2013): 183-208.

furthermore, he ensured that the Saints did the same for one another. He extended spiritual ‘callings’—a Mormon practice in which spiritual leaders, in God’s name, ‘call’ individuals to perform specific tasks or fulfil certain roles—but these callings were frequently practical and economic rather than spiritual in nature. Some men were ‘called’ to build irrigation systems for the city; others were ‘called’ to relocate their families and begin strategic settlements outside Salt Lake City. Even the spiritual concept of missionary work became entwined with the physical wellbeing of the Saints: one man was called on a two-year ‘mission’ to ‘build mail stations between Salt Lake City and the Missouri River’.⁵ None of these endeavours were undertaken for personal benefit, or even for the benefit of individual families. They were projects directed by Brigham Young for the good of the whole church, and in this way Young acted more as a patriarch—directing his vast family in spiritual, social and economic matters—than as a mere spiritual advisor.

This style of spiritual leadership held significant consequences for the family. Firstly, it fused together the moral, social and economic aspects of Mormon family life. The goal was ‘Zion’, the thriving of the Saints, and all social aspects of Mormon life were subordinate to this aim. This in turn produced a second and perhaps more significant change to the family, in that it undermined the individuality and particularity of the traditional family. Mormon men were patriarchs in their own families, but the scope of their authority was severely limited by the heavy emphasis placed on the physical unity and survival of the whole church. Mormon men were ‘called’ to undertake specific professions, to have and care for as many wives and children as possible, and to serve in whatever capacity their leaders felt would contribute to the needs of the whole. Among the faithful, few decisions were so inconsequential that the good of the whole need not be consulted: Goudy Hogan, whose parents were Mormon converts from Norway, recalls that when his father wanted to move his family a few miles north of Salt Lake City, he first asked

⁵ Typescript of ‘A History of Goudy Hogan’, 27-28. Located at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, M270 M82 Vol. 12.

permission from Brigham Young.⁶ Before making a decision about the welfare of his own family, Hogan ensured that the good of his own family would not interfere, in however small a way, with Young's vision for the larger family of the Saints.

This collective aspect had always been present, at least theoretically, in Mormonism. Under Joseph Smith, Mormons had received callings, some of which were practical or economic in nature, and some members had even been asked to give vast amounts of property to the church. But under Smith these practices are best described as utopian ideals rather than practical realities, being infrequent and limited rather than recurrent and pervasive. Young achieved what Smith had not. Using the crises of crossing the plains and surviving the hostile frontier, Young transformed the theoretical Mormon family⁷ into a more literal family—a tight-knit kinship led by a patriarchal father.

The second intellectual shift in how Mormons thought about the family is attributable to the 1852 declaration that formally recognised plural marriage. This declaration required Mormon leaders to justify polygamy to a much wider audience than they had previously, an audience that consisted of both Mormons and non-Mormons alike. In its early years polygamy was practiced only by Joseph Smith and a few of his closest followers; it was not, therefore, a practice disseminated throughout the church, and most rank-and-file Mormons were unaware of the practice, or, even if they had heard and believed the rumours, they had not been asked to practice it themselves. The church flatly denied all charges of polygamy, and, consequently there was little or no public discussion on plural marriage and its social, moral or spiritual merits.

⁶ Typescript of 'A History of Goudy Hogan', 14.

⁷ The theoretical merging of individual families into one large family of the Saints was a process that began in the 1840s. Mormons believed that it was possible in their temple ceremonies to 'seal' couples together in marriage, which meant that they were sealed together in marriage not only in this life, but in the next. During the Nauvoo period this notion of sealings was used by Young and others to perform a type of spiritual adoptions, literally performing a ritual of adoption to make hundreds of Saints his spiritual children. Thus the notion of an enlarged spiritual family was present, at least in theory, from very early in Mormonism. What changed after the trek west was that this theoretical notion of one large interconnected family—a 'heaven family' (Brown's term) directed by one prophetic patriarch—was put into practice on a scale that it had not been before. For a treatment of this, see Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 203-47.

This changed after 1852, with the church's formal recognition of polygamy. Immediately Mormon leaders set about to establish polygamy as integral to the Mormon faith, hoping to define its practice as a political right guaranteed by the Constitution. This was a political and practical step, but it had the secondary effect of confronting rank-and-file Mormons with the reality of plural marriage. In the 1852 speech announcing polygamy, Orson Pratt defined polygamy as 'part and portion of our religious faith', and to further establish polygamy's place in Mormon theology, he warned his Mormon audience that 'those individuals who have this law taught unto them in plainness and they reject it . . . they will be damned'.⁸ Thus while historians estimate that at its climax approximately 15-30 percent of Mormon families were polygamous, meaning that it was never possible for every Mormon man to have a plural wife, it remains the case that after the declaration polygamy was no longer a fringe or an abstract doctrine. It was tied into the core of their religious faith, and every Mormon was forced to reconcile him or herself to the doctrine, either in theory or in practice. This required Mormon leaders to justify polygamy in much broader terms than when the practice had been limited to the most devout.

In an effort to placate both their own membership and the non-Mormon public, Mormon leaders launched a massive defence of polygamy, producing the largest corpus of apologia for polygamy in modern history. As part of this effort Mormons continued to justify plural marriage in religious and biblical terms, but to this spiritual defence they also added ethics, history, psychology, physiology and economics. They aimed to persuade the non-Mormon world of polygamy's moral, social, economic and physical benefits, and to accomplish this they opened a dialogue with the inchoate social and physical theories that were springing up in this period. They claimed that although polygamy seemed radical it followed naturally from mainstream sociological and physiological ideas. As part of this campaign, in 1853 Brigham Young dispatched apostle⁹ Orson Pratt to Washington D.C. with explicit

⁸ 'A Revelation on Celestial Marriage', *Deseret News Extra*, 24 September 1852.

⁹ Mormons reserved the title 'Apostle' for members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a body of twelve men that was modeled after the twelve apostles of Jesus. Thus apostles were very high up in the Mormon leadership. In fact, the Quorum of Twelve was the third highest governing body in the

instructions to publish an apologetic periodical called *The Seer* to defend Mormon doctrines. This periodical, which was published between 1853-54, appealed to the Bible to explain Mormonism's social and sexual unorthodoxy, but it also appealed to history, economics, moral psychology, physiology and the politics of family and national governments.

This effort to justify polygamy in 'scientific' terms represented a major intellectual shift in how Mormons thought about the family. It constitutes an expansion of the dialogue about polygamy and suggests that despite its radicalism and the hostility it provoked from non-Mormons, there is a sense in which Mormons' desire to justify polygamy to a wider audience—one that included their own membership as well as the American public—actually drew them out of their narrow spiritualism and prompted them to engage with a host of other intellectual ideas and traditions. Furthermore, in their efforts to elucidate the sociological or physiological justifications for plural marriage, Mormons engaged with every aspect of family life, including marriage, parenthood, filial love and sibling relationships. What began as an effort to rationalise polygamy matured into a comprehensive discussion of the family's moral and social role.

To explore this historical evolution this chapter divides Mormon thought on the family into three distinct periods: Stage 1) The biblical family under Joseph Smith, 1830-1844. This stage comprehends the Joseph Smith period of Mormon history, when polygamy was secretive and justified almost exclusively in spiritual terms. It terminates with Smith's death in 1844. Stage 2) The patriarchal family, 1844-1868. This period begins with the Mormon exodus across the American plains to the Utah Territories under the leadership Smith's successor, Brigham Young. It includes the 1852 proclamation, when the Mormon church officially acknowledged its practice of polygamy, and continues through the almost two decades of polygamous life in the Utah Territories. Stage 3) The United Order, 1869-1890. This period begins in 1868, when, in response to the newly completed Union Pacific Railroad, Brigham

Mormon church, below only the president (in his office as prophet), and the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counsellors). Thus to be an apostle meant that, at most, there were only a handful of other men (fifteen at most) more senior.

Young launched a series of social and economic reforms that culminated in the United Order, a communistic system in which communities aimed to live as one family.¹⁰ It continues through the passage of federal anti-bigamy laws in 1884, which brought an end to the United Order and concludes in 1890, to the formal practice of plural marriage.¹¹ Recognising the importance of Mormonism's intellectual evolution on the family question, this chapter will limit its exploration of Mormonism and the family to the second and third stages, both of which occurred after Smith's death.

Implicit in this account is a critique of conventional approaches to both Mormon history and the history of cooperative thought. Firstly, it aims to challenge those historians of Mormonism who investigate Mormon ideas about the family through the narrow lens of polygamy. This category includes many valuable and methodical histories.¹² Their shortcoming is that they offer a comprehensive account of a narrow subject, and in restricting their purview to polygamy they inadvertently neglect the rich dialogue about the family that grew out of Mormonism's reflection on its own sexual radicalism.¹³

¹⁰ A clarifying note: Some sources refer to Smith's early economic experiments as the United Order and to Young's efforts in the 1870s as the Second United Order. However, in this dissertation, for the purposes of simplicity, references to the United Order will refer to the United Order as established by Brigham Young.

¹¹ Mormon polygamy continued to be practiced for several decades; however, the 1890 manifesto, issued by the Mormon prophet Wilford Woodruff, represented an end to the church's open sanction of polygamous marriages.

¹² See Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*; Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 64; Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*.

¹³ There are some exceptions to this rule. Kathryn Daynes devotes a few pages to the broader changes to the family that Mormons made during this time, although the bulk of her analysis is still devoted to polygamy (see Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 173, 187 and 195). A more significant exception is Samuel Brown's work on the ways in which Mormons used theological concepts (sealings and ritualistic adoptions) to create extensive family connections. This study is not included for two reasons: Firstly, because this chapter limits itself primarily to the Brigham Young period of Mormon history and Brown's work focuses on alterations to the spiritual Mormon family under Joseph Smith. Secondly, because this chapter aims to provide an intellectual history of Mormonism, a history that documents how Mormonism, in reflecting on its own sexual and familial radicalism, engaged with mainstream social theory. Consequently, it references Mormon theology only in so far as it directly related to the Mormon engagement with social science, leaving the deeper theological and metaphysical aspects of Mormon familialism to other histories. See Brown, *In Heaven as It is on Earth*, 203-47. In some ways, however, Brown's work is commensurable with my claims because Brown uncovers the theological radicalism underpinning *early* Mormon conceptions of the family. My claim is that in *later* periods of Mormon history, during the process of reflecting on and advocating for the practice of polygamy, Mormons began to develop more mainstream justifications for their radical familialism, which were added to (but of course did not replace), their spiritual or metaphysical doctrines.

This category also includes those historians who do not explore the connection between Mormonism's radical familialism and its economic egalitarianism. As early as 1831 Joseph Smith received a revelation commanding the church to be equal in economic matters, for 'it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another'.¹⁴ Following the system outlined in the revelation, Smith himself instituted an elaborate but ultimately unsuccessful communistic system in which members deeded all property to the church and, in return, received a 'stewardship', determined by the church, according to their needs and abilities. The system failed and was replaced by 'lesser laws', but it remained a conceptual aspiration for Mormons during the next four decades, and under Brigham Young's leadership Mormons made several efforts to restore this economic order, first in 1858, again in 1868, and concluding with the most communistic of all the systems, the United Order in 1873. These economic doctrines were a key pillar in establishing and supporting the Mormon patriarchal family. There are many fine histories of plural marriage, and there are even a few comprehensive histories of Mormonism's cooperative projects;¹⁵ however, there is little discussion of how these two social experiments related to each other, what common goals they shared, and to what extent they represented a collaborative effort to establish a new familial social order.

These two oversights—an overemphasis on polygamy and the segregation of Mormonism's social and economic doctrines—are linked in that both accounts oversimplify the family in order to preserve a conventional account of Mormonism,

¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 49:20.

¹⁵ Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May provide the best account of Mormons' cooperative economics. See Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). See also Edward Allen Jones, *The Second United Order Among the Mormons* (Columbia University Press, 1936). These are excellent and comprehensive histories of their specified topic; however, they fail to make the intellectual and practical links between Mormon ideas about the family and their experiments in economic cooperation. In another work Leonard J. Arrington makes some effort to address this gap, giving an account of how life on the American frontier shaped Mormon social life. However, Arrington's analysis does not extend to the philosophical overlaps between Mormonism's radical familialism and its economic egalitarianism. More specifically, the scope of his work does not extend to how Mormon economic doctrines complimented the Mormon patriarchal family, a notion that will be explored in the final section (iv) of this chapter. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1993).

one in which polygamy derived from and reinforced Mormonism's fanatical spiritualism. Unfortunately, historians of cooperative thought have taken this account at face value and have, consequently, excluded Mormonism from accounts of nineteenth-century cooperative history. Mormonism is consistently and repetitively relegated to the sphere of religious extremism: it is examined by religious historians, and in comparative studies of the period it always appears next to other specimens of spiritual or religious fanaticism.¹⁶ In accepting this reductive account, historians have failed to recognise that whatever the origins of polygamy, it matured into a complex set of questions about sociability, perfectibility and the role of social science, and in this sense Mormonism was part of a larger story—a story that went beyond American revivalism and linked Mormonism to other types of cooperative movements. This chapter contends that although religion was certainly the unifying factor among Mormons, their spiritual enthusiasm did not preclude their engagement with social or economic ideas,¹⁷ any more than Owen's enthusiasm for economics precluded his engagement with social, moral and psychological ideas. Mormonism's interest in the family question may have begun, as Owen's did, in their own narrow intellectual sphere (e.g. spiritualism), but in their efforts to solve the family enigma, they eventually consulted a host of other moral and scientific ideas.

It is illuminating that Mormons, much like the Owenites and Oneida Perfectionists, did not expect 'science' to undermine or challenge their religious beliefs, or even to contradict other branches of science. They believed that physiology and economics would ultimately coalesce into a single, coherent account of the family, an account that would reconcile the family's various aspects and functions with each other. Like Owenism and Oneida, they viewed all social and scientific

¹⁶ In almost every comparative study in which it is featured, Mormonism is generally situated relative to other religious radicals, like Oneida or the Shakers. See Kern, *An Ordered Love*; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*.

¹⁷ In giving this account, I recognise that I am, in fact, committing a similar error of omission (albeit in reverse): whereas conventional histories focus exclusively on Mormon spiritualism at the expense of its other ideas, I will do the opposite and place great emphasis on Mormonism's social, moral and scientific ideas (at the expense of its theology). This is a structural necessity. As a result I cannot claim that this history is comprehensive. Only that it offers an unrepresented perspective of Mormon ideas and, through those ideas, connects Mormons to a larger intellectual tradition from which they have conventionally been excluded.

theories as interconnected, harmonious links that, taken together, formed one vast intellectual chain, or ‘master science’. Owen called this the ‘Science of Society’; Oneida described it as ‘social theory’ or ‘sociology’, the ‘science around which all other sciences are finally to be organized’. Mormons called it ‘Zion’, the heavenly order that would comprehend all social, physical and moral perfectibility, a state in which all physical, moral and social laws would at last be understood.

But Mormon apologists could not discover any such continuity in the family. Instead of unlocking a holistic account of the family that harmonised nature’s social, moral and physical laws, Mormons’ engagement with ‘science’ produced the patriarchal family—a specimen of moral and scientific discontinuity whose disparate components emphasised particular, often antagonistic and irreconcilable aspects of human life. This is clear in their solution to the family problem. Mormons aimed to construct a new type of family that allowed for familial duty, partiality and obligation but would not devolve into a school of selfishness. To accomplish this, they embraced the duality between individuality and collectivism, between the particular and the general. The very structure of the patriarchal family, and its relationship to the larger church family, straddled the theoretical and practical chasm between autonomous individuality and selfless submission to the collective, between an account of moral motivation based on self-interest and an account that relies wholly on benevolence and social love. In the Mormon patriarchal family every individual is a member of both an individual family, with all of its attendant partialities and obligations, and also a part of the larger patriarchal church family.

This dualism—in which every Mormon belonged to both a particular patriarchal family and the supra-patriarchal family, the church—was necessary because Mormon theology was grounded on both an individualistic and a collectivist account of human nature. To encourage the social self and prevent the family from becoming an instrument of selfishness, Mormon leaders carefully subjected the individual patriarchal family to the collective. But at the same time they justified polygamy by appeals to the supreme individuality, even nascent Godhood, of each patriarch: Mormons viewed polygamy as the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise to

Abraham and that his posterity would be ‘as numerous as the sand upon the sea-shore’. This posterity, according to the Mormon exegesis, would constitute Abraham’s exaltation in the afterlife, and the more numerous his offspring, the greater his kingdoms and glory.¹⁸

Mormons believed that this view of human nature was compatible with social science and, consequently, they did not rely only on the Bible or other religious texts to defend it. But their appeals to a wide range of social theory did not help them reconcile this tension between social cohesion and human perfectibility: they wanted to emphasise benevolence and cooperation to achieve a social utopia, but their commitment to individual perfection—even exaltation—required the preservation of an autonomous sphere of individual action. The patriarchal family provided an arena for this conflict. It gave Mormons a space to theorise and experiment with the heterogeneous theories emerging out of the nascent social sciences, all in an effort to reconcile mankind’s social with its individualistic nature. And like Owen and Oneida, that Mormons failed to produce a coherent account of the family is perhaps less revealing than the fact that, despite the overwhelming complexity of the task and serial failures, Mormons believed they could succeed. For more than fifty years, Mormons never lost faith that they could reconcile the family—despite its intricacies and inconsistencies—with the rising social science and its promise of a single, unified ‘Zion’.

ii. The patriarchal family, 1844-1868

There is a significant relationship between Mormonism’s internal dialogue on the family and the state of their relations with the outside world. The most intense periods of polygamy—when Mormons published the most tracts, articles and pamphlets defending polygamy and when the most polygamous unions took place—generally occurred after some type of crisis in Mormonism’s identity *vis-à-vis* the

¹⁸ ‘A Revelation on Celestial Marriage’, *Deseret News Extra*, 24 September 1852.

outside world: in 1852-54, after the public announcement of plural marriage, when Mormons feared a hostile response; in 1857-58, just one year after the Republican party's platform declared polygamy one of the 'twin relics of barbarism', reinforcing the tension between Mormonism and the federal government that had climaxed in 1856-57 in an armed conflict known as the Utah War; and in 1868, when Brigham Young feared that, due to the new railroad, the Saints would be corrupted by 'gentile' influence, and in response he launched a new social and economic campaign to preserve the separateness of the church. Indeed, the middle period (1856-57) produced more polygamous unions than any other time in Mormon history. Wilford Woodruff, an apostle, vividly (and somewhat in jest) described this marriage frenzy and the scarcity it produced saying, 'All are trying to get wives . . . until there is hardly a girl 14 years old in Utah, but what is married, or just going to be'.¹⁹

This correlation between the Mormon conversation on polygamy and the movement's relationship with the outside world corroborates one of this chapter's central claims about the evolution of Mormon thought on the family question—that Mormonism's troubled relationship with the outside world had two somewhat contradictory effects. First, it drew Mormons inward, isolating them socially and intellectually, producing a fundamentalist emphasis on the most radical aspects of their doctrine, particularly polygamy. The more threatened Mormons felt from the outside world, the more they strengthened their internal ties to each other by clinging more tightly to their peculiar beliefs and practices. This is the narrative offered in most secondary accounts, as it is the most conspicuous effect of polygamy and the tensions it caused.

But such crises had a second, less obvious effect, in that during periods of intense persecution Mormons felt more pressure to justify their radical sexual practices in the intellectual language of mainstream society. Consequently, periods of intense hostility between Mormons and the non-Mormon world also witnessed the greatest surge in Mormons' intellectual engagement with the social and physical sciences, a dialogue that reshaped Mormon identity until Mormon apologists saw

¹⁹ Quoted in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 92-3.

themselves not only as a part of the scientific discussions taking place in this period but as leading them. However, Mormon apologists did not, as a general rule, cite the thinkers from whom they took their moral, psychological and physiological theories; consequently, it is impossible to reconstruct from which works they assembled their own peculiar social theory.²⁰

The reason behind this omission gets to the heart of how Mormons conceived of themselves relative to the social sciences: they really did believe that their understanding of the natural and moral world surpassed that of their contemporaries. They saw themselves as masters, not students, and consequently they avoided citing ‘gentile’ thinkers lest they inadvertently lend credence to theories that, they believed, were only partially understood by their authors. In place of specific attributions, therefore, Mormon theorists tended to make broad claims about the scientific legitimacy of their ideas (e.g. ‘This is a scientific truth so well known, that the man who would dispute it would be looked upon with contempt by every one versed in physiological science’), and historians must speculate from which texts they synthesised their unique social theory.²¹ That Mormons came to see themselves as serious purveyors of social theory is perhaps best illustrated in an 1855 conversation that took place between Brigham Young and Jules Rémy, a French botanist who was visiting Salt Lake City. In this discourse Brigham Young warned Rémy that despite their studies the French ‘understand nothing of science’, promising that ‘when they shall learn something of it, they will see the truth is found in the book of Mormon, and that our doctrine, sooner or later, must reform society’.²²

‘Righteous love’

In order to ensure that the family did not become an instrument of selfishness, Mormons first redefined family love. This renegotiation produced the Mormon

²⁰ Although there is ample evidence that some Mormon leaders read Robert Dale Owen’s *Moral Physiology* and were familiar with the ideas of Fourier and Owen.

²¹ Albert Carrington, ‘Plurality of Wives—Physiologically and Socially’ *Deseret News* [Weekly], 29 March 1866.

²² Jules Rémy, ‘A Trip to Salt Lake’, in Will Bagley, ed., *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, Vol. 8 (Spokane, Washington: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2006), 72.

concept of 'righteous love', which collapsed all types of traditional family love—sexual, romantic, parental, filial, brotherly—into a generic type of love founded on duty. This concept of love as duty ensured that the partial affections of the traditional family were always subject to the larger hierarchy of the patriarchal family: members of individual families could have particular duties to their fathers, husbands and children, but those fathers would, in turn, have their own duties and obligations towards their spiritual superiors. In this sense hierarchy is what allowed Mormons to accept the partial nature of family love.

The project of transforming family love into duty began with marriage. Mormon leaders undermined passion and sentimentality until both sexual and romantic love were reduced to their propagative function. Marriage was ordained to produce offspring. It was not about passion, sexuality or romance; it was a relation of duty. In making this claim Mormons shared Oneida's belief that what distinguishes God is 'fatherhood'—his ability to propagate and his patriarchal dominion over a limitless posterity. But unlike Oneida, Mormons believed that human beings could become like God; consequently, Mormonism embraced propagation as a means to apotheosis, rejecting Oneida's conception of a static family (in which God's children remain children), and conceiving of perfection as obtained through a limitless posterity. Thus after Smith's death Mormon leaders increasingly distilled marriage down to its propagative function, demoting sexual encounters from a connection of individual passion to an act of obedience and obligation.

'Righteous love' was understood as a type of love that derived from one's spiritual merit. In 1856 Young warned that a man 'ought to love a woman only so far as she adorns the doctrine you profess; just so far as she adorns that doctrine, just so far let your love extend to her.' Pronouncing the final condemnation of romantic or sentimental love, Young concludes that when a woman has proven her spiritual merit and secured her own salvation, then 'she is worthy of the full measure of the love of the faithful husband, but never before'.²³ What is interesting about this notion of

²³ 'The Order of Progression in Knowledge', *Journal of Discourses*, 3:360-61. The *Journal of Discourses* (hereafter JD) was an official periodical published by the church in twenty-six volumes,

‘righteous love’ is that it does not amount to a rejection of the family or of family love. Husbands whose wives were unworthy were sometimes counselled to leave them, but more often they were advised to remain in the marriage. Wives whose husbands were unworthy were similarly advised to submit to their husbands, even when their spiritual judgment erred. Thus redefining family love according to spiritual merit was not intended to abolish or weaken the family—wives were advised to be partial, obedient and dutiful to their husbands—rather, it was intended to strengthen the hierarchical bond within both the individual family and the larger patriarchal family of the church.

Thus obedience itself became its own source and justification for family love. In the individual family this doctrine pertained primarily to women and children, who, according to Brigham Young and other church leaders, were less morally accountable than men; consequently, obedience came to be the primary means by which wives and children should secure the love of their husbands and fathers. Apostle Orson Pratt explained this principle of marital submission and hierarchy in 1853 in *The Seer*, warning that a wife ‘should never follow her own judgment in preference to that of her husband; for if her husband desires to do right, but errs in judgment, the Lord will bless her in endeavoring to carry out his counsels’.²⁴ In 1856 Heber C. Kimball, the first counselor in the First Presidency and therefore second in church hierarchy only to Young himself,²⁵ reinforced this teaching by applying it to his own family, declaring, ‘I have no wife nor child that has any right to rebel against me . . . it is her duty to do my will, as I do the will of my Father and my God’.²⁶

Examined closely, this notion of marital love obliterates all emotional and moral distinctions between sexual, romantic and parental love. Sexual and romantic love are reduced to the same foundations as all other family affections, which derive their legitimacy from righteousness and submission to their immediate spiritual

containing public sermons by prominent church leaders. Publication began, with approval from the first presidency (the prophet and his two counsellors) in 1854 and continued until 1886.

²⁴ *The Seer* Vol. 1, No. 9, 143-4. See also ‘The Latter-day Kingdom—Men not to Be Governed By Their Wives’, JD 5:28-9.

²⁵ See footnote 9 for a more thorough explanation of the Mormon hierarchy.

²⁶ ‘Persons Not to be Baptized Until They Repent and Make Restitution’, JD 4:82.

leader, in this case, their father or husband. From the father's perspective, then, his love for his children is occasioned by the same causes as his love for his wife—that is, obedience. In 1857 Orson Hyde, the president of the Quorum of the Twelve,²⁷ explained that it is this type of love that allowed Mormon men to 'love more than one wife at a time' because his wives had 'no mind or will of their own, but all partake of his spirit and his mind'. The plurality of wives functions on this same principle. Thus 'If a man have forty wives, and they all receive his mind and spirit, and are thus one in him, he can easily love them all (because they are one) as a father can love a half-score of children who copy his mind and spirit'.²⁸ Marital love could be the same as parental love because both were morally justified by the same means—obedience.

The Mormon concept of 'righteous love' was central to their ideal of the patriarchal family, a structure that emphasised rather than undermined the hierarchical nature of the conventional family. This emphasis on hierarchy and obedience was crucial to the Mormon solution to the family problem. It allowed them to accept partiality, obligation and duty while preventing these forms of family love from becoming instruments of egotism. Thus through the concept of 'righteous love', Mormons integrated the individual family into the machinery of the larger patriarchal family of the church. If each individual family could be reduced to a hierarchical structure grounded on duty and obedience, and the patriarchs of each family similarly integrated into the larger church hierarchy, also grounded on duty and obedience, the result was a unified, cohesive Mormon family: a macro-hierarchical structure in which each individual clearly understood their position and authority relative to other members. This dual application of 'patriarchy' produced what Young referred to as 'one-man power', by which he meant the church's ability to act cooperatively, 'like the efforts of one man'.²⁹ And that man was Brigham Young.

²⁷ See footnote 9 for a more thorough explanation of the Mormon hierarchy.

²⁸ 'Murmuring Against Divine Authority', JD 5:282.

²⁹ 'The Holy Ghost Necessary in Preaching', JD 4:25. Also see 'The One Man Power', JD 14:91-8.

Marriage and Mormon physiology

In putting forward their notion of 'righteous love', Mormons were redefining family love according to their own social and spiritual standards and their own particular account of moral psychology. They believed that family love was and ought to be primarily a matter of duty, obligation and obedience, and that other notions of love—such as passion and romance—were unnatural corruptions. But Mormons did not only believe in their account of family love on the basis of faith. They also believed that their account derived from demonstrable facts that science would vindicate, and thus they appealed to history, economics, moral psychology and physiology to prove the moral and social superiority of their family arrangements.

Of those sciences to which Mormons turned to authenticate their new family arrangements, physiology was the most common and the most consequential in its implications. To establish propagation as the exclusive *telos* of marriage—and polygamy as the natural means by which to fulfil that end—Mormons relied heavily on their own physiology, specifically their interpretation of sexual disparities between men and women. To support their unorthodox practices, Mormons turned to concepts that were already popular and accepted by many other nineteenth-century reformers, specifically the concept of 'life force' or 'vital energy', a theory which claimed that the expenditure of male semen drained life energy and, if done too frequently, would diminish both health and virility.³⁰ Mormons modified this theory to suit their own purposes, claiming that, contrary to the theory's conventional interpretations, nature limits the sexual 'life force' of women much more dramatically than that of men. Nature, in their account, designed men for frequent intercourse for the purpose of procreation, whereas it intended women to conserve their life force in order to nurture their offspring. As early as 1853 Mormon publications hinted at the limited sexual capacity of women,³¹ but it was not until 1854 that it received the most explicit articulation, which appeared in the form of a letter written by Belinda Pratt, a plural

³⁰ Lawrence Stone explores Victorian theorists who regarded sexual congress and masturbation as wasteful of life force or energy. See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 677-8.

³¹ 'Nelly and Abby: A Familiar Conversation Between Two Cousins, on Marriage', *Millennial Star*, 9 and 16 April 1853.

wife of apostle Parley P. Pratt, to her older sister. The letter circulated widely and was quickly published by the church as a tract titled, *A Defence of Polygamy, By a Lady of Utah*. In it Pratt claims that the ‘morality of nature’ has ‘constituted the female differently from the male; and for a different purpose’. She explains that ‘the female constitution is designed to flow in a stream of *life*, to nourish and sustain the embryo’, whereas a man has ‘no such draw back upon his strength’ and thus ‘It is his to move in a wider sphere’. In short, women required long gestational periods, which limits their sexual and propagative capacity, whereas men may aspire ‘to empire’.³²

To reshape this doctrine into an even stronger defence of polygamy, Belinda Pratt added another physiological ‘fact’ to this theory of vital life force: the belief that female sexual activity during the gestational period produces morally and physically inferior offspring. Women, she explained, require their life force to nurture the embryo, and thus during pregnancy a husband should ‘refrain from all those untimely associations which are forbidden in the great constitutional laws of female nature; which laws we see carried out in almost the entire animal economy’.³³ Belinda Pratt offered the most explicit expression of this doctrine, but variations appear in such a multitude of Mormon articles, speeches and pamphlets in this period that it constitutes something of a ‘Mormon physiology’.³⁴ In January 1857 apostle Heber C. Kimball, who ranked highest in church leadership save only Young himself, warned that men who undertake sexual intercourse for purposes other than procreation ‘seriously injure their offspring’, adding, ‘For this purpose God has instituted the plurality of wives’. To those who have barren wives Kimball counselled, ‘Why don’t you take a course to regenerate, and not to degenerate?’³⁵ In another lecture delivered in April 1857 Heber C. Kimball expounded on the healthful benefits of polygamy, observing that

³² [Belinda Pratt], *Defence of Polygamy, By A Lady Of Utah* (1854). Reprinted in Hardy, *Works of Abraham*, 96-7.

³³ [Belinda Pratt], *Defence of Polygamy*, 96-7.

³⁴ For a treatment of some of some of the themes relating to ‘Mormon physiology’, (including Belinda Pratt’s *Defence of Polygamy, By a Lady of Utah* and other Mormon theories about vital force) see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, ‘An American Album, 1857’, *American Historical Review* 115 (2010): 1-25.

³⁵ ‘Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball’, *Deseret News*, 25 March 1857.

polygamist men are ‘fresh, young, and sprightly’, while monogamists ‘wither and dry up’.³⁶

In February of 1857 apostle Orson Hyde also picked up this theory, speculating that ‘proper intercourse’, which he defined as intercourse for propagation and ‘no more than that’, would extend human life, perhaps even to ‘Eight or Nine hundred years’. Instead, he laments, the ‘laws of nature have been interfered with’, and consequently children are born ‘cripples and idiots’ because ‘they were not let alone, in their Mother’s womb’.³⁷ Again, he gives polygamy as the logical and scientific solution. In August of the same year George Q. Cannon, a prominent church leader who became an apostle in 1860, published an article titled ‘Improvement of our species’ in the *Western Standard*, a Mormon periodical that he himself founded in California. Cannon’s article condemns monogamy for the moral corruption of offspring, specifically citing the ‘inordinate indulgence of their begetters’.³⁸

This ‘Mormon physiology’ climaxed during the Mormon Reformation, but although it peaked in 1857 Mormons continued to affirm the physiological foundations of their marriage practices for decades. In March 1866 the *Millennial Star* published an article titled ‘Plurality of Wives—Physiologically and Socially’, in which the author, Albert Carrington, an apostle and counsellor to Brigham Young, argued that plural marriage ‘produces a higher condition of physiological existence’ due to its fidelity to female continence. Intercourse after impregnation achieves no end, he explains, merely ‘robbing the future mother of that vigour which should nourish her embryotic [sic] offspring’. This, he claims, ‘is a scientific truth so well known, that the man who would dispute it would be looked upon with contempt by every one versed in physiological science’.³⁹ More than a year later in 1867 the *Millennial Star* published another article by apostle Charles W. Penrose titled ‘Physical Regeneration’, in which Penrose congratulates Mormons for leading the scientific community on the topic of racial regeneration, describing Mormons as ‘the

³⁶ ‘Address by Heber C. Kimball’, *Deseret News*, 6 April 1857.

³⁷ Quoted in Hardy, *Works of Abraham*, 134-5.

³⁸ George Q. Canon, ‘Improvement of Our Species’, *Western Standard*, 7 August 1857.

³⁹ ‘Plurality of Wives—Physiologically and Socially’, *Deseret News* [Weekly], 29 March 1866.

only people on the earth who are truly alive to the tremendous consequences involved in this question'.⁴⁰ Mormons were, in this account, not only consumers of scientific theory, but leading producers of it, and their self-conception as a 'peculiar people' began to require more than distinctiveness and unorthodoxy; rather, it had come to comprehend social, moral and scientific superiority.

Once Mormons had established their own peculiar physiology supporting polygamy, they came to believe that other social sciences, notably history, would also prove the superiority of plural marriage. George Q. Cannon claimed that the 'history of the world' vindicates plural marriage by demonstrating that only polygamy regenerates rather than degenerates society. According to Cannon, the most 'permanent, indestructible and progressive' societies in history are not found in Christian monogamic Europe, but rather in Asia, 'among the polygamy races'. In this history, the fall of Rome authenticates the physiological superiority of polygamy because it fell, according to Cannon, due to its practice of insipid, anaemic monogamy, being overrun, 'not by another monogamic race,' but by the 'vigorous polygamic hordes from the north'.⁴¹

At the heart of this 'Mormon physiology' is the belief that nature, and specifically the animal kingdom, holds normative claims about human sexuality and thus the marriage relation. They believed that a study of nature produced three prescriptions about sexual and marital life: first, that men are designed for more frequent sexual intercourse than women, with fewer limits on their sexual and propagative capacities; second, that women must conserve their life force for gestation, and therefore should not engage in sexual intercourse during pregnancy; third, that any violation of these laws produces a morally and physically, degenerated offspring. Conveniently, each of these claims vindicates polygamy as the 'natural' and 'scientific' alternative to monogamy.

⁴⁰ 'Physical Regeneration', *Millennial Star*, 10 August 1867.

⁴¹ 'Celestial Marriage', JD 13:203. Also see 'Mormonism, Not Sensual', *Millennial Star*, 4 December 1877.

Parenthood and 'race improvement'

Because Mormonism condensed the marriage relation down to its propagative function, the theoretical distinction in Mormon philosophy between 'marriage' and 'parenthood' is tenuous at best; however, in order to differentiate the several intellectual streams flowing into Mormon ideas about the family, there is some grounds for segregating sexual or propagative justifications for polygamy from Mormon theories of parenthood, racial improvement and the education of children. The first justification for such a distinction is that while sexual physiology was at the core of many Mormon theories of racial regeneration, Mormons also explicitly linked racial improvement with the moral education of children. Indeed, one way that Mormons intended to bring about the moral regeneration of society was simply by out-propagating their gentile counterparts and literally repopulating the fallen world with Mormon offspring. In 1857, clarifying how Mormons could spiritually conquer the gentile world through propagation, Heber C. Kimball speculated that in twenty-five years he and Brigham Young 'will have a larger number in our two families than there now is in this whole Territory, which numbers more than seventy-five thousand'.⁴² In the same year the *Millennial Star* published an article promising that a man with forty wives, who each had ten children, could at age 78 have millions of decedents.⁴³ Thus apostle Orson Hyde described polygamy as 'leaven hid in three measures of meal until the whole is leavened', a process that would 'make the United States tremble from the very head to the foot'.⁴⁴

In this way Mormons believed that polygamy would advance social and moral regeneration through the sheer quantity of their Mormon offspring, a side-effect that is distinguishable, if not entirely distinct, from those effects deriving from sexual physiology. In this account polygamy produced morally superior children not only because it stayed the corrupting influences of sex during gestation, but also because it ensured that the Mormon population, which was assumed to be superior as they were

⁴² 'The Ax that is Laid at the Root of the Tree—Regeneration—Products of Polygamy, a Numerous Offspring, Etc', JD 4:224.

⁴³ 'Varieties', *Millennial Star*, 13 June 1857.

⁴⁴ 'The Marriage Relations', JD 2:84.

God's 'peculiar people', increased more rapidly than their non-Mormon counterparts. The doctrinal principles of polygamy also ensured that the greatest number of children were born to the most morally superior Mormon parents, as it explicitly linked a man's spiritual prowess with the number of his wives and thus his offspring. In his history of Mormon polygamy, Van Wagoner has shown that Mormon men were pressured into plural marriage if they wanted to advance in church authority; similarly, Michael D. Quinn estimates that among the forty-four men who were admitted into the top echelons of church leadership between 1845 to 1888, only fourteen, or 32 percent, were monogamists at the time of their advancement.⁴⁵ Given that monogamists made up somewhere between 70 to 85 percent of the general Mormon population, these numbers suggest a clear preference for polygamic leaders. Indeed, in practice those highest up in the church frequently boasted of a multitude of wives and offspring, with Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball and Orson Pratt claiming a cumulative total of 108 wives and 166 children.

This approach to racial improvement ascribed great importance to the moral superiority of parentage, not only because such attributes would be inherited but also because those children would be raised and educated by the best patriarchs and socialised in the best Mormon families. However, it has already been noted that the socialisation in the Mormon patriarchal family was in fact a peculiar and unconventional process, in that it trained children in obedience rather than in autonomy and self-determination. Whereas Owen struggled to reconcile parenthood and childhood education with the cultivation of a fully rational, autonomous self, Mormons aspired to no such achievement. They did not aim to create equals through the education of children; rather, they endeavoured to produce individuals fit for their hierarchical family arrangements. The concept of 'righteous love' was predicated on obedience, and specifically on an individual's obedience to their familial patriarch, and consequently women and children were trained, not in self-government and independence, but in deference and submission. Only men presided over their own

⁴⁵ Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 180. Quinn limits his analysis to those at the highest levels of church leadership, who held authority over the entire church, rather than merely in local or even regional circles.

little families as monarchs. And yet the tension between individuality and collectivity, between sovereignty and submission, could not be syncretised, not even in the radical hierarchy of the patriarchal family, because in relation to the larger family and its supra-patriarch, Brigham Young, all patriarchs are reduced to the spiritual level of women and children. In the grand patriarchal family men secured the love of their leaders in much the same way that women secured the love of their husbands—through obedience, submission and deference to their spiritual patriarchs—even while maintaining order in their own families by asserting their dominance and self-sovereignty.

This dualism—of individuality and collectivity—also manifested in Mormon theories of racial improvement. On the one hand, Mormons embraced polygamy and propagation as mechanisms of individuality and Godhood: a man's posterity constituted his glory and exaltation, and the extent of his earthly family determined the scale of his spiritual kingdom. As Brigham Young explained in 1855, it was the means by which men became 'Kings of kings, and Lord of lords, or Father of fathers, or Prince of princes'.⁴⁶ It was, in this sense, a profoundly individualistic, even monarchical doctrine, and a man was the unchallenged ruler of his own immediate family, whatever his obligations and duties outside of it. On the other hand, the promise of moral, intellectual and physical perfectibility—not in the next life but in this one—proved too great a temptation to Mormons, and they attempted to incorporate theories of racial improvement into their already elaborate account of the family's moral and social role. Not surprisingly, this produced even more discord with the individualistic undertones of the patriarchal family.

Mormon leaders like George Q. Cannon, who embraced theories of race improvement a full twenty-six years before Galton, used Mormon physiology to relocate marriage to the public sphere, giving perhaps the strongest Mormon defence of public over private interests: the human race will degenerate, he warned, until marriage is given over to public management—that is, 'until moralists and legislator's find out that a true and effectual reform must begin in the marriage bed'. This fact,

⁴⁶ 'Plurality of Wives—The Free Agency of Man', JD 3:265-6.

according to Cannon's theory, justifies collective action against those who violate the scientific marriage laws of nature, and consequently Cannon looks forward hopefully to a time 'when the law forbids the unhealthy to beget children—when it compels every healthy man to marry . . . when it suffers no healthy girl to remain single after she becomes of proper age'. To vindicate his bold moral and political physiology, Cannon again turns to history, specifically to the Spartans, a society in which 'No diseased and effeminate person was permitted to marry and curse the world with tainted offspring'. Cannon exalts these policies as 'wise thoughts and noble deeds'.⁴⁷

Cannon's 1857 article argued forcefully for the collectivist implications of racial improvement through propagation; however, he was not the only Mormon leader to suggest that a type of collective influence, perhaps even force, ought to ensure that only the best human specimens breed. In July, a few months before Cannon's article appeared, Heber C. Kimball gave an address to the Saints in Salt Lake City, where he described procreation as a type of social privilege rather than a right, declaring, 'if I am not a good man, I have no just right to a wife or wives, or to the power to propagate my species. What, then, should be done with me? Make a eunuch of me, and stop my propagation'.⁴⁸ In his 1866 article on the social and physiological benefits of polygamy, apostle Albert Carrington denounced the misuse of sexual intercourse within marriage as an 'evil . . . which philanthropic physiologists deplore but cannot reach', likely due to the individual license and protection from collective interference given to the marriage state.⁴⁹ This notion that marriage and procreation were privileges to be earned, not rights to be expected, underpinned much of the pressure that Mormons felt to embrace polygamy. Mormon men were told that if they were not worthy of many wives, they were in fact not worthy of even one wife, and that their one wife might be taken away from them; women were similarly warned that if they forbade their husband additional wives,

⁴⁷ Cannon, 'Improvement of Our Species', *Western Standard*, 7 August 1857.

⁴⁸ 'The Latter-Day Kingdom—Men not to Be Governed By Their Wives—Love to God Manifested By Love to His Servants', JD 5:29. Also see 'Utility of Correction—Necessity of Living Our Religion', JD 4:334-5.

⁴⁹ 'Plurality of Wives—Physiologically and Socially', *Deseret News* [Weekly], 29 March 1866.

they risked losing him in the afterlife.⁵⁰ Apostle Frances M. Lyman summarised this doctrine succinctly with the warning, ‘a man has no right to one wife unless he is worthy of two’.⁵¹

In this sense, polygamy straddled one of the most profound tensions in Mormon thought on the family. This discord derived from Mormonism’s efforts to join their physical account of human teleology with their spiritual account of human eschatology. Because they expected continuity between the spiritual, moral and physical world, they turned to nature to reconcile these disparate accounts of humankind, but they found no such scientific unity. Their spiritual rationale pointed to mankind’s individuality and endless potential for Godhood and empire; their physiological science, however, reduced these same potentate patriarchs to instruments of collective physical regeneration, whose marriages, rather than existing to augment their own spiritual glory, were but crude vehicles for racial enhancement. These objectives are not interchangeable and produce very different conceptions of marital and sexual relations: in the first, presumably all males ought to marry and procreate, generating whatever personal glory and exaltation they can for themselves; in the latter, only the most perfect moral and physical specimens have that privilege.

Moral motivation and economics

The above sections explore marriage and parenthood, and two social sciences, notably physiology and history, to which Mormons turned in their efforts to justify their social heterodoxy. This section considers two additional branches of social science that Mormons found equally difficult to sculpt into a cogent account of the family—moral psychology and economics. In highlighting the incoherence and disjointed product of this dialogue it is not this dissertation’s intention to ridicule or deride Mormon thought on the family; on the contrary, although these inconsistencies evince a degree of intellectual disorder, they also demonstrate Mormonism’s serious and multifaceted struggle with the family’s social and moral paradox. Mormons may

⁵⁰ ‘Nelly and Abby: A Familiar Conversation Between Two Cousins, on Marriage’, *Millennial Star*, 9 and 16 April 1853.

⁵¹ Quoted in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 98.

have failed to produce a coherent description of the family, one that reconciled sociability with their ambitious aims in spiritual and physical perfectibility, but they did not fail because they accepted a reductive or simplistic account of human nature, moral motivation or the puzzles of social life.

Evidence for this claim is found in Mormonism's appeals to moral psychology. Like Owenites, Mormons recognised the dual nature of the family as both a profoundly social and anti-social institution. They began with the assumption that the family depends on both benevolence and self-interest, and that individuals, its constituent elements, respond to similar motivations. Thus in their social, psychological and economic reconstruction of the family Mormons carefully and explicitly recognised the existence of both selfishness and altruism. The goal was not to abolish selfishness altogether, as Oneida had done, but rather to ensure that the family did not become a seedbed that cultivated selfishness. And to ensure that the family was an instrument of benevolence and not egotism, Mormon leaders recommended polygamy. They believed that the polygamous marriage relation would serve as a cure for selfishness and greed, explaining that it would purge the family of the 'contracted sentiments' of the exclusive, monogamic system. They equated monogamy with egocentrism and polygamy with generosity. In the 1852 announcement Pratt contrasted polygamy with the 'narrow, contracted nations of modern Christianity', and in 1853 the *Millennial Star* also described monogamy as a 'narrow, contracted order'.⁵²

In most instances, the 'contracted sentiments' that Mormon leaders referred to were undoubtedly economic in nature. Orson Pratt warned that 'those who have only one wife, cannot get rid of their covetousness, and get their little hearts large enough to share their property with a numerous family'. A large family, in this account, requires generosity; it breaks the spell of materialism and avarice. Otherwise, men will be 'so penurious, and so narrow and contracted in their feelings, that they take

⁵² 'A Revelation on Celestial Marriage', *Deseret News Extra*, 18 September 1852; 'Nelly and Abby', *Millennial Star*, 9 and 16 April 1853.

every possible care not to have their families large'.⁵³ Speaking in Salt Lake City in 1854 apostle Orson Hyde confirmed this doctrine, lamenting that many men are 'too niggardly to take a wife', and in 1855, speaking to a gathering of the Saints in Provo, Utah, Brigham Young explicitly equated polygamy, and its attendant large families, with an expanding of the affections. Young denounced Mormon men 'who will not to take any more women, because they do not wish to take care of them', warning that 'a contracted spirit causes that feeling', what Young calls 'the old sectarian leaven'.⁵⁴ In this way, Mormons equated plural marriage and its large, extended families with what Oneida termed the 'we spirit'. It required a man to assume responsibility for a large number of women and children, when he may have used his wealth to benefit himself and a more limited notion of 'family'.

This becomes more significant in light of the fact that a man's spiritual standing in the church was frequently linked with his economic acumen—with the top echelons of leadership frequently made up of wealthy men—and both were associated with a plurality of wives. In this way, polygamy represented yet another overlap between Mormonism's economic and its social or spiritual doctrines. This chapter has already noted that certain crises in Mormon history integrated, to some extent, Mormonism's social, spiritual and economic aims: crossing the plains and surviving on the frontier required extensive cooperation and a strong social and political system to organise these cooperative efforts. Brigham Young provided that organisation, acting as the great patriarch of the vast family of the Saints. However, in addition to the autocratic leadership of Brigham Young, Mormonism's family doctrines became connected to economics in more explicit ways, specifically in that wealthy men were expected to take more wives, often from among the poor and fatherless. Polygamy was, according to John Taylor, who would succeed Brigham Young as prophet in 1880, one way through which individuals could 'look after the welfare and interest of all'.⁵⁵ Morally and psychologically, Mormons intended for polygamy to expand men's affections, overcoming their lust for property and prompting them to care for

⁵³ 'A Revelation on Celestial Marriage', *Deseret News Extra*, 18 September 1852.

⁵⁴ 'The Marriage Relations', JD 2:83; 'The Plurality of Wives—The Free Agency of Man', JD 3:265.

⁵⁵ 'The Gathering—Our Territorial Condition and Organization', JD 26:73.

the poor by literally taking them into their own household. But polygamy also served a more practical redistributive purpose. Kathryn Daynes has noted that because the wealthiest Mormon men typically had the most wives, and because plural wives were often destitute, in practice plural marriage often redistributed wealth from the most affluent to the most economically vulnerable women.⁵⁶

But in their structuring of the patriarchal family Mormons did not only appeal to benevolence and altruism; rather, they embraced an account of human nature that recognised the existence of selfishness, even if they carefully designed their patriarchal family so as not to cultivate egotism. The most obvious example of this occurred in a speech by Brigham Young titled ‘The Weakness and Impotence of Men’ delivered in 1852, in which Young advised his followers that for those who lust for riches, ‘it is good policy for him to bind up his wealth in this Church, so that he cannot command it again, and he will be apt to cleave to the kingdom’. This ‘identity of interests’ would, Young promised, provide security in event that moral convictions fail. He explained, ‘if our hearts should ever become weaned from loyalty to the sovereign, all our *earthly* interest is bound up there . . . We must therefore sustain the kingdom in order to sustain our lives and interests’.⁵⁷ This recommendation suggests that although Mormons rejected egotism as a foundation of social life, they recognised its existence as a part of human nature and took precautions against it.

In their sexual theories, Mormons embraced an even darker account of human nature. Mormon leaders often defended polygamy on the grounds that male sexual promiscuity is something of a physiological inevitability, and they maintained that a social sanction of multiple wives was morally superior to a social sanction of prostitution. Non-Mormon visitors to Salt Lake City frequently observed that Mormons seemed to accept as established fact that men in mainstream society generally kept several mistresses in addition to their legal wives, a ‘fact’ that Mormon leaders frequently cited in their defence of plural marriage. In 1857 Heber C. Kimball told a Mormon gathering that the ‘great men of the earth keep from two to three, and

⁵⁶ Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 128-33.

⁵⁷ ‘Weakness and Impotence of Men’, JD 1:202. Emphasis in original.

perhaps half-a-dozen private women . . . merely to gratify their lusts'.⁵⁸ Brigham Young denounced this system of 'private women', wherein men may 'take as many liberties with them as if they were their wives, and yet not call them wives'.⁵⁹ George Q. Cannon, in his 1857 article on race improvement, accepted a similar view of male sexual conduct, warning that monogamy inevitably requires prostitution; polygamy is, therefore, a skeptic's solution. It is the product of Cannon's grim assumption that 'Human nature must be taken as it is'.⁶⁰

Thus far Mormons have appealed to physiology, history, moral psychology and economics to vindicate their unorthodox familial practices. Critics of this account may doubt whether Mormons engaged meaningfully with the social sciences, suggesting that Mormons merely grasped for any 'science' or 'fact' that would strengthen their case for plural marriage without undertaking a serious intellectual study. This was, in some instances, quite obviously the case. Before 1852, Mormon leaders used census information, which showed that males outnumbered females in the Utah Territories, to deny that they practiced polygamy, claiming that it was simply a practical impossibility; after 1852 Mormons cited the same census data to make the exact opposite claim, contending that there are more females than males and thus that nature itself sanctioned polygamy.

To this critique this dissertation offers two responses. First, that even if Mormons consulted scientific theories only out of convenience, such a dialogue still represents a significant intellectual shift from the first two decades of plural marriage, when Mormons' justifications for polygamy appealed exclusively to the spiritual rationale shared only by the internal community and justified exclusively in terms of sacred literature. And second, that the extent to which Mormons' engagement with social theory actually modified their family practices is, in fact, irrelevant to the claims of this dissertation. What is salient about Mormonism's engagement with social science is not their actual theories but rather their belief that they would be able

⁵⁸ 'Oneness of the Priesthood—Impossibility of Obliterating Mormonism—Gospel Ordinances—Depopulation of the Human Species—The Coming Famine, Etc.', JD 5:91.

⁵⁹ 'Advice to Lawyers—Royal Polygamy in Europe—Polygamy Revealed From Heaven', JD 11:261.

⁶⁰ Cannon, 'Improvement of Our Species', *Western Standard*, 7 August 1857.

to discover scientific and moral continuity where others had failed to do so. Physiological science is not *why* Mormons practiced polygamy, but they still *expected* it to validate their system. They appealed to science because they believed it would be a true ally of all social and moral truths, bringing about ‘Zion’, the master science or final culmination of God’s laws; however, the more sciences Mormons inducted into their cause, the more those sciences complicated their account of the family, and the more difficult it became to reconcile the dictates of one science (even dictates that they themselves had posited) with the dictates of another. Thus the claim made in this dissertation is not that Mormons were, in reality, impartial and dispassionate consumers of social science, but rather than in the process of re-appropriating social science for their own spiritual needs, Mormons discovered the same methodological difficulties that troubled Owenism and Oneida.

iii. The United Order, 1868-1890

Heretofore, this chapter has occupied itself with claims pertaining to Mormons’ engagement with social science; consequently, their efforts at economic cooperation have only been examined peripherally, in their incidental overlaps with polygamy or life on the frontier. This omission was a practical necessity: Mormonism’s economic theories are too significant to exclude from an account of Mormons and social science yet too complex and unwieldy to situate comfortably, and explore at any length, amidst the string of other less influential social theories. To correct this imbalance, this section will give a historical account of Mormon economic cooperation and its relationship with the movement’s social and moral doctrines, beginning with Joseph Smith, continuing through the Utah period and concluding with the collapse of Brigham Young’s United Order in the 1880s.⁶¹

⁶¹ The complex causes behind the collapse of the United Order and the end of polygamy are not directly relevant to this dissertation; however, it is notable that they were not unrelated. Mormonism’s social and economic doctrines had become so interconnected in this period that the collapse of one necessitated the collapse of the other. Thus when the federal government began to enforce anti-bigamy

In giving this account, this section aims to substantiate two claims about the relationship between Mormonism's social and economic doctrines. Firstly, that before 1868, Mormonism's ideas about economic cooperation paralleled and complemented its social ideas, particularly their notion of the patriarchal family, in that both exemplified the same dualism of individualism and collectivism, autonomy and submission, that characterised the patriarchal family. Secondly, that after 1868 this parallel between Mormonism's social and economic ideas continued, but both shifted decisively towards collectivism. After 1868, Mormons increasingly elevated the individual's obligation to the supra-patriarchal family—meaning the whole church—above that to their own immediate families, while at the same time moving towards a more comprehensive economic communism.

The historical event that triggered this renegotiation of the Mormon social project was the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, which Brigham Young feared would flood the Saints with 'gentile influence'. In response, Young redoubled his efforts to ensure the social and economic insularity of the Saints. Young and other leaders instituted a revival of polygamy, emphasising plural marriage in lectures and addresses with a frequency and intensity that had not been seen since the 1850s, and he also aimed to isolate the Mormon community economically, an effort that began as a series of cooperative stores and matured into an effort at full-scale communism called the United Order. In this period Mormon leaders came to see themselves as social theorists who had solved, or were on the verge of solving, what they called the 'social problem'—that is, social and economic fragmentation. Increasingly Mormons situated their own experiments relative to thinkers like Owen and Fourier, claiming the cooperative reformist nomenclature as their own and asserting their moral and scientific superiority. That Mormons began their most comprehensive efforts at social and economic reform in response to an external threat (i.e. the railroad) substantiates another of this chapter's central claims: that crises in Mormon identity consistently produced two somewhat contradictory effects, in that they resulted in both social

laws in the 1880s (arresting some polygamists while others fled), the communes, who were generally led by polygamists, could not withstand the loss of leadership.

isolation and intellectual integration with the outside world. It is salient that in the same moment that Mormons pulled inward to secure their community from ‘gentile influence’, they also identified themselves as the true masters of mainstream social science.

Mormon cooperative economics before 1868

Joseph Smith introduced economic egalitarianism into Mormonism soon after he founded the church in 1830. In November 1831, while in Kirtland, Ohio, Smith dictated a revelation that came to be known as the Law of Consecration, a law that demanded members who received wealth ‘more than is needful for their necessities and their wants’ should consecrate the excess to the storehouse to be distributed according to need. The justification for such a request was God’s stern command that ‘in your temporal things you shall be equal’.⁶² In 1832 this doctrine evolved further. In April Smith received another revelation commanding equality among the membership, defining the requirements of equality as all having equal claims to property, ‘every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his wants are just’. Smith summarised the new system as ‘Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God’, and he further promised that this new arrangement would be ‘an everlasting order’, if the people remained worthy of it.⁶³

In April 1834 Smith dictated an additional divine message about economic equality. In a revelation that he claimed came from God, Smith attacked private ownership. God, he explained, owns the earth, and therefore all traditional claims of ownership were in fact best described as ‘stewardships’, an arrangement through which God gave individuals temporary authority to administer and care for his property. But this was not ownership in the traditional sense, and thus Smith warned, ‘let not any among you say that it is his own; for it shall not be called his, nor any part

⁶² *Doctrine and Covenants* 70:7-18.

⁶³ *Doctrine and Covenants* 82:15-21.

of it'.⁶⁴ Following the system outlined in the revelation, Smith instituted an elaborate but ultimately unsuccessful communistic system wherein members deeded all property to the church and, in return, received a stewardship, determined by the church, according to their needs and abilities. This was known as the 'Law of Consecration', and, after it failed, it was quickly replaced by the more conventional 'lesser law' of tithing, which required members to give 10 percent of their property to the church, and then continue to give 10 percent of their increase annually thereafter.

If Smith had lived, these early efforts at economic egalitarianism may have fallen into obscurity, one of a dozen peculiar and undeveloped experiments that Smith conceived, partially executed and abandoned. But after his death Mormon leaders clung to Smith's utopian vision of economic equality, elevating it above his other teachings and establishing it, along with polygamy, as the heart of Smith's legacy. Brigham Young himself was particularly determined to carry out Smith's economic depiction of 'Zion'. Young's first attempt to restore Smith's economic vision occurred from 1855 to 1858, when Young began asking members to 'consecrate' their property to the church. It is unclear precisely how many Mormon families actually answered this call and participated in this system; however, there are records of several hundred such 'consecrations' in this period, from which data historians have estimated that less than half of the 7,000 families then residing in Utah consecrated most or all of their property in this period.⁶⁵

These consecrations were not compulsory in the sense that they were not forced; however, there was considerable social pressure put on members to ingratiate themselves with the leadership by making an economic sacrifice. Evidence suggests that calling for these consecrations Brigham Young intended to restore the system of Consecration and Stewardships as outlined by Joseph Smith, which, in addition to members consecrating their property to the church would have required two additional steps: first, that local Mormon leaders divide up the consecrated property and assign 'stewardships', and second that the surplus generated from these

⁶⁴ *Doctrine and Covenants* 104:70.

⁶⁵ See Arrington, Fox, and May, *City of God*, 63-79.

‘stewardships’ be regularly transferred back to the Mormon leadership for redistribution. But Young was not able to reintroduce the entirety of the program, possibly due to tensions with the federal government and the ‘Utah War’, and the programme terminated in 1858.

What is particularly illuminating about these economic experiments is their attempt to reconcile a collective, communistic ideal with a sacrosanct notion of individuality and ownership. In this sense Mormons’ notion of an economic ‘Zion’ paralleled their social notion of the patriarchal family—in both instances, Mormons aimed to reconcile individualism with collectivism, autonomy with community, and independence with submission. For example, despite the heavy emphasis on cooperation and community, at its core the notion of a ‘stewardship’ preserved both a nominal and practical sphere of individual possession and autonomous control, while at the same time reinforcing a larger idea of mutual or communal ownership. ‘Stewards’ directed the daily management of their economic stewardships, and in that sense they ‘owned it’, a principle that reinforced the traditional, property-owning family and its individualistic foundations. But in another sense Mormons reinforced the communistic ideal, claiming that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’, and therefore ‘are all in a state of equality, owning nothing’.⁶⁶ Through stewardships, Mormons navigated the same duality that they navigated with the patriarchal family: that of the great, collaborative family of God coexisting with individual, patriarchal families, each with their own interests and kingdoms to build.

An additional parallel is found in that both stewardships and the patriarchal family were grounded on inequality, and not just a reluctant acceptance of inequality but a positive affirmation of inequality’s social potential. Stewardships were grounded the assumption that some individuals are better able to manage economic matters than others, and that, consequently, the best economic system would harness their capacity for the good of the whole. This was, perhaps, the most salient distinction between the Mormon cooperative project and communism: Mormons openly recognised that stewardships are not equal because human beings are not equal. Orson Pratt affirmed

⁶⁶ ‘Consecration’, JD 2:99.

this concept in 1854, clarifying that some stewardships are greater than others ‘Because God has given to some men greater ability to manage and control property than others’. This produced a new definition of equality among Mormons, what Orson Pratt termed ‘perfect equality’, or the equality that comes from ‘each one seeking the interest of the whole as well as of himself’.⁶⁷

Of course, inequality was also a defining feature of the patriarchal family and Mormons found justifications for this hierarchical social system in a variety of social sciences. In their study of politics and moral psychology Mormons concluded that the natural hierarchy of the conventional family is the natural political hierarchy for a community or a state. Orson Pratt, in an issue of the *Seer*, claimed that ‘Family government is the first order of government’, by which he meant the hierarchical family in which ‘Husbands must govern their wives and children . . . and wives and children must learn to honor and respect the counsels of the head of the family’. This principle of hierarchy, was, therefore, the great political principle of Zion, because ‘What is applicable to small families is also applicable to larger ones . . . and the same great heavenly principle is applicable to a union of any number of families; or to the whole body of the saints’.⁶⁸ Inequality is the social principle of both family and general government. It ensures that although patriarchs are sovereign in their own sphere, they remain compliant and yielding to their spiritual and political superiors, and in so doing it ensure that autonomy never comes at the expense of social cohesion. It is what allows family love to have a social and moral place in society. It is what allows society to accept the family without accepting the family as a school of vice.

This highlights what is, perhaps, the most important distinction between the Mormon patriarchal family and Oneida’s ‘enlarged family’: Oneida broke down all existing reproductive ties, making each member a child in relation to the Community, which was equally the parent of all. The Mormon patriarchal family, however, left the reproductive family intact, and if anything it actually strengthened the bonds of the

⁶⁷ ‘Consecration’, JD 2:100-102.

⁶⁸ Pratt, *The Seer* Vol. 1, No. 9, 144 and Vol. 2, No. 7, 292.

traditional patriarchal family. What Mormonism did, however, to prevent the family from becoming a school of selfishness was to subject the individual patriarchal family to the supra-patriarchal family: smaller family units were allowed to exist so long as they behaved, in their relation to the community, as children of the larger patriarch. Thus both Oneida and Mormonism conceived of the community as a type of collective parent. Where they differ is in their conception of the unit of communal offspring: at Oneida, individuals formed the children of the overarching parent, the Community; for Mormonism, that role was filled by individual families.

This was the Mormon conception of 'Zion' for more than twenty years. It was a social, moral and economic system that held in tension the individual and the collective, the family and the commune, the particular and the general, the micro and the macro. In 1868, however, Mormons began to move towards the collective principle, both in their economics and in their social theory. This shift is the topic of the next subsection.

The collective principle after 1868

The completion of the Union Pacific Railroad presented a formidable threat to Mormon sovereignty in Salt Lake City. Brigham Young was an outspoken supporter of the railroad, hoping it would bring Mormon converts to Utah; however, in addition to Mormons Young knew that the railroad would likely bring non-Mormons as well, and in sufficient numbers to pollute Mormon society. According to historians Leonard J. Arrington, Farmorz Y. Fox and Dean L. May, this fear, in addition to Young's long-standing hope to realise Joseph Smith's economic vision, is what prompted Young to launch his economic reforms in the late 1860s.⁶⁹

The first of these reforms was the mercantile cooperation, which began in 1868, the goal of which was to supplant non-Mormon merchants with Mormon retailers, establishing Mormon economic hegemony to such an extent that it would be impossible for non-Mormons to succeed. The plan required a central cooperative wholesale house in Salt Lake City, which would allow Mormon merchants to sell

⁶⁹ See Arrington, Fox and May, *City of God*, 88-9.

cheaper goods, as well as strict admonitions from the Mormon leadership to only buy goods from Mormon stores. This new economic policy was both fuelled by and in turn fuelled a new degree of Mormon insularity, and once again, Mormons defined themselves from the ‘other’ using dramatic language: George Q. Cannon warned Mormons, ‘do not go and buy of men who would use that money to cut your throats’, while Brigham Young advised Mormons against using their wealth to ‘enrich outsiders’.⁷⁰ The goal of this new system was, of course, isolation from ‘gentiles’.

It is ironic, then, that just as Mormons were drawing themselves even more inward, alienating their community socially and economically from mainstream society generally and non-Mormon migrants specifically, Mormon leaders were increasingly situating themselves as committed analysts of mainstream social theory. Of course, Mormons had been appealing to the social and physical sciences for several decades; however, it was not until the late 1860s that this shift in Mormon identity climaxed, and Mormons, believing they had established themselves as true social theorists, assumed the language traditionally associated with cooperative reformers: John Taylor began to describe Mormon unity with the Fourierist term ‘phalanx’, and George Q. Cannon compared Mormon cooperative experiments to Fourier and Cabet, with the distinction that, despite their laudable aims, other cooperative movements ‘lack cohesive power’, a social flaw that he believed Mormons had solved.⁷¹

In two separate addresses in 1869 George Q. Cannon expounded on what he termed the ‘social problem’, offering polygamy and economic cooperation as solutions. Both, he explained, are intended to counter selfishness and social fragmentation in both economic and sexual matters. The Mormon experiment is therefore, according to Cannon, the world’s supreme achievement in social and moral reform, an enterprise that dwarfs the feeble efforts of more mainstream theorists: ‘We

⁷⁰ Quoted in Arrington, Fox and May, *City of God*, 90.

⁷¹ John Taylor used the term ‘phalanx’ to describe the United Order in August 1878. See ‘God’s Power in All Things—Kingdom of God—Cooperation, a Stepping Stone to the United Order—Political Economy—National Troubles—Missionary Labors—Schools and Teachers’, JD 20:44. For George Q. Cannon’s references to Fourier and Cabet, see ‘The Order of Enoch—Socialistic Experiments—The Social Problem’, JD 13:97-8.

are solving the problem that is before the world to-day, over which they are pretending to rack their brains. I mean the “Social Problem”.⁷² Mormons, he claimed, had also ‘racked their brains’, but where others had failed he believed that Mormons had succeeded.

According to Cannon, the Mormon experiment had already proven itself, as it had produced ‘a healthy, pure and virtuous community, a community which, in these respects, has no equal on the earth’.⁷³ This was the historical moment when Mormons came to view their social system not only as *progressive* but as *progressed* past conventional or mainstream standards. They had, in their view, proven their scientific superiority. Thus it was in this period that Mormon promises about their social system became increasingly bold. Brigham Young declared that polygamy ‘will work out the moral salvation of the world’, and John Taylor, in describing Mormonism’s wider social project, proclaimed, ‘We are taking a stand to revolutionize the ideas of ages, to overturn the fallacies of centuries, and to root out and destroy the corruptions of past generations by introducing the law of the most high God’.⁷⁴

Convinced of their success in the previous decades, Mormons intensified their social and economic aims. The cooperative stores were successful, so much so that in 1873 Young announced the beginning of a more ambitious social and economic project—the United Order, also called the Order of Enoch or the Order of Heaven. For years Mormon leaders had hinted that tithing and the cooperative stores were just ‘stepping stones’ to a higher order, the ‘order of heaven’. The central idea of the United Order, like many other cooperative experiments, was to combine labour as well as capital, thus producing a superior economic and social order that would unify the Saints and leave more time for individual recreation and improvement. But although Mormon leaders spoke frequently about the moral and economic goals of the Order, the practical workings of the system remained vague and, in fact, varied quite significantly across the many United Orders that were founded in the 1870s.

⁷² ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ Taught By the Latter-Day Saints—Celestial Marriage’, JD 14:58.

⁷³ ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ Taught By the Latter-Day Saints—Celestial Marriage’, JD 14:58.

⁷⁴ ‘The Priesthood to Dictate in Temporal As Well as Spiritual Things—Inconsistency of An Equal Division of Property—Let Apostates Alone’, JD 12:361 and ‘Political and Social Economy’, JD 11:354.

In the years following 1873, when the Order was announced, Brigham Young and other leaders organised hundreds of Orders, superimposing this new economic structure over the extant hierarchy of church leadership. On the congregational level, local bishops generally served as ‘presidents’ of their particular associations, with the larger organisational units, such as stakes or regions, supervising and coordinating their efforts. Given the vast and amorphous nature of the Mormon movement—by 1873 there were over 100,000 Mormons, most of whom lived in the Utah Territories—there were many different interpretations of the United Order, and considerable disparity with regards to the degree of cooperation and centralisation.

To illustrate the aim in general terms applicable to the whole movement, Mormon leaders told their members that the goal was to live like a ‘well regulated family’. Brigham Young, speaking in 1872, described the Order as ‘a little family, say about a thousand persons’. In May 1874 Young again referred to the United Order as a ‘system of oneness’ grounded on the ‘union of the family, whether that family consists of the parents and ten children, or the parents, ten children, fifty grandchildren, or a hundred and fifty great-grandchildren, and so on until you get to a nation’. The United Order was not, however, merely a theoretical family; rather, Young intended for it be a family in practice as well as in principle. As an alternative to traditional domestic arrangements, where each woman cooks for ‘two or three or half a dozen persons,’ Young imagined ‘a hall in which I can seat five hundred persons to eat’. This system will prove more effective, Young promised, because ‘Half the labor necessary to make a people moderately comfortable now, would make them independently rich under such a system’.⁷⁵ The United Order was, according to Mormon leaders, a family of sorts; however, it resembled the vast communal family of the church much more closely than the polygamous patriarchal family. Some Orders, such as Orderville, Hebron and Price, actually implemented these plans,

⁷⁵ ‘The Order of Enoch’, JD 15:221-2.

preparing and consuming meals communally and living as one large family under a strict form of social and economic communism.⁷⁶

This idea of family constituted a considerable shift towards the collective principle, both economically and socially. Regarding the patriarchal family, Mormons increasingly emphasised the larger patriarchal family over its individual counterpart. The goal of the United Order was explicitly to establish communal families, and even to congregations that were not ready or able to embrace this radical new communism, Young and other Mormon leaders continuously emphasised the individual's obligations to the supra-family, the church, over their immediate family. In 1873, Orson Pratt denounced the tendency to seek wealth for one's own family as 'individualism', and the following year, in April 1874, he clarified this doctrine further, stating that the notion of 'every family for themselves . . . [is] in direct opposition to the order of heaven'.⁷⁷ In 1878, George Q. Cannon also explained that in addition to the family duty, individuals have a duty 'that reaches out beyond the family circle . . . to my fellow creatures', and a few months later, John Taylor warned that the family tempts a man to serve 'two masters', which he cannot.⁷⁸

This shift towards the collective manifested in both family and economic doctrines. Young intended that the United Order would eventually replace the concept of 'stewardships'—which, as previously argued, preserved a practical degree of individual autonomy while still reinforcing collective principles—with a more traditional form of communism. This is evinced in a letter that Young wrote to Mormon leaders at Orderville, wherein Young stated, 'The system of stewardship . . . is not so far advanced and does not approach so near to the Order of Enoch as that system which you have entered into in your county'. Young further clarified that for

⁷⁶ See Emma Carroll Seegmiller, 'History of the United Order of Orderville'. Located at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, BX 8643.2 .H53h.

⁷⁷ 'Consecration—Temporal Equality—Selfishness to Be Overcome—Resurrection—Return to Jackson County—Glory of Zion', JD 15:356 and 'The Order of Enoch—Study of Law—How to Become Rich', JD 16:5.

⁷⁸ 'Labors and Experience of the Elders—The Work Scarcely Begun—The Power of Union—Temporal Salvation Necessary As Well As Spiritual—Cooperation and the United Order', JD 20:87 and 'Cooperation and the United Order—The Saints Should Be Governed By the Law and Will of God—The Approaching Calamities Upon the World—Should be Willing to Forsake Earthly Interests for the Gospel's Sake', JD 21:57.

Orderville to abandon its communised system of ownership and labour for the old system of stewardships ‘would be to take a step backwards’. The goal, Young reiterates, ‘is union of the people . . . and the shortest cut to that is the best’.⁷⁹ Thus both economically and socially, the United Order represented a shift in Mormon social thought. For more than two decades, Mormons had, through their economic and social system, sought to balance communal unity with patriarchal sovereignty and autonomy; however, the United Order represented a significant intellectual movement towards the social principle.

This shift required Mormons to embrace a more optimistic view of human nature, particularly regarding selfishness and greed, than they had done previously. These ideas have of course been present in earlier periods of Mormon history, but they had always been tempered with more pessimistic accounts of human sympathy and egotism. But after 1873, the Mormon discourse shifted decisively to emphasise the boundless potential of human benevolence. For example, the Order of the City of St. George declared their intent to ‘abstain from all selfish motives and actions, as much as lies in our power . . . and to promote the special good of the Order and the general welfare of all mankind’,⁸⁰ while the emphasis on general benevolence, rather than concern for one’s own family, requires a much higher standard of individual benevolence than traditional familialism, or even polygamous, patriarchal familialism. However, although Mormons certainly adopted a more positive view of human psychology in this period—or, more accurately, they believed that their superior social arrangements had succeeded in drawing individuals out of their ‘contracted’ education—they still maintained a profound pessimism about human physiology.

This duality is one of the more striking aspects of Mormon social theory in this period: Mormon leaders promised a moral revolution, where all seek the benefit of all and selfishness succumbs to brotherly love, yet they continued to fortify their cynical, even fatalistic account of human sexual physiology. Evidence for this is not

⁷⁹ Letter from Brigham Young to Elders [illegible] and Seegmiller, 13 October 1875. In Orderville Ward Papers pertaining to the Orderville United Order, 1874-1885, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, LR 6543 27.

⁸⁰ ‘Preamble and Articles of Agreement of the United Order of the City of St. George’ (ca. 1874).

difficult to find, as in this period Mormons continued to write obsessively about plural marriage, but perhaps the best sample comes from George Q. Cannon and Orson Pratt, whose discourses in 1869 provide some of the strongest language to be found in the entire corpus of Mormon apologia on plural marriage. In his address Cannon reasserts the physiological necessity of plural marriage, claiming that if a man is not allowed plural wives, 'he must either do himself violence or what is far worse, he must have recourse to the dreadful and damning practice of having illegal connections with women, or become altogether like the beasts'.⁸¹

Orson Pratt followed next, asserting that monogamy has 'laid the foundation for prostitution and the evils and diseases of the most revolting nature under which modern Christendom groans'. Both men appeal to nature, claiming that nature produces far more females than males (Cannon claims there are 63,000 more women than men in Massachusetts alone), and that the natural depravity of men requires that such women will become either prostitutes or wives. Polygamy, then, is the only way to save women 'from a life of degradation'.⁸² One year later in 1870, Cannon reaffirms that the solution to this 'social problem' is to obstruct the path of human depravity and 'open the door in the other direction and make plural marriage honorable'.⁸³ According to Cannon and Pratt, polygamic social policy derives logically and necessarily from the immutable laws of nature.

In his account, human physiology is immutable. And, of course, this assumption of a static human physiology is a presupposition for many of Mormonism's ideas about the family, from polygamy to parenthood and racial improvement. Much like Owen, Mormons wanted to treat the human specimen as an animal, as a part of the natural world, whose physical, discoverable laws would provide the basis for normative social and moral claims. This, they believed, was necessary to perfection, to 'Zion'. But their larger social project required a more fluid concept of the human animal, one that could progress past the same physical laws on which their science was based. Because of this tension, the family, and eventually

⁸¹ 'Celestial Marriage', JD 13:206.

⁸² 'Celestial Marriage', JD 13:204-206.

⁸³ 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ Taught By the Latter-Day Saints—Celestial Marriage', JD 14:58.

even the concept of 'Zion' became the battleground upon which Mormons tested two competing notions of social science and perfectibility against each other: one of physical perfection achieved through a perfect understanding and application of nature's laws, and the other a social paradise, where seemingly innate human flaws like selfishness had been purged from the human animal. In Mormonism, this tension between moral and physical perfectibility was theological as well as philosophical, and in this sense Mormonism provides perhaps the most extreme articulation of the struggle between individualism and collectivism. In their philosophy, the tension was existential, a choice between consummate sociability and supreme individuality, between submissive childhood and eternal Godhood.

This emphasis on the social principle would be relatively short-lived. Young had established hundreds of United Orders in 1873-4, but few achieved economic stability and by 1877, when Brigham Young died and John Taylor succeeded him as prophet, only a handful remained. Taylor was far less enthusiastic about the economic experiments began by his predecessor, and consequently the few surviving Orders found themselves receiving less and less support from church headquarters in Salt Lake City. John Young, Brigham Young's nephew, was a member the Orderville United Order, one of the most successful Orders and consequently one of the last to fail. John Young attributed the ultimate demise of Orderville to Young's death, speculating that 'Had President Brigham Young Lived, the history of that community would have been different. . . . The fact is that in the death of Brigham Young, Orderville lost its guiding star and pilot'.⁸⁴

Worse still were the federal anti-bigamy laws passed in 1884. Because polygamous men tended to be higher up in the church leadership, these laws effectively deprived communities like Orderville of their leadership, as bishops and other leaders were either imprisoned or went into hiding.⁸⁵ Charlotte Cox, a member of the United Order in Orderville, recalls one summer near the end of the Order when 'All the polygamists in town were being forced into hiding so much of the time [they]

⁸⁴ John R. Young, *Memoirs of John R. Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1920), 155.

⁸⁵ Seegmiller, 'History of the United Order', 52.

left crops in the fields and gardens to care for themselves'.⁸⁶ Amid growing pressures from the federal government to cease practicing polygamy, combined with the fact that John Taylor was 'out of sympathy' with the United Order, the Orderville United Order dissolved in 1886. In 1890, a few years after the collapse of the United Order experiment, the new prophet, Wilford Woodruff, issued a manifesto that discontinued the church's practice of plural marriage. Mormonism had officially turned away from both its economic egalitarianism and its sexual unorthodoxy, ending a social experiment that had stretched across more than five decades.

This chapter has argued that whatever the origins of Mormonism's radical family doctrines, ultimately the family provided a practical and conceptual space for Mormons to work out serious intellectual puzzles about morality, sociability and the role of the new social sciences. This account challenges those historians who depict Mormonism's social project as reductive, simplistic and fanatical. It is the contention of this chapter that although Mormons' belief in universal continuity may have been utopian it was not reductive. It did not produce a monistic account of human nature or social life. They may have approached the family problem with naive and overly simplistic expectations about the congruity of the moral and scientific world, but their struggle to reconcile the moral and intellectual chaos of the family problem did not take a one-sided approach to the questions of moral motivation and the normative values of selfishness and altruism. There was an attempt to reconcile disparate, incongruous notions of human life—ideas about sociability, individual autonomy and physical perfectibility—that continued and evolved for more than four decades.

This is not the traditional account of Mormonism. Indeed, even to associate Mormonism with 'science' may seem historically and intellectually bizarre to both historians of Mormonism and historians of science. That, however, is the contention of this chapter. It is an argument in two parts: firstly, about how and why Mormons altered the family, and secondly about how thinking about the family in turn altered Mormonism. It claims that, ultimately, the family challenged Mormonism's monistic,

⁸⁶ Charlotte Cox Heaton, 'A Pioneer Heritage and Early Years in Polygamy and the United Order in Southern Utah'. Located at University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, CT275.H43 A3.

theological worldview. Although polygamy derived from Joseph Smith's prophetic leadership and biblical restorationism, as Mormons tried to put those ideas into practice, they discovered a social, economic and moral puzzle—a paradox that, despite its religious origins, religion was unable to fully explain. So Mormons turned to other sources to fill in the gaps left by their spiritual guides. They turned to the natural world, believing that, as God had created both the moral and physical world, such studies would only augment and supplement the moral philosophy they found in Smith's revelations and the Bible. Instead they found intellectual anarchy.

Thus Mormonism tells the story of a spiritual community and their attempt to reconcile a foundational social institution—the family, with its complex nexus of social, moral and scientific implications—with their belief, or, perhaps more appropriately, their *faith*, in the continuity of the moral and physical world. It is also a story of their failure. And of the contentious, inconsistent, and even antithetical ideas of family and social life that, in practice, transformed the harmonious ideal of 'Zion' into a polyphonic dialogue about which science best explains human behaviour and which aspects of family life best represent the social, moral and scientific ideal.

5. THE FAMILY OF SOVEREIGNS AT MODERN TIMES

i. Political anarchism and the family

The preceding chapters examined the family question as it played out in the economic egalitarianism of Owenite socialism and in two types of spiritual movements, namely the expansive Mormon phenomenon and the confined commune at Oneida. Modern Times constitutes a third type of movement whose aims were, at least on the surface, explicitly political rather than economic or spiritual. Thus the founding principle at Modern Times was a political principle, defining the relationship between the individual and society. That principle was ‘sovereignty of the individual’ with the addendum ‘to be exercised at his own cost’. In practice, this devotion to self-sovereignty produced a very different type of community than those previously studied. Owenism, Oneida and Mormonism each relied on the apparatus of some form of hierarchy, usually held together by the charisma and vision of a single man, and the movement’s intellectual and spiritual development occurred within the orbit of that leader and his influence. Indeed, it is difficult to over-estimate the significance of Robert Owen, John Humphrey Noyes and Brigham Young to their respective followers. In contrast to these more traditional examples, Modern Times scorned all hierarchy. In practice as in principle, Modern Times maintained the dictum that its founder, Josiah Warren, declared disdainfully to John Humphrey Noyes: that ‘there is no “Chief” in that sense of the word, where all are “Sovereigns”’.¹

Modern Times enshrined the sovereignty principle as the heart of their cooperative society. Josiah Warren acquired his experience with communal living and collective ownership at New Harmony, Indiana, as a supporter of Robert Owen’s American experiment, but after reflecting on the failure of Owenite socialism in that

¹ Josiah Warren, ‘A Few Words to the Writer in a Paper Called “The Circular” on “the Sovereignty of the Individual”’, Josiah Warren Papers, 1834-1868, Labadie Collection, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, CN Labadie-Warren, Box 1, Folder 15.

venture Warren concluded that the defect of communism was, in fact, communism itself. Warren tested his ‘time store’ or ‘equity store’—where he sold goods at cost with a small markup for his labor—and after he had convinced himself of its success he moved to New York in 1850, where he met the radical reformer Stephen Pearl Andrews, whom he soon converted from Fourierism to his own doctrines. Together he and Andrews set out to found a cooperative community based on Warren’s principles.

Warren’s socialist ideals fuelled his philosophic anarchism. He came to believe that cooperation could never be achieved through a combination of interests, such as the collective ownership advocated by Owen, because such all such projects would collapse ‘from the inherent selfishness of the human race’.² But despite this view of human nature, particularly unorthodox for a cooperative reformer working towards utopia, Warren hoped that the cooperative project might yet be saved—by individualism, which Warren termed the ‘vital principle of human happiness’.³ Cooperation, he concluded, requires that interests be disaggregated and individualised to the fullest possible extent: collective ownership merely guarantees the frequent and forceful collision of individual interests; disaggregation and separation of individual interests, on the other hand, preserves harmony by removing the sources of social friction. It is the confounding of these two distinct principles, cooperation and combination, that Stephen Pearl Andrews condemned as the ‘blunder of socialism’.⁴ Echoing this sentiment, free thinkers at *Modern Times* raised the slogan ‘Cooperation without Unity’ to demarcate their brand of cooperative reform from their counterparts, and thus *Modern Times* summarily dismissed the cherished ideal of social unity that Owen, Noyes and Young pursued so earnestly.

² Charles A. Codman, ‘A Brief History of the “City of Modern Times”’, Long Island, N.Y.—and A Glorification of Some of Its Saints’ (Brentwood, N.Y.: ca. 1905). Located at Brentwood Public Library, Brentwood, N.Y.

³ Josiah Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce, Showing the Workings, in Actual Experiment, During a Series of Years, of the Social Principles Expounded in the Works Called ‘Equitable Commerce’, by the Author of This, and ‘The Science of Society’, by Stephen Pearl Andrews* (New York: Fowlers & Wells, 1852), 12.

⁴ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Science of Society*,—No. 1. *The True Constitution of Government and the Sovereignty of the Individual as the Final Development of Protestantism, Democracy, and Socialism* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1854; reprint, Weston, Mass.: M&S Press, 1970), 37.

This was to be a new idea of cooperation, disentangled from the unnecessary burdens of altruism, agreement and solidarity, and to this end Modern Times supplemented their first principle of individual sovereignty with a second, which it termed ‘cost the limit of price’. Together these principles supplied the entire recognised philosophy at Modern Times. Warren and Andrews believed that if these principles were properly understood and executed, no other form of political leadership, government or coercive body would be necessary to manage the common interests of mankind. The principle of sovereignty meant that each individual retained that degree of freedom which they could exercise without encroaching on the freedom of others; cost the limit of price instituted an economy free of capital gain, where goods were sold at cost rather than market price. It was the cost principle that, according to Stephen Pearl Andrews, transformed a mass of isolated, autonomous sovereigns into a cooperative body, as it provided the means by which ‘competition is rendered cooperative instead of antagonistic’ without restricting individuality.⁵

Such a radical project, committed to both cooperation and individual freedom, attracted a theatrical suite of free thinkers, radical reformers and spiritual idealists, each with their own disparate philosophies and beliefs. Eventually even Warren resented the multitude of feverish crusaders at Modern Times, ‘each one seeming to think that the salvation of the world depended on his displaying his particular hobby’.⁶ Warren might have been thinking of Dr Thomas Low Nichols and his wife, Mary Nichols, reformers whose free love campaign earned Modern Times considerable unwanted attention from their pious New England neighbours. Warren might also have been thinking of Edward Newbery, a dentist and enthusiastic phrenologist who advocated for ‘rational reproduction’, using phrenological theory to produce superior human offspring. Or perhaps Warren thought of Henry Edger, the faithful apostle of Auguste Comte who came to Modern Times with the intention of transforming it into the first American branch of the new positivist religion.

⁵ Andrews, *Science of Society*,—No. 2. *Cost the Limit of Price: A Scientific Measure of Honesty in Trade, as ONE of the Fundamental Principles in the solution of the Social Problem* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852), 170.

⁶ Josiah Warren, *Practical Applications of the Elementary Principles of True Civilization to the Minute Details of Everyday Life* (Princeton, Mass.: 1873), 17.

In addition to this curious marriage between socialist and anarchist ideology, Modern Times distinguished itself by its limited size and brief duration. Whereas Mormonism and Owenism comprised vast, amorphous movements of thousands, perduring through decades and stretching their singular histories across the century, Modern Times occupied a small physical geography, boasted of few numbers and lasted less than thirteen years. Indeed, Modern Times was small even by Oneida standards. The movement began with only a handful of families and at its height at most 150 residents claimed the latitude of a sovereign life at Modern Times. Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews, the dedicated public voice for Warren's ideas, founded Modern Times in 1851 and by 1864 the community had already moved away from its radical roots and adopted a new name, Brentwood.

The notoriety of Modern Times is not, however, reflected in its size. These free thinkers worked tirelessly to diffuse their philosophy—or, more accurately, their various philosophies—with figures like Stephen Pearl Andrews and Thomas and Mary Nichols publishing a steady and overwhelming stream of books, pamphlets and periodicals which frequently drew the interest, and often the disapprobation, of the New England press. Knowledge of Modern Times even extended beyond the United States, and no less a figure than John Stuart Mill acknowledged that it was from Warren, whom he praises as a 'remarkable American', that he borrowed the phrase 'the sovereignty of the individual' for his celebrated essay *On Liberty* (1859).⁷ But despite this influence in its own time Modern Times has not attracted equal attention in ours, and the experiments and unorthodox philosophies at Modern Times have received considerably less scholarly investigation than Owenism, Oneida or the Mormons. In fact, despite its obvious unorthodoxy on the family question, Modern Times is generally excluded even from broad comparative studies of nineteenth-century sexual or familial radicalism.⁸

⁷ Mill describes Josiah Warren's philosophy as a system that, 'though bearing a superficial resemblance to some of the projects of Socialists, is diametrically opposite to them in principle, since it recognises no authority whatever in Society over the individual, except to enforce equal freedom of development for all individualities'. See John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (hereafter *CW*), ed. J. M. Robson (32 vols., Toronto, 1963–91), Vol. 1, 260–61.

⁸ It is not included by J. Kern or Lawrence Foster in their comparative studies. Raymond Muncy

There is some justification for this neglect. The overtly anarchic foundation of Modern Times is a formidable obstacle to an aggregation and analysis of the family question. In practice as in theory each sovereign at Modern Times quite literally espoused and diffused his or her own particular views, on the family as on all other social, moral and political matters, and this ideological latitude makes it difficult to reconstruct a coherent intellectual account of the family that can be attributed to the community as a whole. This is the approach taken by Roger Wunderlich, who provides the only book-length study of Modern Times to date. Wunderlich examines the founding principles of Modern Times, namely sovereignty and cost the limit of price, but he makes no effort to synthesise the movement's views on the family with the brand of anarchic individualism that he identifies in Warren's central principles. Instead, he dismisses Modern Times's heretical family practices as manifestations of the social eccentricity that philosophical anarchism tends to cultivate. In this account familial radicalism is incidental to Warren's anarchic individualism rather than structural to it; furthermore, his accounts assumes that the intellectual nature of Modern Times as an anarchic movement precludes the reconstruction of any particular set of social and moral views that can be ascribed to the movement as a whole.⁹

It is the contention of this chapter, however, that such a reconstruction is in fact possible. It is possible because the philosophy at Modern Times was not anarchism precisely, or at least it was not anarchism *only*. The theory of sovereignty

provides a more inclusive study of sexual radicalism in this period, one that includes several movements from Fourierists to the Zoarites, but he also excludes Modern Times. See Kern, *Ordered Love*; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*; Muncy, *Sex and Marriage*.

⁹ See Wunderlich, *Modern Times*, New York, 54. Because Modern Times is associated with radical anarchism, scholars have made no effort to synthesise a philosophy that can be attributed to the movement as a whole; instead, historians have produced intellectual portraits of individual sovereigns and their philosophies. For examples of these portraits, see the following biographies: For the biography of Josiah Warren, see William Bailie, *Josiah Warren, The First American Anarchist: A Sociological Study* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906; for the biography of Stephen Pearl Andrews, see Madelein B. Stern, *The Pantarch: The Biography of Stephen Pearl Andrews* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968); and for a thorough biography of Mary Gove Nichols, see Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). Though Roger Wunderlich provides the only full-scale scholarly study of Modern Times it is supplemented by several local histories. See Verne Dyson, *A Century of Brentwood* (Brentwood, New York: Brentwood Village Press, 1950).

and cost the limit of price as outlined by Warren and Andrews made many normative social claims that went beyond individual autonomy—prescriptions for social organisation, human teleology and economic and moral justice—that also held implications for the type of family relationships that would exist in their new society. It has been one of the aims of this dissertation to challenge or problematise the intellectual categories in which these movements have been placed, such as economic egalitarianism or spiritual radicalism. This is not to say that these labels have no descriptive historical value, but rather to point out their limits and suggest that too strict an application of these categories obscures the role these movements played in a larger intellectual dialogue about the family, morality and the nascent social sciences. Owenism's interest in the family may have originated in improving the economic condition of the working classes, but it matured into a complex set of questions about the family's social and moral role, and the role of science in making prescriptions about social life. Mormonism tells a similar story. Polygamy may have derived from religious radicalism and the spiritual charisma of Joseph Smith, but eventually it too evolved into a rich dialogue about perfectibility, sociability and science. Because historians thought have clung too tightly to these conventional classifications, they have failed to note how the family question drew these movement out of their intellectual foundations and brought them into a much larger conversation—a multi-tonal dialogue that transcended the boundaries of economics, politics or spiritualism, and attempted to situate one of humanity's most complex institutions, the family, relative to the growing body of socio-scientific knowledge.

This chapter contends that *Modern Times* was also part of this conversation and that historians, by classifying it as a narrow, inflexible variety of philosophic anarchism, have failed to grasp the intellectual scope of *Modern Times*, not only as a political movement but also as a movement for social, moral and economic reform. Historians associate *Modern Times* with radical individualism and free love, and in this their view shares much more in common with the *Modern Times*'s contemporary critics—in particular the scandalised New England press, who saw in *Modern Times* only lawlessness and sexual promiscuity—rather than with how the free thinkers at

Modern Times conceived of and defended their own philosophy on social, moral and economic grounds. Viewing Modern Times through the lens of the family tells a very different story.

To challenge the conventional narrative this chapter offers an account that hinges on a new understanding of the role political anarchism played at Modern Times. It contends that for Warren and his followers the sovereignty principle was a *means* to an *end*, rather than an end in itself, and that the end in view was profoundly cooperative. Warren critiqued socialism for sacrificing individual liberty on the altar of economic equality; however, in restoring the sovereignty principle Warren aimed to secure both. Sovereignty was the means by which Warren intended to orchestrate cooperative social behaviour. He believed the sovereignty principle was the solution to the unscientific and ‘false’ view of human nature that underpinned socialism and communism, and he hoped that individualism could rescue the social vision of cooperative thinkers like Robert Owen. Thus he declared that the ‘high and noble aims of Communists must be reached without communism’.¹⁰

Evidence for this claim is found in Warren’s defence of both the sovereignty and the equity principles. In fact, despite this commitment to individual sovereignty and a utopian future without government, there is a sense in which Modern Times took equality far more seriously than its counterparts: Owen and Noyes embraced an aristocracy of age or experience, granting social stature to those who had gained wisdom or spiritual prowess through lengthy lives; similarly the social and spiritual gradation in Mormonism provides perhaps the most intricate example of cooperative hierarchy in either Britain or America. Mormons, like Owenites and Oneida Perfectionists, limited their pursuit of equality to the economic sphere and, while eulogising their new egalitarian society, accepted many other stratifications of power and influence.

Modern Times did not. The doctrine of individual sovereignty could tolerate no notion of partial or lesser individuality. All were sovereigns. None were partial or lesser sovereigns. The cost principle rewarded labour according the cost of that labour

¹⁰ *The Quarterly Letter*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1867), 3.

to the *labourer*, or the their ‘repugnance overcome’, which meant that more pleasurable or ‘less intense’ labour received less compensation, and labour undertaken by those with superior skills that rendered the work less difficult received less. Under such a system, the labour of women and even children received the same compensation as men, and this preoccupation with equality constitutes a prescriptive doctrine that falls outside the scope of pure anarchic individualism. Warren was so committed to the moral and social implications of his theory that, according to one resident of Modern Times, Warren opposed the free love movement ‘mainly for fear that the equity movement might be buried out of sight by that of freedom’.¹¹

Equity was the goal, and freedom the means. Thus Warren designed a political and economic system that, while functionally dependent on sovereignty, aspired to create a more social, moral and cooperative society. In this sense the project at Modern Times was not truly about individual liberty; it was, rather, an attempt to harmonise science, morality and politics. The sovereignty principle was necessary because of physical or scientific ‘facts’ about human nature. The fact of individuality required sovereignty in order to harmonise the diversity of human interests and tastes that exist in the natural world, but ultimately sovereignty is the scientific means by which one achieves social and moral ends. This is evinced in Warren’s descriptions of his system, which he commonly referred to as ‘equitable commerce’ but which he also labeled ‘equitable *moral* commerce’ or, even more significantly, ‘the means by which justice *has been* done to labor’.¹²

This treatment of sovereignty as a means to social and moral ends was not isolated to Warren himself; indeed, Stephen Pearl Andrews constantly affirmed this reading of Warren’s principles. He defined Warren’s ‘Science of Society’ as the inevitable merging of science and ethics. According to Andrews, political economy had failed due to the absence of ethics (‘for want of a more extended scope and a *more humanitarian* purpose’), while ethics had failed for the want of science (‘for submitting to the exigencies of false social relations’). Warren’s social system

¹¹ Codman, ‘A Brief History of the “City of Modern Times” ’.

¹² Josiah Warren. *Manifesto* (Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, 1952 [originally published 1841], 2-4; *The Quarterly Letter*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1867), 3.

comprehends the scientific truth of the ‘individualization of interests, coupled, however, with co-operation . . . [Thus] it may be said to absorb the Science of Ethics, as it does that of Political Economy’.¹³ This interpretation is also present in other intellectual subgroups of Modern Times. In 1855 the positivist Henry Edger explained that Modern Times’s founding principles may be viewed in two ways: ‘First, as being really the fundamental elements of a true “*Science of Society*”, and secondly, as furnishing a present basis of co-operation among persons desiring a thoroughly radical social renovation’.¹⁴ In the first instance, sovereignty and equity are immutable ‘facts’ about human nature; in the second, they are stepping stones to an improved, potentially perfected social state. But in both instances sovereignty is a principle of scientific cooperation—of social theory—and not the constituent of an uncompromising brand of political anarchism.

This claim that sovereignty was a means and not an end does not rescue Modern Times from being labeled a hotbed of radicalism. Indeed, by any measure the social practices at Modern Times were wildly unorthodox. But the sovereignty principle, however radical in its application and effects, and however infamous Modern Times became due to its practice, was in fact only the scientific means larger social and moral ends. Once the intellectual foundations of Modern Times are understood in these terms it becomes possible to reconstruct the movement’s response to the family question. If Warren’s anarchism derived from a larger cooperative project, then the disparate heterodoxies that developed subsequently, from the free love of Thomas and Mary Nichols to Edward Newbery’s ‘rational procreation’, were distinct interpretations of a theoretical framework already in place at Modern Times. From this perspective, the radical projects at Modern Times transcend the simplistic label of ‘anarchism’, which reduces them to incoherent experimentation, and emerge as self-reflective projects that engaged with the social and moral implications of the family relative to their ‘Science of Society’.

¹³ Andrews, *Science of Society*, No.—2, 14-15.

¹⁴ Henry Edger, *Modern Times, the Labour Question and the Family. A Brief Statement of Facts and Principles* (N.Y.: Calvin Blanchard Publications, ca. 1855), 2. Typescript located in Henry Edger Papers, Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania, collection number 1536. Subsequent page references will be to this typescript.

To explore these disparate projects this chapter will set aside the chronological approach used to explore the former three movements and will apply a different narrative style, presenting the thought of Modern Times as interconnected but self-contained portraits of individual thinkers. This is because the nature of Modern Times, which eschewed central authority, does not lend itself to the type of narrative used to describe Mormonism or the Owenites. The thinkers at Modern Times were united by their devotion to a common cooperative vision, and in this sense it is possible to talk about the ‘moral’ and ‘political thought’ of Modern Times; but in the absence of an explicit political or social hierarchy, individual thinkers embraced widely different interpretations of those principles, so much so that, ironically, it is only possible to uncover the underlying harmonies by separating out particular philosophic melodies from the general chorus of ‘sovereignty of the individual’.

Once this chorus has been broken down to its constituent melodies, it will be possible to see on what points these melodies harmonise and on what topics they produce dissonance. But in so far as a shared melody emerges, it will be argued that the ‘Science of Society’ at Modern Times produced a very different solution to the family problem than the other movements. This is because Modern Times treats self-interest as not only necessary but as beneficial. Oneida rejected self-interest; Owenism and Mormonism accepted self-interest as a practical reality but took steps to mitigate its anti-social tendencies. Modern Times, however, exalts self-interest as the quality that allows for true cooperation and makes social life possible. Thus while Owenism, Oneida and Mormonism indict the family as a mechanism of individual interests, Modern Times condemns the family for the instances in which it is *not* a vehicle for individuality and particular interests. In practice this meant that Modern Times undermined parent-child relations, which, according to their moral psychology, constituted an artificial combination of interests that undermined truly social relations. This overturns the conventional account of Modern Times as sexual radicals or ‘free lovites’. It suggests that despite Modern Times’s reputation as the ‘mother of Free Love’,¹⁵ the relation under assault at Modern Times was not sexual but parental.

¹⁵ It was John Humphrey Noyes who designated Modern Times the ‘mother of Free Love’. In his

In fact Modern Times exemplifies one of the more complex responses to the family problem: it accepted and even exalted selfishness as the foundation of social life, yet despite embracing individuality and partiality it could not accept the family. In this sense Modern Times turns the family question on its head. It accepts a sceptical account of human nature, in which appeals for social behaviour are couched in terms of self-interest, yet it discerns something particularly sinister in the family. It perceives the family as a type of false interest that undermines true individuality and therefore undermines social life. Modern Times is, therefore, something of a counter example to the other movements in this study, such as Owenism or Oneida, which assumed that the family was anti-social because it nurtured selfishness and individualism. Modern Times takes the opposite approach, identifying the family's assault on individualism as the source of its unsocial tendencies.¹⁶

Ironically, its fanatically individualistic response to the family question challenges the conventional account of Modern Times as consummate individualists. This is because Modern Times rejects the family not to rescue individualism, but to rescue the social and moral functions of individualism. It rejects those aspects of the family that aggregate interests, a process that, according to the social theory of Modern Times, corrupts those aspects of individualism that make it an instrument of social life. In this account Modern Times's radical individualism derives from the belief that only disaggregated self-interest produces truly cooperative behaviour; consequently their individualism was more about cooperation—and the social, moral and physical sciences underpinning it—than it was about individual autonomy. Thus to this movement of celebrated individualists and radical anarchists individuality is merely a means to a more social, moral and scientific society. It is little more than an instrument of social science.

History of American Socialisms he wrote, 'Owen begat New Harmony; New Harmony (by reaction) begat Individual Sovereignty; Individual Sovereignty begat Modern Times; Modern Times was the mother of Free Love'. Noyes, *American Socialisms*, 94.

¹⁶ In assaulting the family for threatening individualism, the sovereigns at Modern Times shared the approach to the family taken by some of the Owenite feminists from chapter 2; however, the Modern Times applied this principle much more thoroughly and with more radical results.

Warren and the problem of childhood

Josiah Warren famously opposed the free love movement, condemning it as a ‘crown of thorns’. His campaign against free love climaxed in 1853 when he posted *Positions Defined*, which chastised Thomas and Mary Nichols for making statements on behalf of the community. In later years, Warren even blamed the free love crusade for the community’s failure, as it brought down upon the sovereigns the ‘ogre’ of public opinion.¹⁷ But despite his distaste for radicalism on the marriage question, Warren willingly risked waking the ‘ogre’ to assault the inequity of traditional parent-child relations. This aspect of Warren’s philosophy is not pursued in scholarly literature, which is limited to descriptions of the cost principle, the labour dollar and Warren’s hostility for free love.¹⁸ Consequently what follows constitutes a new account of Warren that maintains that any history of Warren and his philosophy requires scholars to place significance where Warren himself placed it, and as Warren emphasised the application of these principles to the family in both of his major works on the cost principle—*Equitable Commerce* (1852) and *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce* (1852)—it should not be excluded from an examination of Warren’s social system.

In these texts Warren outlines a social theory that emancipates children from their parents both morally and economically. His assault on traditional parenthood derives from his core principles, sovereignty and equity. The sovereignty principle requires the separation of individual interests: the family, according to Warren, constitutes an artificial combination that brings individual interests into conflict, and thus domestic and social harmony required that the family be disaggregated as much as possible. The equity principle, or cost the limit of price, requires that all individuals be remunerated for labour according to the cost of that labour *to themselves*, meaning that in Warren’s system children found themselves at an advantage whereas under capitalism they had been disadvantaged. Thus Warren’s theoretical description of

¹⁷ Josiah Warren, *Positions Defined* (Modern Times, New York: the author, 1853); Josiah Warren, ‘A Few Words to the Pioneers’, *Word*, July 1873. Located in Special Collections, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

¹⁸ See Wunderlich, *Low Living and High Thinking*, 15-24; also see Bailie, *Josiah Warren*, 42-50.

sovereignty and equity undermines the moral, political and economic dependence of children on their parents. But Warren's commitment to this radical application was by no means theoretical. He applied it under his own roof, and he advocated its practice to other families as well.

In *Equitable Commerce* and *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, Warren discusses the application of his principles to the family, concluding that the economic independence of children, combined with their moral or legal emancipation from their parents, would produce healthier, more industrious children, less inclined towards waste and more disposed towards affection for their parents. Furthermore, Warren confesses that he has already proven the truth of this claim in an experiment conducted in New Harmony in 1840, when two young boys were placed on their own resources and instructed that 'they were now to act entirely upon their own responsibilities, each to have the whole proceeds of his labor, to do with it just as he chose, and that no power of parents or any one else was to interfere to compel them to work, or to study, or to do any thing else'.¹⁹

According to Warren, the results of this experiment proved conclusively that a disaggregation of parent-child interests produces morally and intellectually superior children, who had learned for themselves 'what it was best to do, by always looking forward to the consequences of not doing'.²⁰ In other words, by rendering children economically independent through the equity principle, they would develop into morally autonomous agents to a degree that would be impossible so long as their interests were artificially combined with their parents. In Warren's account the boys paid to learn a trade, and, quickly discovering the financial advantages to themselves of counting and measuring their own materials, they undertook the study of arithmetic in the evenings entirely by their own choice. In this way they continued on so happily 'as to wish their good fortune on all children', and Warren believed the boys lived

¹⁹ Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 57-8.

²⁰ Josiah Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 57-8.

more virtuously because they made decisions based on their own interests, disentangled from the interests of their families.²¹

Warren claimed that the traditional family puts children in opposition to their parents, both morally and economically. Returning to his experiment, Warren recalls a day when one of the boys was taken ill, and Warren advises him not to work, reflecting that in a normal state of family relations such trust would have been impossible: 'If he had been working for my interest instead of his own, as children generally do for their parents, I should not have dared to advise him not to work when he did not feel like it, for fear he would be tempted to make that a plea when he was well!'.²² For Warren, this episode proves that only individuality can mitigate the defects in the human character, and consequently that self-sovereignty is required in children as soon as its practice is possible. He advises parents 'to place their children upon their own separate and distinct interests; *entirely separate and distinct* from the interests of their parents, masters, rulers, or advisers'. The aim of this segregation of interests is to 'let [parents] learn that children, as human beings, have human rights; the right of *Individuality*, the right of sovereignty, as much as an adult, to be exercised within the same limits, *i.e.*, *at their own cost*, and that the exercise of these rights in indispensable to a successful education'.²³

Perhaps the most engaging aspect of Warren's deeply unconventional account is his conviction that love, even the love of parents, requires that interests be disaggregated in order to be pure and uncorrupted by selfishness. He does not dismiss the possibility of genuine altruism; rather, he insists that those noble sentiments can 'never be brought into play by the exercise of authority . . . On the contrary, the exercise of any thing of the kind is sure to kill all such noble impulses'. Morality requires that love and self-interest be strictly divided in order to ensure the purity of both. Warren insists that parents who want to motivate their children to complete household chores ought to trade labour for labour because leveraging their personal relationship and demanding labour for parental love is an 'iniquitous demand . . .

²¹ Josiah Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 60.

²² Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 63-4.

²³ Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 64.

Equity demands *labor for labor*. Love may be returned for love; but this is another subject, and should not be mixed up with *pecuniary* considerations'.²⁴

Warren's claim is that it is individualism, not altruism, that makes social life possible. Children and parents can engage in truly moral or altruistic relations only to the degree that they successfully disaggregate their interests and treat each other as individuals, recognising their own distinct needs and ambitions. Any false conflation of their individuality brings their interests into conflict and obstructs cooperative behaviour. This theory requires a radical renegotiation of the traditional family. In this new social and economic system families may still exist in love, but their social, political and economic structure is altered. It is not clear just how much Warren intends to alter the family's structure, but one clue is found in *Equitable Commerce*, where Warren describes how this theory modified his own family, specifically his relationship with his seven-year-old daughter. According to Warren he made a contract with her for her labour 'as with any stranger', and thus he 'laid down all the false power over my child which was delegated to me by ignorant law-makers'.²⁵ Any special or particular social, political and economic relationship with her dissolved; only the emotional or sentimental bond remained. According to Warren this obliteration of artificially combined interests produces a superior variety of parental love 'because it is *disinterested*', and under these circumstances parental advice is uncorrupted: 'If there is ever to be undisturbed harmony between parents and children, it will be found where their interests and responsibilities are entirely *individualized, disconnected* from each other, where one exercises no power or authority of the persons, property, time, or responsibilities of the other'.²⁶

This account of Warren suggests that he may have spurned sexual radicalism but he was far from orthodox on the family question. His application of his sovereignty and equity principles insists that the family can only be purged of

²⁴ Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 66.

²⁵ Josiah Warren, *Equitable Commerce, a New Development of Principles, as Substitutes for Laws and Governments, for the Harmonious Adjustment and Regulation of the Pecuniary, Intellectual, and Moral Intercourse of Mankind, proposed as Elements of New Society* (New Harmony, Indiana: the author, 1846), 112; Warren, *Practical Details*, 66.

²⁶ Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 113. Emphasis in original.

selfishness when it is purged of inequality; however, as the family is inherently hierarchical, society must provide disadvantaged members with the means of their own social and economic elevation. This emphasis on individual sovereignty, combined with the economic emancipation of women and children, undermined the very foundations upon which family organisation rests and made a giant stride towards *equalising* every member of the community in an aspect never contemplated by the Owenites, the Oneida Perfectionists or the Mormons. It seems that Modern Times believed that cooperation, in order to qualify as cooperation at all, could only take place between equals.

The nature of these experiments makes it clear that Warren regarded the sovereignty principle as a means to achieving social and moral ends rather than an end in itself. In his account children ought to be morally and economically emancipated from their parents because, as human beings, their nature requires it for their moral development. Furthermore, the moral development of parents themselves requires that they not be allowed to exploit their own children, and thus sovereignty is necessary to secure a truly moral family organisation and to rescue love from pecuniary corruption. Sovereignty was the essential instrument of a ‘successful education’.²⁷

This is, of course, a much more radical position than that of Owen, who claimed that the rational education of children required that they be spared from the prejudiced and inadequate education that they would receive from their irrational and unqualified parents. In framing their social systems Owen and Warren asked the same question—that is, how to conduct education so as to produce rational, autonomous adults—but their solutions were quite different. For Owen, the solution lay in harnessing the collective rationality and knowledge of the whole and ensuring that this knowledge was transferred, by the collective management of education, to children; Oneida and Mormonism each had their own mechanisms in place to ensure that the prejudices or ignorance of parents was not passed along to their children. For Warren, however, the project of transforming children into rational adults could only

²⁷ Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce*, 64.

be accomplished by the children themselves. Only experience, specifically the experience that comes from full autonomy and real responsibility, could provide a social and moral education. Thus whereas Owen sought to save children from their parents' prejudice, Warren set out to save children from childhood, specifically from the infantilisation and violation of sovereignty that occurs in the traditional family.

ii. Free love at Modern Times

Because Warren famously opposed the free love movement, his emphasis on childhood rather than sexual love does not, by itself, challenge the conventional account of Modern Times as a champion of free love and consummate individualism. This section will therefore examine the free love movement in order to demonstrate that even among the most outspoken proponents of sexual freedom, the sovereignty principle was secondary, the means to a larger cooperative end. Their true project aimed to reconcile science and morality and, ultimately, to draw on this new 'Science of Society' to produce a coherent account of the family's moral and social role. And for this more expansive project, parenthood and childhood, and not sexual love and marriage, proved the most perplexing even among the advocates of free love.

Free love at Modern Times began with Stephen Pearl Andrews, who applied Warren's sovereignty principle to what he termed the 'freedom of the affections', declaring himself a 'free lovite'.²⁸ He was joined in 1853 by Dr Thomas Low Nichols and his wife, Mary Gove Nichols, a dynamic couple who applied their own peculiar physiological theories to support the free love cause. Andrews and the Nicholises shared a common commitment to free love but not a common approach to its justifications: both condemned traditional marriage as a violation of self-sovereignty, particularly with regards to women, but their distinct philosophies derived from different applications of physiological and psychological theory.

²⁸ Stephen Pearl Andrews, 'Free Love', *New-York Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1858.

Andrews and the moral hierarchy of love

In applying Warren's sovereignty principle to marriage, Stephen Pearl Andrews secured a reputation among historians as an individualist, anarchist and free-lovite. It is the contention of this chapter, however, that Andrews's assault on marriage was only part of a much larger campaign against the traditional family, and in particular against the subjection of higher affections such as sexual and romantic love to the vulgar, self-interested love that parents feel towards their offspring. This is not an aspect of Andrews's philosophy that scholars have pursued, perhaps because Andrews himself saw indissoluble marriage as the first obstacle to be overcome. Consequently, he devoted many of his political tracts to that narrow application of his larger philosophy.

That marriage was, however, only the first application of Andrews's philosophy is evident even in his most passionate defence of free love, an 1852 debate between Andrews, Horace Greeley and Henry James that took place in Greeley's *New York Tribune*, which Andrews subsequently published under the title *Love, Marriage, and Divorce, and the Sovereignty of the Individual* (1853). The first hint that Andrews means to challenge more than marriage occurs in Andrews's introduction to *Love, Marriage, and Divorce*, where he condemns the entire family unit as one of the last 'superstitions' that binds humanity in ignorance. Andrews writes, 'Who can foretell that isolated families may not come hereafter to be regarded as hot-beds of selfishness and narrow prejudice against the outside world, separating and destroying the unity of the human race'?²⁹ Thus Andrews suggests that social and moral progress will eventually necessitate the abolition of the individual family.

The picture provided in *Love, Marriage, and Divorce* is only a partial glimpse, however, of Andrews's unorthodox ideas about the family. In an unpublished manuscript written in his own hand titled, 'Love, Marriage, and the Condition of Woman', Andrews sketches the relationship between sexual love, marriage, the

²⁹ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *Love, Marriage, and Divorce and The Sovereignty of the Individual: A Discussion Between Henry James, Horace Greeley, and Stephen Pearl Andrews* (New York: 1853; reprint, Boston, Mass.: Benj. R. Tucker Publisher, 1889), 20.

family and female equality. This extraordinary text represents one of the most exhaustive and peculiar sociological texts of the period on human sexuality.

In it Andrews develops his own biological and psychological theories in order to produce a moral and scientific account of the family. Firstly, Andrews establishes the imperative for free love. According to Andrews, men and women are designed so as to 'balance' each other emotionally and psychologically. The love of women is spiritual, the love of men is material. Individuals are naturally attracted to those who can supply their deficiencies and bring them back into balance; consequently, restricting any two individuals for life may result in profoundly imbalanced characters, which will manifest in psychological and moral disorders. In this account, the psychological and moral wellbeing of humanity necessitates free love. It requires that individuals be free to pursue the necessary psychological 'balance' from their sexual partners, according to their needs at a particular time and under particular circumstances. It also requires that those individuals be free to change partners when their circumstances and needs change.

In addition to the indissolubility of marriage, Andrews's psychological theory identifies another problem with conventional marriage: it conflates sexual and parental love. Thus Andrews condemns the family as an institution in which 'love is subjected . . . [to] the necessity for the maintenance of children born of the union'.³⁰ According to Andrews nature has separated sexual and romantic love by planting two distinct instincts in the human animal: the sexual passion to ensure the propagation of the race, and the love of offspring to ensure that children are cared for while in infancy. Society has conflated these two instincts into the family organisation, thereby corrupting both. Nature condemns this perversion. It demands that marriage and parenthood be considered as two distinct, disconnected social needs.

Furthermore, Andrews claims that sexual passion is socially superior to parental love. Sexual love inculcates love and affection for others, and thus it is the

³⁰ Stephen Pearl Andrews, 'Love, Marriage, and the Condition of Woman', in *Love, Marriage, and Divorce and The Sovereignty of the Individual: A discussion between Henry James, Horace Greeley, and Stephen Pearl Andrews. And a Hitherto Unpublished Manuscript 'Love, Marriage, and the Condition of Woman' by Stephen Pearl Andrews*, edited by Charles Shivley (Weston, Mass.: M&S Press, 1975), 1 and 12.

‘highest in rank of all the social affections’, while the love of offspring resembles the anti-social love that one feels for oneself and is ‘prompted as much by selfishness as affection’. Consequently, sexual love ‘should no more be subjected to the necessities of maintaining offspring than it should be to the necessities of maintaining the parties themselves’.³¹ The current state of society has inverted these affections, to its own social and moral detriment; the elevation of the selfish, anti-social love for offspring prevents the development of universal love and genuine cooperation. Although the love for one’s offspring is instinctual, Andrews speculates that as society evolves and becomes more cooperative, the feelings of ‘excessive familism’ will fade, but this evolution is impossible under a system that elevates the love of offspring above sexual love and thereby encourages the ‘intense concentration of all the affections upon the little circle of immediate family relations and connections’. This concentration, Andrews declares, is not a virtue, as it is popularly conceived, but ‘Positively considered, it is a vice, and will come one day to be considered as such’. Under its influence ‘Every household is a little world of the most intense and exclusive selfishness’.³²

The moral physiology outlined in this manuscript suggests that although Andrews was certainly a free-lovite—sexual love was his preoccupation, and he regarded it above all other types of affection—he was not a free-lovite in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, liberating lovers from the legal bondage of marriage was only part of his larger aim to liberate sexual love from its bondage to the family. For Andrews the real obstacle to cooperation was not marriage but parental love, and his entire sexual theory is based on a desire to restore sexual love to its proper dominance over the other family affections.

This account of Andrews’s sexual radicalism also highlights his contribution to the larger intellectual project of *Modern Times*—the creation of a master science that comprehends morality, science and politics. Andrews calls this master science by many names, including the ‘Science of Society’, the ‘Science of Social Astronomy’,

³¹ Andrews, ‘Love, Marriage, and the Condition of Woman’, 13 and 49.

³² Andrews, ‘Love, Marriage, and the Condition of Woman’, 49.

‘Pantarchy’, and ‘Universology’. Underpinning these projects was the belief that science could correct false moral and social practices: thus Andrews’s developed a psychological account of human sexuality, from which he believed he could make normative claims about marriage, parenthood and the natural hierarchy of the affections.

Andrews was so certain of his ‘Science of Society’ that he believed it would ultimately abolish crime. ‘Crime is just as much a matter of cultivation as potatoes’, he declared. ‘The way to produce it and the way to prevent it is a matter of Science, just as much as any chemical process’. Crime, in Andrews’s account, derives from two social failures, the first scientific and the second ethical. It derives firstly from the ‘existence of arbitrary institutions’ that fail to grasp natural law, or scientific facts, and secondly from the ‘denial of Equity’, or the moral failure of the ‘commercial system’.³³ By combining science and ethics, and introducing their combined prescriptive claims into human institutions, Andrews believed that the ‘Science of Society’ could cultivate or exterminate crime by the same methods used in the chemical sciences.

This is the method Andrews described in his theory of pantarchy, a moral, social and political philosophy heavily influenced by positivism. In the pantarchy, the legislature exists ‘to discover and promulgate the Laws of Nature . . . or the Laws of Order and Harmony in the Universe’; consequently, under the pantarchal system, the legislature consists of ‘those who devote themselves to Sociological Science’, meaning scientists and moralists. This is the means by which the physical sciences become the social and moral sciences. It is the political means by which the ‘Science of Man’ is carried up from the ‘*individual to the collective sphere*, from Physiology to Sociology’.³⁴

Andrews’s ‘Science of Society’ was inspired by a vision of limitless human perfectibility, but the very same sciences by which Andrews hoped to achieve that perfectibility relied upon a static understanding of natural phenomena and, in

³³ Andrews, *Love, Marriage, and Divorce*, 47.

³⁴ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *Constitution or Organic Basis of the Pantarchy* (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1860), 4. Emphasis in original.

particular, the immutability of the human animal. The difficulty derived from the problematic nature of using humanity as a subject for science. In his psychology, Andrews appeals to instinct as the design of 'Nature', from which one can draw normative moral claims; but he also insists that the inferior moral instincts, such as familialism, will diminish as the human animal becomes perfected through science. Like Owen, Andrews wants to treat human beings as both components of the immutable natural world and as moral agents that stand outside physical laws and probabilities. Thus Andrews struggles to reconcile the same tension as the other thinkers in this dissertation—that is, the contradiction between human perfectibility and the scientific principles upon which that perfectibility is based.

Thomas and Mary Nichols and 'hereditary aristocracy'

Thomas Low and Mary Gove Nichols came to Modern Times in 1853. Their residency among the sovereigns was of short duration—only two years—but in that time they published prolifically, both books and periodicals. These works established Thomas and Mary as leaders in the free love movement. Mary Gove had studied medicine and discovered the same medical theories espoused by John Humphrey Noyes, that the semen expelled in frequent sexual congress deprives men of 'life force'. Mary extended this theory to women's sexual health, and began teaching that men who suffer from sexual disorders of excess inflict their disease upon their wives through unwanted sexual acts. The root of this physiological problem, she believed, was the lack of sovereignty or self-ownership brought about by the marriage state.

Thomas and Mary's sexual radicalism derived from their moral physiology—that is, from the prescriptive moral claims about marriage and sexuality that they extracted from their physiological theories—and it was precisely this preoccupation with physiology that transformed their anti-marriage campaign into hostility for the larger family unit. This escalation occurred when Thomas and Mary began to think about disease not just as it affects married individuals but also as it affects the physical, intellectual and moral progression of the race as a whole. In *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results* (1854), Thomas and Mary declare that the disease

and misery of married couples is not limited to husbands and wives but will cause measurable physiological defects in their offspring: men who indulge in sexual excess with their enslaved wives do harm to their offspring, and hence violations of the sovereignty principle harm the entire human race. The children of such men suffer ‘from the laws of hereditary descent’.³⁵

Thus marriage—by which Thomas and Mary meant the romantic and sexual relationship confined to two individuals—requires individual sovereignty for the happiness and entitlements of individuals themselves; however, when marriage matures into the family, sovereignty is replaced by obligations to the collective, in this case the production of a healthy and well-formed race. As disease is hereditary, Thomas concludes that those who are ‘tainted with hereditary disease’ ought not marry, and in his long list of such afflictions he includes ‘Cancer, gout, consumption, scrofula, and forms or modifications of syphilis, and insanity, as well as tendencies to crime’.³⁶ Thomas and Mary refine their physiological science, concluding that the entire spectrum of human characteristics is heritable, from disease to moral rectitude. As Thomas writes, ‘Character and genius are hereditary, as well as features and complexion. . . . There are born liars and born thieves—born drunkards and prostitutes. Vices and crimes—the characters and tendencies that produce them—are handed down through generations, as are honesty and virtue, and all noble and heroic qualities. These facts are the real basis of a hereditary aristocracy’.³⁷

The notion of a ‘hereditary aristocracy’ seems somewhat at odds with the idea of marriage as a private affair between sovereigns, yet both notions seemed, to Thomas and Mary, to derive from physiological facts about the natural world. Thus their physiology justified both radical individualism and extreme collectivism; their science was unable to reconcile the tension between marriage, defined as an instrument of individual happiness and wellbeing, and the family, defined as an

³⁵ Thomas Low and Mary Gove Nichols, *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, 84.

³⁶ Thomas Low Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations: As It Has Been, As It Might Be. Its History, Physiology, Morals, and Laws* (London: W. Foulsham & Company, 1886), 191.

³⁷ Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 191. This sentiment is also expressed in Thomas and Mary’s 1954 work on marriage; however, this particular phrasing is taken from the revised version published by Thomas Nichols in 1886.

instrument of collective progress and wellbeing for the race as a whole. In fact, their physiological science seems to be the source of these tensions.

This is apparent in Thomas and Mary's efforts to extract morality from physiology. In their biological and physiological studies they came to believe that nature itself endorsed radical individualism. Nature, they explained, had constituted each human being differently from all others, and thus nature had proclaimed individuality an unalterable 'fact' of the natural world. In Thomas and Mary's naturalistic biology, the prescriptive claims of nature, or the discoverable biological facts about the natural world, were tantamount to morality itself, and thus Thomas declared that something is 'right' if it is 'in harmony, or accordance with the laws of nature'.³⁸ Thomas and Mary immediately applied this naturalistic morality to human beings, claiming that because individuality is a biological fact, evidenced by the diversity of the species, then political and moral sovereignty are 'right' in an ethical sense. Society ought to recognise nature's sanction of individual sovereignty and cease regulating individuals.

Thus Thomas and Mary's defence of the sovereignty principle was far more radical than Warren's. The Nicholises believed that because individuality was a biological 'fact', then morality itself must also be individualised, even relativised. If something is 'right' or 'moral' if it is in accordance with its natural laws, then the laws governing morality must vary from individual to individual, according to his or her physical constitution. 'The law of every organised being is written in, or indicated by, its constitution', they wrote, adding, 'Whatever is in accordance with that law, for that being, is *right*; whatever is opposed to it, is wrong'.³⁹ This quickly becomes part of their defence of free love: they suggest that some individuals may be suited for monogamy, others for polygamy, others for celibacy and so on. Thus while Andrews studied nature to make normative moral claims about marriage, in an attempt to outline the form of marriage prescribed for all society by nature, Thomas and Mary conclude that the inherent variation of nature makes deriving such normative claims

³⁸ Thomas and Mary Nichols, *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, 23-4.

³⁹ Thomas and Mary Nichols, *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, 23-4.

impossible. Marriage must be ‘free’ and politically undefined so that individuals can follow their own natural laws. In this sense, Thomas and Mary found in the physiological and biological sciences perhaps the strongest statement of moral individualism and political autonomy.

The problem was, of course, that the ‘laws of hereditary’ were also physiological and biological ‘facts’ that entailed an equally radical defence of collectivism—that is, they justified some type of regulation on individual actions in order to ensure the health and progress of the race as a whole. Thus they declare marriage in its propagative function a matter of collective concern, and individual sovereignty is preserved only in so far as it contributes to the physical perfection of the human family: ‘Who should marry?’ Thomas asks, answering, ‘The strong, the beautiful, the wise. The men and women who are physically, mentally, and morally adapted to make each other happy, and whose offspring will improve the race’.⁴⁰ Marriage, as an isolated relationship between two individuals, demands freedom; but marriage as the foundation of all social relations—as a family—transcends individual sovereignty and must meet higher standards of social cooperation.

In later editions of their joint works, Thomas appeals to Charles Darwin to resolve the tension between marriage as an institution of individual happiness and marriage as a physiological mechanism of racial improvement. He defines ‘natural selection’ as the instinctual attraction that occurs between the best specimens of humanity, in contrast to the ‘conventionalism, or arbitrary laws’ of society. In this account, natural selection guards the ‘true interest of posterity’ by ensuring that physically superior specimens marry and reproduce; however, society interferes with this process of natural selection by introducing other, arbitrary motives for marriage, such as wealth or social status.⁴¹ Society is the arbitrary or corrupting influence; it interferes with instinct, introducing other motives for marriage that undermine natural attractions based on physical or intellectual superiority. In this account, sovereignty and instinct, ‘spontaneously seek those relations with each other which are the most

⁴⁰ Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 188.

⁴¹ Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 175 and 192.

natural, and therefore best adapted to promote the happiness of the individual, the harmony and well-being of society, and the vigour of the race'.⁴² Sovereignty and racial improvement are both matters of instinct, struggling against the corrupting influence of social convention.

This only partially resolves the tension between sovereignty—defined by Thomas and Mary as the freedom to follow individual instinct—and the individual's moral obligation to the race as a whole. Those who are ill, barren or intellectually, physically or morally inferior may still desire to marry, and may even feel an instinctual drive towards reproduction, but the improvement of the race requires that that they restrain themselves. Thomas reconciles this conflict between individual freedom and collective obligation by advocating for a fusion of science and morality, hoping that individuals can be educated to recognise their own inferiority and *voluntarily* remain celibate. This union of science and morality occurs when individuals 'carry reason and conscience into the domain of love . . . to insure a healthy, highly developed, and happy posterity'.⁴³ Thus Thomas and Mary, in their interpretation of Darwin, concluded that only when the science of hereditary descent is combined with morality—specifically with a moral conviction of one's duties to humanity as a whole—will human beings be able to use the principles discovered by Darwin to achieve for themselves what they have achieved with animals.

This suggests that despite the radical implications of their physiological and sexual theories, which went so far as to advocate for a different sexual ethic for each individual, depending on his or her physical constitution and sexual needs, there is another sense in which their philosophy of free love was not particularly free. Indeed, according to Thomas and Mary's moral physiology, the sexual relation, more perhaps than any other, undermined individual sovereignty and limited the sphere of acceptable moral action: the physiological differences of individual constitutions may support a relativistic morality, prescribing no single ideal of marriage and sexual life,

⁴² Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 175.

⁴³ Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 243.

but the improvement of the race made highly invasive claims about the individual's ethical obligations, particularly with regards to their sexuality.

This vacillation between individualism and collectivism is perhaps best exemplified in Thomas and Mary's prudish account of sexual physiology. Despite their claim that marriage should vary from individual to individual, with some suited to monogamy and others to sexual variation, Thomas and Mary made comprehensive claims about the frequency with which human beings (all human beings) ought to engage in sexual congress. After examining the menstrual cycle of females, Thomas and Mary concluded that the month represents the a natural cycle of human sexuality, and, consequently, they warned that the sexual act 'should never be engaged in for pleasure alone', and even prescribed that sex 'need not take place oftener than once a month' lest it be a 'an injury to health, because a waste of life'.⁴⁴ There is an obvious tension between the claim that individuality is a physiological fact, with sexual norms varying according to individual constitutions, and the treatment of humanity as a static animal whose sexual needs are regulated by the female menstruation cycle. In the first instance humans are complex beings with varying physical, emotional and psychological needs and the reason to determine their own morality; in the second all human specimens are subject to the same natural laws of instinct and probability that regulate the animal kingdom.

But there is a further irony found in Thomas and Mary's sexual radicalism, namely that two of the most celebrated champions of free love and sovereignty rejected contraception and its implications for a companionate rather than a procreative notion of marriage. It is ironic that a collectivist like John Humphrey Noyes eagerly embraced a science to avoid pregnancy, in order to redefine marriage as an institution of individual happiness, while Thomas and Mary Nichols, the acclaimed proponents of sovereignty and free love, scorned the liberties offered through modern contraceptive science. They did not, as the conventional account of their individualist anarchism and sexual radicalism suggests, always produce a defence of sovereignty. They had in mind larger social, moral and scientific goals.

⁴⁴ Nichols, *Marriage in All Ages and Nations*, 213.

iii. The family and perfectibility

Thomas and Mary Nichols, Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews represent three of the most influential thinkers at Modern Times; however, there were others who found in Warren's principles an attractive foundation for their own philosophies and experiments. This section examines two. It begins with Henry Edger, the Comtian apostle who created a small positivist community in what he described as the 'decomposition of false sources of social authority' at Modern Times.⁴⁵ It then considers the dentist-phrenologist Edward Newbery, who experimented with what he termed the 'law of Human Perfectibility', which he derived from his phrenological, physiological and psychological theories, culminating in the 'laws of intermarriage'. These two figures have been chosen because of their influence on Modern Times. After Warren and the free-lovites, Edger and Newbery were perhaps the most enthusiastic and persistent in agitating for their views, publishing and lecturing prolifically on their social and scientific principles.

In addition to their influence, Edger and Newbery are also included because they exemplify alternative approaches to the founding principles and vision of the community: Warren, Andrews and the Nicholsons regarded the sovereignty principle as a universal fact; their social theory was grounded on the assumption that sovereignty was a permanent and indissoluble requirement of human social life. It was not a moral end in itself but it was a necessary condition for moral human interaction. Edger and Newbery offer alternate perspectives on the moral, social and scientific role of the sovereignty principle. They demonstrate that although thinkers at Modern Times shared a common respect for sovereignty as the scientific means by which to achieve higher social and moral aims, there was by no means absolute agreement on its permanence or durability as a scientific principle.

Henry Edger and Edward Newbery shared a commitment to human perfectibility, which required a flexible interpretation of the sovereignty principle, and

⁴⁵ Henry Edger, 'Journal at Modern Times', Vol. I, 21 Archimedes 66 (14 April 1854). Located in Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania, collection number 1536.

this approach to social science produced distinct responses to the family question. In contradistinction to Thomas and Mary Nichols, Edger and Newbery harboured reservations about the moral and social utility of human instincts while at the same time grounding their social theory on the study of nature and natural law. Whereas Thomas and Mary denounced society as ‘artificial’ and exalted instinct as ‘natural’, interpreting sovereignty as the triumph of nature over the corrupting influences of society, Edger and Newbery sought to use sovereignty to reconstruct society on rational principles, restoring both reason and society to their proper, authoritative capacities. Their aim was the reconstruction of society, politics and law, not the abolition of them. In this pursuit Newbery and Edger seem much closer to French social theorists than the thinkers of the British Enlightenment, and thus Edger and Newbery fit less comfortably in this dissertation than perhaps any other thinkers that have been included. But although Edger and Newbery were heavily influenced by French social science, and by Comte in particular, they employed those ideas to tackle the same set of questions about the family as other thinkers at Modern Times, albeit with heavy overtones of French positivism.

Edger and the positive family

Born in England, Henry Edger travelled to America in 1851 with the intention of joining Cabet’s Icarians at Nauvoo, the community recently vacated by the Mormons. But Edger never made it to Illinois. He visited Modern Times in 1851 and for the next several years he maintained great interest in the progress of the community, finally settling there in April 1854, where he remained for most of his life. While at Modern Times Edger became a devout follower of Auguste Comte, with whom he entered into correspondence from February 1854 until Comte’s death in 1857, and began to agitate enthusiastically for Comte’s Religion of Humanity, which he believed could solve the great ‘social problem’.

Positivism was, in many ways, an awkward fit for self-described individualists. Charles Codman, a notable resident of Modern Times, recalls that despite Edger’s enthusiasm he found few converts among the sovereigns, because

‘Each one thought him or herself sufficiently self centred to propose, not to accept solutions’.⁴⁶ Edger’s influence, however, is not measured in converts but in his considerable impact on the intellectual debate taking place at Modern Times. Indeed, some of the community’s most influential thinkers, including Stephen Pearl Andrews and Thomas and Mary Nichols, appealed to the ‘Grand Man, Society’ in their published and private works, and Henry Edger is almost certainly the source of their Comtian nomenclature.⁴⁷ Stephen Pearl Andrews was strongly influenced by positivism, describing the ‘Grand Man’ as a ‘profound truth’ and organising his new society, called ‘Pantarchy’, according to many of the same principles found in the Religion of Humanity.

Edger’s presence as a positivist apostle is salient to this dissertation’s account of Modern Times for two reasons. First, positivism represents one of the most explicit efforts to integrate science and morality, and in particular to reconcile empirical science with an expansive notion of human progress and perfectibility. This commitment to human perfectibility required a flexible interpretation of the sovereignty principle’s scientific value; consequently, Edger described the sovereignty principle as provisional, a temporary apparatus intended to clear away the old and corrupt social order. Secondly, Edger’s positivistic interpretation of the sovereignty principle produced a unique response to the family problem. The Religion of Humanity, the great project of positivism, explicitly pursues the universal love of the *Grand-Être* at the expense of more narrow affections, but for Comte the solution to this puzzle was to be found in womanhood—that is, in idealising the role of women in the domestic sphere. As a resident of Modern Times—a community founded to answer broad questions about self-sovereignty, cooperation and equality—Edger required a more comprehensive answer to questions of impartiality and benevolence, one that treated the family as a whole. In this sense Edger was an advocate of

⁴⁶ Codman, ‘A Brief History of the “City of Modern Times” ’.

⁴⁷ See Thomas and Mary Nichols, *Marriage: Its History, Character, and Results*, 9. Despite his radical individualism, Stephen Pearl Andrews wrote that ‘since the solidarity of mankind is such that every act of the Individual affects more or less remotely the interests of the race . . . The unity of “the Grand Man” is doubtless a profound truth’. See Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Sovereignty of the Individual* (Berkeley Heights, New Jersey: ca. 1853), 10. Located in NYU Bobst Tamiment Collection, Bobst Library, New York University, New York, PAM 5148.

Comtian ideas, but he recast those ideas in order to address the concerns central to Modern Times.

Edger believed that the sovereignty principle was a manifestation of the ‘decomposition’—the breaking down of society—that would be necessary to make way for a new social system. The role of positive science was, therefore, to reconstruct a new political, social and moral society in the newly created negative space, and thus Edger selected Modern Times because he felt it was in a more advanced stage of decomposition and would require positive solutions: ‘a demand must inevitably spring up for really Organic Conceptions’ he wrote in his journal. ‘Hence upon this spot I have planted myself’.⁴⁸ Because it had negated the false power structures of the old society, Modern Times would, he believed, provide fertile ground in which to cultivate his positive science. According to Edger, ‘Positive science consists in the discovery and co-ordination of natural laws. All phenomena that are subject to natural laws are for that reason susceptible of becoming the subject of real-science’.⁴⁹ Edger believed that human beings qualified as being ‘subject to natural laws’, and therefore his aim at Modern Times was to extend the principles of physical science to ‘social and moral phenomena, those of human society and of the human individual’, the last frontier for scientific discovery. Thus the aim of Edger’s positivism was to reconcile empirical science with ethics.

In fact, Edger embraced Warren’s principles because he perceived in them the foundations of a positive science that bridges the gap between science and morality. Of Warren’s principles Edger wrote that although they seem to be the ‘very intensification of anarchy in their first appearance’, in reality they ‘admit of quite organic transformations’. This is true even of the sovereignty principle, which hints at the ‘social point of view’ by limiting the individual’s sovereignty to actions ‘exercised at his own cost’; it is even more true, however, of the cost principle, which ‘seems to me still more organic in tendency, as claiming a direct intervention of moral

⁴⁸ Henry Edger, ‘Journal at Modern Times’, Vol. I, 21 Archimedes 66 (14 April 1854).

⁴⁹ Henry Edger, *The Positivist Calendar: Or, Transitional System of Public Commemoration Instituted by Augustus Comte, Founder of the Positive Religion of Humanity* (Modern Times, N.Y.: the author, 1856), 13 and 49.

considerations in all industrial and commercial relations'.⁵⁰ Edger described the cost principle as a 'moral aptitude', and claimed that Modern Times appealed to sovereignty and cost the limit of price not to purge their society of moral restraints but rather 'to found a truly scientific moral doctrine'.⁵¹ In Edger's expansive account of human progress, sovereignty was, at best, a transient principle, a 'platform of co-operation for earnest and sincere reformers while waiting for a true and positive light'.⁵²

Because he regarded sovereignty as a temporary principle, an instrument to aid in the reconstruction of a better society, Edger did not believe that it required the dissolution of marriage or the family, and indeed he criticised Warren and Andrews for this application of their social theory. According to Edger, treating sovereignty as a real 'Science of Society' requires hostility for the family, as 'such an Individualism strikes at the root of the Family Institution, and, indeed, of every bond that now unites Man to Man'.⁵³ In contrast to Warren and Andrews's anti-familialism, Edger believed that his utility-based account—in which the sovereignty principle is primarily a mechanism to strip away the irrational institutions of the past—allowed for the reconstruction of social bonds, and in particular of the family.

But although the family survives Edger's application of the sovereignty principle, it does not survive his expansive notion of human perfectibility. In his 1855 essay on Modern Times, Edger warned that human progress would eventually render the family morally and socially obsolete, declaring, 'We frankly confess to having for a long time formerly believed marriage an institution destined finally to pass away, and a social condition more or less resembling that announced by Charles Fourier to take its place'.⁵⁴ The perfection of human motivation brings about this new 'social condition'. In the current or inferior state of affairs, Edger praises the family as the 'first school of love', where affection is exercised in 'restricted circles, where if less noble they can naturally become more intense'. In this account the family is a crude

⁵⁰ Henry Edger, 'Journal at Modern Times', Vol. I, 6 Dante 66 (21 July 1854).

⁵¹ Edger, *Modern Times, the Labor Question and the Family*, 5-7.

⁵² Henry Edger, 'Journal at Modern Times', Vol. I, 6 Dante 66 (21 July 1854).

⁵³ Edger, *Modern Times, the Labor Question and the Family*, 3.

⁵⁴ Edger, *Modern Times, the Labour Question, and the Family*, 11.

model of the *Grand-Être*; it is a tool for social learning and improvement, and in this capacity it ‘furnishes every true believer with types and representatives of the Great Being’. Individuals begin in a ‘pristine state’, where they are dominated by selfishness, but social experiences awaken social impulses. The family provides this first social experience, which begins ‘First in the family, then in civic cooperation’.⁵⁵

The inevitable march of human progress, however, renders this ‘school of love’ morally and socially obsolete. Edger’s sociology provides a scientific and moral hierarchy of the affections, which explicitly differentiates between family love and the social love. In a sermon preached at Modern Times in 1863, Edger explains that there is a ‘gradation of nobility’ in the affections ‘as they are more or less purely disinterested’. He continues, ‘The impulsions, most purely relating to the Self are at the bottom of the scale; those most exclusively looking towards Others are at the top’. Thus the great project of positivism, according to Edger, is to subject the lower impulses or affections to the higher. Edger claims that the ‘whole human problem consists, in general, in consolidating and developing the predominance of our sociality over our personality, of disinterestedness over selfishness’. Only by these means can human beings elevate the ‘supremacy of universal Love, the highest and noblest of our natural emotions, over all inferior feelings’.⁵⁶

In this account human perfectibility consists in the triumph of reason over instinct, of the substitution of a type of social or rational motivation for partial or instinctual motivation. Individuals begin in an instinctual, selfish state; the family provides an intermediate school of socialisation, where instincts are still given free rein but they learn to be more social as they experience sympathy for others. Ultimately, however, humans will evolve to a higher social state, where the evolution of human motivation renders the inferior family affections obsolete. The family, which before was regarded as a social and moral ‘school of love’ will then be seen as

⁵⁵ Edger, *The Positivist Calendar*, 24, 33-4.

⁵⁶ Henry Edger, *The Positive Community: Glimpse of the Regenerated Future of the Human Race. A Sermon preached at Modern Times, Long Island, on Saturday, 24 Gutemberg 75 (5th September, 1863), Being the Sixth Anniversary of the Death (Transformation) of Auguste Comte, Founder of the Religion of Humanity* (Modern Times, N.Y.: the author, 1864), 12. Located in Papers of Henry Edger, Maison d’Auguste Comte, Paris, France.

neither social nor moral. In this sense the family begins to seem more like the sovereignty principle—that is, as a temporary solution superannuated by the positive march of human progress—rather than a permanent or immutable fact of human life.

Edger's approach to the family question displays the scope and heterogeneity of the intellectual debate taking place at Modern Times. Thinkers at Modern Times shared a commitment to the overarching vision of the community—namely, the integration of morality and science into a master science that would comprehend every aspect of human life. However, they differed as to the capacity and limits of such a science, and indeed as to the capacities and limits of the human animal itself. Their engagement with the family problem highlights these divergences. Thinkers like Warren, Andrews and the Nicholsons opposed the family because it violated the immutable laws of nature, the laws upon which their 'Science of Society' was based; Edger's issue, however, was not that the family violated scientific principles as they are now observed in the natural world, but that the family violated an expansive notion of human perfectibility, one in which human beings are governed by a different set of laws and behaviours. Thus while the other sovereigns at Modern Times could not reconcile the family with their social science, Edger could not reconcile social science with a static account of human nature.

Despite the fact that Edger's hostility for the family derives from an entirely different aspect of his social science, he struggles with the same ontological and methodological puzzles that plagued Warren, Andrews and the Nicholsons, and indeed the Owenites, Oneida Perfectionists and the Mormons: that is, he struggles to reconcile his desire to treat human beings as existing outside the natural world while at the same time deriving his social science from an assumption that humanity is, itself, subject to natural scientific laws. In Edger's case this tension is particularly pronounced because he believes that even instinct will evolve until vulgar self-interest and family love will no longer motivate individuals, meaning he rejects the supposition that those characteristics which are currently observable in the human animal, such as the instinctual love of offspring, are permanent or immutable facts about human beings. Like other thinkers in this dissertation, Edger struggles to

establish a coherent approach to mankind as a subject for science. He cannot reconcile Warren's social science, which is based on empirical fact, with a positive notion of limitless human perfectibility that renders empirical facts obsolete.

Newbery and 'rational procreation'

Like Edger, Edward Newbery was born in England. He studied in France for a time, which is perhaps why his philosophy seems heavily influenced by French social theory, and eventually came to the United States in 1837, where he studied dentistry and became thoroughly persuaded by the new science of phrenology. Aside from this scant biography, not much is known about Edward Newbery, and what is known of his philosophy derives from his published works, specifically his *Manual of the Science of the Nature and Perfectibility of Mankind* (1847) and *Human Perfectibility: Individually and Sociologically Considered* (1878). In 1854 the *New-York Weekly Leader* described Newbery as 'one of the devils of the Long Island hotbed [Modern Times]', who used his dental practice to diffuse his wild reproductive theories, telling his female patients that 'if they don't like their husbands, they may leave them, and may have as many more as they like, to improve their offspring'.⁵⁷ Newbery demonstrates yet another approach to the sovereignty principle. Like Warren and Andrews, Newbery treats sovereignty as a necessary fact about human life, yet Newbery applies sovereignty in order to *undermine* individuality rather than to *cultivate* it. Sovereignty is, in Newbery's philosophy, still a means to an end, but that end is profoundly collectivist.

According to Charles Codman, Newbery inherited his interest in physical perfectibility from his father, who experimented with large-scale child-rearing in the hopes of producing an ideal human specimen suited for community life.⁵⁸ Edward was the nineteenth of thirty-seven children born to his father, and, far from rejecting the philosophy that made his own family so unusual, Edward fused it with his own phrenology and continued the pursuit. Newbery developed what he termed the 'laws

⁵⁷ *New-York Weekly Leader*, 30 September 1854.

⁵⁸ Codman, 'A Brief History of the "City of Modern Times" '.

of intermarriage', a method which Charles Codman described as 'scientific crossfertilization' or 'stirpiculture'. Codman explains, 'In a general way, the doctor planned to encourage the propagation of blonde with brunette, the muscular temperament with the nervous, the bilious with the locomotive the blue eyes with the black, etc., and by these means to inaugurate a race culture which should in harmony result in a physical, mental and spiritual domain'.⁵⁹ In his own works, Newbery describes his science as one of 'balancing' the human animal. Uniting two opposites creates a 'neutral', or a balanced specimen, the 'equally mixd temperament', which is 'that of the highest human beauty, health, and equal mental and physical capacity'. Newbery was specific in his conception of the perfect or balanced reproductive product, which he described as possessing 'clear skin, brown hair, and medium complexion'.⁶⁰ Those who did not meet his criteria—whom Newbery referred to as 'unbalanced temperaments'—were inclined to disease, both physical and psychological.⁶¹

Newbery's laws of intermarriage required what he termed 'rational procreation', that is, that couples understand the scientific laws of perfectibility and select their procreative partners accordingly. In this account, instinct and passion are the greatest enemies to perfectibility, and, consequently, Newbery condemned 'falling in love' as a 'blind impulse'⁶² that put human perfectibility at the mercy of capricious romance. In his published works Newbery suggests that propagative relations ought not take place—and perhaps must not be allowed to take place—until both parties are educated and can love responsibly, subjecting their instincts and passions to reason and education. He suggests that they should have to study the principles of

⁵⁹ Codman, 'A Brief History of the "City of Modern Times" '.

⁶⁰ Edward Newbery, *Human Perfectibility: Individually and Sociologically Considered* (Brentwood, N.Y.: 1878), 17. Located in Papers relating to Modern Times and Early Brentwood, Brentwood Public Library, Brentwood, N.Y.

⁶¹ Edward Newbery, *Manual of the Science of the Nature and Perfectibility of Mankind* (New York: George Evans, office of the Young American, 1847), 13. Located in Papers relating to Modern Times and Early Brentwood, Brentwood Public Library, Brentwood, N.Y.

⁶² Codman, 'A Brief History of the "City of Modern Times" '.

perfectibility, and perhaps even pass an exam on the principles of medical science and perfectibility before they are ‘admitted to community membership’.⁶³

The strongest statement of this doctrine is found not in Newbery’s published pamphlets but in the recollections of Moncure Daniel Conway, who visited *Modern Times* in 1858 or 1859 and recorded an interchange that took place with a member of the community on the subject of ‘stirpiculture’. That member was almost certainly Edward Newbery. The unnamed champion of stirpiculture advocated for arranged marriages, arguing that no marriage arrangements could be worse than the current system, which relies on the ‘combined ignorance of the contracting pair’. Sexual love, he claimed, is not only a matter of the heart but also of reason and, most particularly, education. ‘Educate a man or a woman’, he declared, ‘and they will love very different objects from those they would have loved in their ignorance’.⁶⁴ To prove the necessity of scientific education to regulate love, the unnamed protagonist argues that an ignorant youth might fall passionately in love with his own sister, unless he has been educated as to the scientific disadvantages of such a union. Science will, in time, reveal other types of unions that are also undesirable, as ‘There are temperaments which should not be wedded more than brother and sister. There are characters, to unite which is to introduce an evil offspring into the world’.⁶⁵

In this account there are no natural or instinctive barriers to incest. Education, and the triumph of science and reason over ignorance and instinct, is the only solution, the only safeguard against unhealthy unions. Education must aim for a ‘general diffusion of knowledge’ on these subjects, as only an understanding of these principles will ensure the ‘scientific relation of the sexes, that the human race might share in some of that miraculous improvement which is now monopolized by those breeds of sheep and pigeons which Mr. Darwin describes’.⁶⁶ This is, of course, not the first time that the sovereigns appealed to Darwin. But whereas Thomas and Mary Nichols appealed to Darwin to defend the moral and scientific utility of instinct—

⁶³ Newbery, *Human Perfectibility*, 27-8.

⁶⁴ Moncure Daniel Conway, ‘Modern Times, New York’, *Fortnightly Review* 1, (July 1865), 251. Located in Modern Times Collection, 1853-1977, Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead, N.Y.

⁶⁵ Conway, ‘Modern Times, New York’, 251.

⁶⁶ Conway, ‘Modern Times, New York’, 251.

defining ‘natural selection’ as the free play of instinct that naturally inclines the healthy and beautiful to reproduce while excluding the sickly and diseased—Newbery uses Darwin to defend the subjection of instinct to reasoned procreation.

Newbery embraced the sovereignty principle because he believed it undermined indissoluble marriage, which he regarded as an obstacle to rational procreation in two aspects. First, because it forces mismatched temperaments to remain together and reproduce, which harms the human race. Second, because it violated his theory of associative compensation, which held that individuals balance or unbalance each other through physical association. Marriage must be dissolvable. Individuals require different sexual combinations throughout their lives, and marriage condemns them to mental, physical and spiritual imbalance. Thus Newbery condemns monogamy as an obstacle to human progress, warning that the most ‘defective persons . . . are most monogamic, because they change but little from their imperfect institutions, while the more balanced temperaments, being subject to the greatest variety of conditions, are the greatest varietists in love’.⁶⁷

Newbery applies his theory of associative compensation to undermine parenthood as well as marriage. The laws of inheritance declare that a child will inherit the imbalances of its parents; however, association can either improve or exacerbate these imbalances. Thus Newbery concludes that parents are physically ill-suited to provide the compensative function for their own children. Nervous parents who caress their own child will ‘transmit nervous energy to it from their larger nervous system to the already nervous excess in the child’, and the child will suffer ‘shooting pains of acute neuralgia’. The solution is communism and communal parenthood, but as a more immediate treatment Newbery counsels parents to employ a washerwoman to hold their children in order to limit their own physical interaction. In one memorable case Newbery advised that a particularly frail baby ought to sleep with a bull terrier to counter its feeble constitution.⁶⁸ Newbery is not the first cooperative thinker in this dissertation to claim that parents are ill-suited, and perhaps

⁶⁷ Newbery, *Human Perfectibility*, 17.

⁶⁸ Newbery, *Human Perfectibility*, 10.

even the most ill-suited, to bring up their own children; however, he is the first to make the claim on physiological grounds. Owen grounded his concerns about parenthood on education, fearing that parents would teach their children their own prejudices. Newbery claimed that physiology necessitated the separation of parents and children.

There is an irony here. Newbery embraced the sovereignty principle as a scientific necessity, the essential foundation of human perfectibility; however, in embracing sovereignty Newbery aimed to repress individuality, not protect it. His effort to ‘balance’ humanity strongly mirrors Oneida, which sought to eliminate individualities and extreme differences in the name of human solidarity. In Newbery’s case, he has literally made ‘sameness’ into a science—or, more accurately, into several sciences. The explicit goal of both rational procreation and compensative influence is sameness; when Newbery describes the ‘balanced’ human specimen, which is the goal of rational procreation, he has in mind a narrow idea of human individuality, specifically the moderate temperament possessing ‘clear skin, brown hair, and medium complexion’.⁶⁹

Thus the aim of Newbery’s science was to eliminate variation—that is to ‘subdue our spontaneous self-hoods’.⁷⁰ This constitutes a unique application of the sovereignty principle, and a unique response to the family problem: Warren, Andrews and the Nicholsons opposed the family because it violated their social science, specifically the ‘fact’ of individuality and the scientific necessity of autonomy; Edger opposed the family because it violated his expansive notion of human perfectibility, meaning it sanctioned the moral utility of instinct rather than embracing a progressive conception of moral motivation. Newbery seems to denounce the family on both accounts—that is, as a violation of both empirical science and a limitless notion of human perfectibility.

Because Newbery focused his efforts on rational procreation, grounded on physiology, biology and phrenology, it may seem that he was only interested in the

⁶⁹ Newbery, *Human Perfectibility*, 17.

⁷⁰ Newbery, *Human Perfectibility*, 24.

physical perfection of humanity, in contradistinction to Edger who occupied himself primarily with the moral and social perfection of humankind. However, Newbery grounded his entire theory of compensative influence on a progressive theory of moral motivation. He believed that individuals ought to love their opposites as the means to both physical *and* moral improvement. It was for this reason that Newbery rejected Fourierism, because ‘it would only be able to generate sympathy among those who chose to form an association because of their natural sympathies’ and ‘Such a system does not really solve the problem of limited sympathy’.⁷¹ In this statement, Newbery is explicitly rejecting Fourier for a return to the problem of disinterestedness and partiality as identified in the Scottish Enlightenment. He rejects Fourier’s solution to the family—a solution grounded on the laws of attraction—because he does not believe that grounding a social system on attraction solves the heart of the family question, which is ‘the problem of limited sympathy’.⁷² It is a problem Newbery intends to solve by rational ‘cross-fertilisation’.

Newbery’s physiological theories, combined with his own moral psychology, provide yet another thread of the intellectual conversation taking place at *Modern Times*, a project which aimed to fuse science and morality, to derive normative moral claims from empirical fact. Newbery believed selfishness to be a moral evil, and he tried to use this moral principle as a foundation for his physiological social science. Thus his theory of physical perfectibility was grounded on an account of moral motivation; human perfectibility required a reconciliation between moral and physical law, and Newbery believed that any truths discoverable from ethics would be equally applicable to physiology and rational procreation.

⁷¹ Edward Newbery, *Manual of the Science of the Nature and Perfectibility of Mankind*, (New York: 1847), 12-13.

⁷² Newbery, *Manual of the Science*, 12-13.

iv. Man as a subject for science

This chapter has outlined a new narrative of Modern Times as a social, moral and political movement. In this new account what is interesting about Modern Times is not its individualism per se but rather its reverence for individualism as a principle of social science. That the various sovereigns could not agree on a particular application of the sovereignty principle, or on a single account of its scientific role, is perhaps less illuminating than that each sovereign attempted, in providing an account of individualism as a tenet of social science, to develop a methodological foundation for treating humanity itself as a subject of both moral and physical science. Whatever their interpretation of the sovereignty principle, and however they reconciled it with their own social theory, the free thinkers at Modern Times struggled to provide an account of the human animal that suited both their aspirations for perfectibility and their methodological needs for a stable subject constrained by natural laws. In this Modern Times struggled with the same intellectual puzzle that troubled Owenism, Oneida Perfectionism and Mormonism—that is, how to treat human beings as a subject for scientific study, as an entity that exists within nature and responds to natural phenomena according to a set of predefined rules or principles, while at the same time elevating the human animal as a specimen of limitless perfectibility, able to transcend its own nature and create an entirely new set of physical, social and moral laws. This puzzle is particularly interesting in this context because these thinkers struggled with social science to answer a specific set of questions that had been central to the Scottish Enlightenment—questions about limited sympathy, partiality and disinterestedness.

Because of this intersection of social theory and moral philosophy, it seems that for Modern Times the question of sociability and human cooperation hinged on the existence or non-existence of free will: if human beings are fit subjects for social and moral science in the same way that physical objects are a fit subject for the physical sciences, as Andrews plainly claims, then they must be subject to natural law, and their social and moral lives must be determined by definable laws and

principles in the same way that the physical lives of objects are determined by physical laws like gravity. At the very least they must be subject to the laws of probability, which precludes the possibility of a robust account of free will. If, at any given moment, a human being might choose to act according to different principles, or respond to different motivations, thereby disrupting the mathematical mapping of their social and moral lives, they cannot be a stable subject for social and moral science.

According to Stephen Pearl Andrews, the science behind the cost principle and the labour dollar is best understood as a mathematical calculation of probabilities of human behaviour, or what Andrews called ‘Social Mechanics’. According to Andrews the value of an individual’s labour ought to be determined according to the ‘repugnance overcome’; however, this poses its own difficulty because ‘people put all sorts of different estimates upon the relative intensity or severity of all sorts of different labour’. Science, is of course, the solution as it is now ‘sufficiently advanced’ to provide a rational solution: ‘The statistical and other branches of science have familiarized us with the method of general averages’. Andrews proudly announces that it is now possible to know, with ‘proximal accuracy’, how many individuals will commit suicide in London and by what means, ‘how many will choose the razor, how many the rope, how many the pistol, had how many drowning’. This is the foundation of the new moral economy: ‘It will be found possible, in a similar way, when the world wishes to know, how many women prefer ironing to washing, etc.’.⁷³ It is also the foundation of Andrews’s claim that ‘Crime is as much a matter of cultivation as potatoes’.⁷⁴ Human beings are, in this account, as a fit a subject for social and moral science as chemical elements are for chemistry.

Warren and Andrews believed they had discovered the true social science, a universal sociology derived from the same methodology as the physical sciences. Henry Edger claimed a similar role for positivism, insisting that sociology ‘consists

⁷³ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Labour Dollar* (Boston, Mass.: Benj R. Tucker, Publisher, 1881), 9-11.

⁷⁴ Andrews, *Love, Marriage, and Divorce*, 47.

essentially in the substitution of real conceptions for fictitious beliefs'.⁷⁵ Others, like Thomas and Mary Nichols or Edward Newbery, employed various physical, medical and psychology sciences to establish social and moral 'facts' about human society, although they came to very different conclusions about the moral and social utility of human instinct or the role of reason in determining human behaviour and progress. For thinkers like Henry Edger and Edward Newbery, it was impossible to accept a deterministic or even a statistical account of human behaviour, because they believed that human beings would, through their own rational development, alter the laws that governed human nature in its current state.

It seems curious, however, that the movement most devoted to individuality—a community where, according to Moncure Conway, 'nothing was in such disrepute as sameness; nothing more applauded than variety, no fault more venial than eccentricity'⁷⁶—there should be such unqualified devotion to absolute scientific truth. There is an obvious tension between individual autonomy and scientific absolutism. It seems strange that Modern Times should throw off the anti-individualism of communism only to replace it with positive science. A devotion to sociology and other sciences undermines the moral principles of radical equality by suggesting that not all individual perspectives and opinions are equally valid.

This tension manifested in the various theories of human perfectibility at Modern Times. Many of the social and physical sciences pursued by the sovereigns made prescriptive claims about the future progress of the human race, and in some cases those theories went so far as to advocate for 'sameness', even when justifying such theories with the sovereignty principle. Thomas and Mary Nichols employed science to make prescriptive claims about the perfection of humanity, sacrificing individual autonomy on the altar of racial improvement. Edward Newbery went even further. Newbery's science defined an ideal model of the physically and psychologically perfected human specimen, and his entire social theory was designed to correct deviations from that established ideal. Even Andrews, that famous

⁷⁵ Henry Edger, *The Positivist Calendar*, 13.

⁷⁶ Conway, 'Modern Times', 246.

individualist, offered his own model of the ideal human temperament, claiming that science justifies free love as the natural means by which to achieve biological and physiological ‘balance’. In this sense, *Modern Times* represents the tension between social science and human perfectibility, or the belief that the study of human nature will yield normative social and moral claims, and the belief that humanity can overcome its nature through the exercise of its reason and free will.

Science, sovereignty and the family

Traditional narratives reduce *Modern Times* to anarchic individualism and free love, identifying marriage as the great adversary of the philosophy at *Modern Times*. Marriage violated the inviolable sovereignty principle, and therefore it could not be tolerated by a group of militant, self-proclaimed individualists. However, once sovereignty is understood as a scientific principle, the foundation of a cooperative social theory, it becomes clear that childhood and reproduction, and not marriage, were the most formidable obstacle to *Modern Times*’s philosophy: Warren believed that because individuality is a fact of human social life, any genuine cooperation requires that individual interests first be disaggregated. Parent-child relations posed a particular problem because children’s interests were not—and until they reached a certain age could not be—entirely disaggregated from that of their parents; consequently, their cooperation was corrupt, reduced to exploitation and crude self-interest. Even the notorious free-lovite Stephen Pearl Andrews had more difficulty reconciling his philosophy with parental rather than sexual love. Andrews claimed that sexual love was the most morally and socially superior form of love, but it had been supplanted in the natural hierarchy by the vulgar, instinctual love of offspring. Andrews and Warren assault parenthood for different reasons, but they share a conviction that when applied to children, merging interests and individualities corrupts love.

Of the four movements included in this study, only Oneida demonstrated a comparable commitment to eradicating the germs of selfishness from family love. Owenism and Mormonism accepted the selfish nature of family love, and in some

ways even welcomed self-interest and partiality as natural foundations for social life. Oneida and the individualists at Modern Times could not. In this sense Modern Times and Oneida are intellectual reflections of each other; in each image the family appears as the exact opposite of the other, a near perfect but reversed manifestation of the same philosophy. At Oneida, Noyes pre-occupied himself with the sexual relationship, and much of his anxiety concerning selfishness and ‘exclusivity’—the types of private love that fragment social unity—pivoted on the intensity of affection between lovers. Parenthood he discouraged for more practical reasons, such as moral education. Parents were not the best suited to love their children, and their preference damaged their children morally, but the true enemy of universal love was not parental love, but sexual or romantic.

Modern Times reverses this paradigm. The sovereigns believed that disaggregating interests neutralised the threat of the sexual relationship. Thus love between individualised equals was not deemed as threatening as childhood and parental love. The antithetical reflections of the family at Oneida and Modern Times derive from their disparate conceptions of equality and independence. Modern Times claimed that genuine cooperation only takes place among equals, where there is a disaggregation of interests so that free, autonomous and independent agents can act of their own will to cooperate with others. But equality at Modern Times meant something very different than equality at Oneida. At Oneida and among the Owenites, equality meant that all were equally *dependent* on the community, meaning that all alike received the necessities of life, not from individuals that could claim power or supremacy over them, but from the community as a whole; at Modern Times, equality meant that all were equally *independent*, able to work for themselves and gain a wage comparable to others, no matter their age, skill or sex. This notion of equality and cooperation could only take place between individualised, autonomous agents with disaggregated interests.

Any vestige of dependence threatens this notion of equality. This explains why parent-child were attacked at Modern Times and the sexual relationship enjoyed relative acceptance. For Andrews, the Nicholsons and even to some extent Warren, it is

dependence that allows the care for one's family to appear as a virtue when it is in fact a vice. It is this dependence that justifies giving to one's own first. Thus Andrews complained that families concentrate their affections and resources on their own narrow circle, and turn their cold hearts away from those outside it, no matter how dire the suffering. But this dependence is characteristic only of the parent-child relationship and does not necessarily apply to sexual or romantic love. In a community of equals, where each sovereign, male and female, is responsible for their own good, there can be no such excuse for hoarding wealth, even when a type of preferential love exists. Because all are independent, and equally capable of their own support, if two equal individuals love each other more than the rest there is no reason to suppose that it will result in a hoarding of wealth, or in unusual rapacity and greed to provide the necessities of life. If interests are disaggregated, marriage reformed and women equalised under the cost principle, there is no reason to fear the marital relationship. It is no longer a threat to the definition of equality and cooperation pursued at Modern Times.

But children are a threat because they fail—and will always fail—to meet the standard of equality necessary to fit within this cooperative apparatus. And thus in order for sovereignty and the cost principle to transform isolated families into a cooperative of independent sovereigns, something must be done with the children, as their structural dependence justifies a false morality that subdivides society and concentrates moral obligations in particular circles. The emphasis on liberty, equality and independence largely solved the problem of marriage, but children were irreconcilable with the same principles of sovereignty and equality that rescued the sexual relation. Consequently Modern Times pursued a version of the family deprived of hierarchy, dependence and combined interests: a family of equals for a community equals.

Because of its unique social theory, Modern Times was able to accept individualism and self-interest while still rejecting the traditional family. Despite accepting the social and moral legitimacy of selfishness, Modern Times perceived something particularly pernicious in family love, something that went beyond

individualism or the inherent egotism of human beings. Their distrust of the family despite their acceptance of partiality gets to the heart of their social theory: Modern Times rejected the family not because it believed that individualism is unsociable, as Oneida did, but rather because it believed that the type of individualism found in the family is unsociable. The family inculcated the *wrong kind* of selfishness because it derived from interdependent, inherently unequal relationships. The solution was to discover and apply a social theory that would correct the family's inherent social and moral failings by disaggregating interests and placing all members—fathers, wives and their children—on an equal footing. The essence of this solution to the family problem was to use nature against nature, not to elevate human sympathy, but to eliminate the need for it.

CONCLUSION

Historians have segregated Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times in their accounts of nineteenth-century cooperative history, pronouncing the spiritualism of Mormonism and Modern Times to be incommensurable with the economic egalitarianism of Owenism or the political anarchism of Modern Times. The family brings these movements together. In approaching these movements through the family this dissertation offers a new account—an account that acknowledges their historical and ideological disparities but uncovers the extent to which they were participants in a common intellectual project. They each came to the family question in different ways: Owen's interest in the family derived from his concern about the economic inefficiency of single family arrangements; Mormonism's radical family practices can be traced back to the restorationism and spiritual charisma of Joseph Smith; and Modern Times began advocating free love as a corollary to its principles of individual sovereignty and self-ownership. Only Oneida began its dialogue about the family with broad social and moral questions. Consequently, what these movements have in common is not the origins of their interest in the family—which is the account of these movements that is preserved in scholarly literature—but rather the complex and multi-tonal discourse that their initial interest matured into, modified by the many social, psychological, biological, spiritual and physiological theories that were circulating in this period.

Engaging with these new sciences drew each movement out of their particular intellectual spheres, as they appealed to the growing body of social theory to construct a coherent account of the family. Owenites, whose initial interest in the family had been economic, began to see the family as a source of moral education and physical perfection. The spiritual perfectionists at Oneida modified the family not only to make it more spiritual, but also to make it suit their economic ideals of cooperation, their moral ideals of selflessness and their physiological ideals of human perfection. Mormons instituted polygamy to restore the biblical order of Abraham, but their

engagement with mainstream social theory pushed them to ask a different set of questions—questions about moral motivation, economic cooperation and scientific reproduction. Within a few years of its founding Modern Times had secured for itself the reputation as the ‘Mother of Free Love’ because it extended its principles of individualism and self-sovereignty to marriage and sex; however, in working out the implications of their scientific social theory for the family, Modern Times discovered a much more serious threat to their cooperative theory—childhood. But childhood did not undermine the cooperative vision at Modern Times because it violated a narrow application of the sovereignty principle. Rather, it threatened the community’s broader social, moral and economic aims.

In connecting these disparate philosophic movements to a single intellectual tradition, the family overturns conventional accounts that represent these movements as simplistic in their approach to human nature and reductive in their conception of social science. This dissertation has argued that their inability to produce a coherent account of the family was a product of their failure—and to some degree their awareness of their failure—to shape the jagged corpus of social and scientific knowledge into a methodical explanation of human beings and human institutions. They aimed to discover a science of humanity grounded on Newtonian principles and methodologies, but they were reluctant to accept the concomitant account of human nature required by such a social theory. Ultimately, they resisted the implications of their own social science.

This pursuit of a ‘master science’ or ‘Science of Man’ was not limited to the English-speaking world, but its intersection with the family problem was unique to the Anglo-American tradition. Evidence for this claim is found in the fact that questions about the family and impartiality were at the heart of Britain’s most celebrated nineteenth-century contribution to moral philosophy—utilitarianism. In this sense the debate about impartiality and the family was one of the defining characteristics of British moral thought from Godwin¹ to John Stuart Mill. In 1800

¹ Whatever interpretive arguments may be employed to exclude Godwin from the utilitarian tradition, it remains true that he accepted and propagated core principles of what became utilitarianism—i.e. that

Samuel Parr had objected to Godwin's moral calculus, specifically to Godwin's claim that justice requires the strictest standard of impartiality, a standard so uncompromising that Godwin condemned filial duty as a selfish, false type of benevolence. This critique persisted as utilitarianism matured. After utilitarianism had been exhaustively defined by Jeremy Bentham and subsequently refined by John Stuart Mill, questions about impartiality and its implications for the family remained at the heart of the critical response to the utilitarian ethic. In his critique of John Stuart Mill's utilitarian theory titled *An Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy* (1870), John Grote, who had succeeded William Whewell as Knightbridge Professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge, devoted considerable attention to what he described as the problem 'of the distribution of action for happiness', a problem which he claimed has 'always practically been felt as the pressing question of morals' and which he broke down into two questions about impartiality and distribution. The first is the question of distribution 'between our own happiness and that of others, the question between selfishness and benevolence'; the second is a question of the 'special claim[s] upon us, or the question between justice and both benevolence and selfishness'.²

Utilitarianism, Grote explains, has been unfairly criticised for providing an unsatisfactory answer to the first question. Critics claim that because utilitarianism measures action according to pleasure and pain that it must produce a licentious and hedonistic kind of morality. Grote rejects this critique, explaining that utilitarianism requires the highest standard of benevolence because 'the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but the happiness of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent

the basis of justice is human happiness, quantifiable by some means—even if Godwin's conception of utility was not hedonistic and therefore differed from the more dominant utilitarianism as articulated by Jeremy Bentham. Godwin is included here because his framing of the question of rational impartiality in *Political Justice*, and the critique it drew from Samuel Parr, would frame the utilitarian debate for the next several decades. For a discussion of Godwin's place in the utilitarian tradition, see Robert Lamb, 'Was William Godwin a Utilitarian?', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009): 119-41.

² John Grote, *An Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1870), 88.

spectator'.³ Thus Grote absolves utilitarianism of the first charge. But Grote believes that this impossible standard of impartiality generates a far more serious problem for Mill's ethic—the problem of distribution with regards to special claims. In Grote's account the real failure of utilitarianism is not that it fails to distinguish between selfishness and benevolence but that it fails provide an answer to the second question of distribution, and in neglecting this larger question it fails to realise that human actions occur within a complex nexus of special human relations. Grote concludes that the utilitarian project elevates distribution to a position of paramount importance in its moral theory, and then fails spectacularly to address it.

Believing the problem of distribution fatal to the utilitarian ethic, Grote rejects impartiality as an appropriate foundation for moral philosophy. He begins by dismissing impartiality as implausible: 'We may know men selfish, and men very much the reverse; but a person acting upon this idea of impartiality, I think, would be hard to find'.⁴ But even admitting the possibility of impartiality, Grote maintains that moral beings are obligated to be partial. To prove this, Grote gives a semi-Burkean account of social existence, in language similar to Shaftesbury, in which man's nature derives from existing social relations. Society itself is not made up of individuals; it is a complex amalgamation of interlocking systems. If one accepts this constitution of human relations, then equality and impartiality is not a practicable formula because society is not composed of equal parts. Thus Grote argues that although it may be possible to *measure* human happiness mathematically by adding the happiness of an individual to the happiness of another, happiness itself cannot be *pursued* or *augmented* through such atomic means, because individuals ought to pursue the happiness of those in their sphere, whom they can benefit the most. Moral relations, meaning the particular social relations in which individuals stand in relation to one another, determine moral obligations. The cause of morality is to 'spread outwards' and strengthen existing moral relations, and not to destroy those relations in an attempt to reduce all moral feeling to the same level.

³ Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, 86.

⁴ Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, 91.

On these grounds Grote rejects Mill's claim that utilitarianism restates the ethic of Jesus that all men ought to love their neighbours as themselves. Grote accuses the utilitarian philosophy of distorting this principle by misunderstanding the 'partial' nature of Christian neighbourly love:

[T]he Christian idea of all men being brethren or neighbours, (the very expression carrying with it the notion of that spreading outwards which I have described, of the expansion of a family or society rather than of the division of an aggregate) seems to me at the farthest remove possible from Mr Mill's idea of men being, as objects for the action of each one of them, equal units, duty consisting in impartiality among them. However much the action of Christianity, in tending to widen the moral view and the feeling of brotherhood, tends to bring these ideas in certain respects nearer each other, it leaves them always as much two distinct ideas with distinct properties, as the asymptote is distinct from the curve towards which it ever tends but which it never meets.⁵

In this paragraph Grote reveals that his morality is rooted in partiality, in the preferential or 'interested' passions of the family. But more importantly, his insistence on the distinction between 'brotherhood' and equal 'impartiality' implies that the sentiments of 'general benevolence' and the passions arising from 'partial benevolence' are antagonistic, and that the strengthening of one comes only at the weakening of the other. This is clear from Grote's declaration at the end of the paragraph that the brotherhood of Christianity can act perpetually as the source for benevolence and altruism specifically because it is not weakened by being divided equally among all mankind: 'Christianity widens the area of brotherhood because it is ever generative of fresh sympathy and philanthropy, not because it has any tendency to equalize sympathies, or to weaken existing ones by dispersing them abroad'.⁶

Due to his conception of society as a nexus of complex social and moral interrelations, irreducible to individual units, Grote not only tolerates the preferential sentiments, he requires them. He exalts such affections as the most natural and virtuous and therefore the foundation of morality. Moral agents have a duty to be partial, to consider 'first in the particular', rather than the general. Grote concludes his attack on the problem of distribution and impartiality with the claim that the utilitarian

⁵ Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, 91-2.

⁶ Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, 91-2.

maxim that an action is right if it tends to promote happiness ‘is incomplete without having appended to it such an addition as this, “and not merely happiness in general, but such happiness in particular as the agent is specially bound and called upon to promote”.’⁷ Impartiality is itself a negative principle, according to Grote, meant to prevent the moral agent from acting from *undue* impartiality, rather than serving as the foundation for its own theory. The extreme impartiality required by the utilitarian ethic is, in his view, a moral fallacy.

Grote’s critique of Mill’s utilitarianism is, therefore, essentially an objection to its reductive approach to human morality—that is, he charges that the impartiality underpinning utilitarianism is grounded on an impoverished account of human social life. The human animal does not exist independent of context: its social and moral life is defined by a complex web of interlocking duties, obligations and experiences, such that it is impossible, and even immoral, to reduce ethical obligations to its relations with humanity as a whole. Such an approach ignores the very composition of social life and is unfit to describe, much less *prescribe*, the moral obligations of human beings. Thus the family question was at the centre of Mill’s utilitarianism as Grote understood it; however, as many scholars have pointed out, to view Mill only as a consequentialist is to somewhat miss the point of his moral thought, because at the heart of Mill’s philosophy was not a mechanical tabulation of pleasure and pain but a devotion to humanity as a being of near limitless progressive potential.⁸

It has been a recurring theme of this dissertation that although Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times have been dismissed as radical and simplistic movements—consumed by their myopic devotion to narrow ideologies—there is a sense in which their radicalism derived from their serious engagement with mainstream social and moral theory. This has been argued by demonstrating that the questions at the heart of their radical family practices can also be found in mainstream thinkers from Hume and Wollstonecraft to Grote and Mill. The difference is one of degrees: these movements took the implications of their moral theory to their logical

⁷ Grote, *Utilitarian Philosophy*, 97-8.

⁸ John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1989), 23; H.S. Jones, ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralist’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 288.

extremes and put their conclusions into practice, provoking censure from traditional society; but the questions at the heart of their discourse—questions about impartiality and benevolence, partial and social love, human perfectibility and social science—were common to mainstream moral thought from Hume to Mill.

But these cooperative movements shared more with Mill than a preoccupation with impartiality and disinterestedness; rather, they shared Mill's dualistic account of human nature and the profound struggle with social science that this dualism produced. Both discourses were marked by a philosophical gap created by the tension between moral naturalism and perfectionism: both aimed to devise a social theory grounded on observable, causal laws of human behaviour but neither was prepared to accept a notion of human progress as limited, or even static. The cooperative reformers tried to fill this gap by appealing to ever more radical social, biological and physiological theories, modifying their family arrangements in bizarre new ways, all in an effort to ground it on empirical, scientific principles without surrendering its claims to rationality and perfectibility. But the gap remained. And it was this same gap that Mill intended to fill with his own 'Science of Man', a vague and unfinished theory that he termed 'ethology'.

Ethology was, according to Mill, the 'science of the formation of character' by environmental circumstances.⁹ It was grounded on the associationist psychology—the causal 'laws of the mind'—that Mill had inherited from his father and Bentham, but to this empirical naturalism Mill added his own notion of sociology, the causal study of historical and social circumstances, taken from Comte. It was this combination of associationist psychology and sociology that Mill believed would resolve the tension between the methodology of social science and what he took to be its aims—human progress. The laws of association could, Mill believed, form any combination of ideas, producing any number of complex social and historical moral combinations;¹⁰ and thus humanity could operate according to causal or deterministic laws but still be capable of vast social and moral improvement by forming ever better psychological

⁹ John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, *CW*, Vol. 7, 861.

¹⁰ Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 43 and 250.

associations. Thus the point of Mill's ethology was to discover a science that could causally account for social phenomena but would not limit the progressive potential of humanity. As John Skorupski has argued, Mill's ethology was a product of his 'passion for striking a balance—in this case balance between the indefinite mutability and the necessary continuity of human characters and institutions'.¹¹

Mill planned to write an entire book detailing the principles and operations of ethology, but he did not. Some scholars have found this telling, suggesting that perhaps even Mill was aware of the impossibility of such a science.¹² Others have claimed, however, that it is possible to derive a general sense of Mill's social theory by examining how he applied it in his works on economics, morality and politics. Terence Ball has gone so far as to argue that although Mill never wrote a book or treatise on ethology, each of his major works 'can be read as a case studies in applied ethology'.¹³ If it is indeed possible to derive something of Mill's own social theory from his analysis of and recommendations for his own society, then it should be possible to reconstruct some part of how Mill addressed the gap, in practice as well as in theory, between an empirical social theory grounded on laws of psychological and biological determinism and his expansive ambitions for human progress.

Although it may be possible, as Terence Ball has argued, to do this with any of Mill's works, the tensions in Mill's social theory are most visible in his writings about the family, particularly in his essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869). It is, in fact, Mill's dualistic approach to human nature and to social theory that, according to Jennifer Ring, accounts for Mill's timid claims regarding women's liberation, making the essay 'profoundly disappointing as a feminist treatise'.¹⁴ Ring argues that Mill cannot make the claims he wants to make using his empirical methodology. His

¹¹ Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 264.

¹² See S. Collini, 'The Tendencies of Things: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Method', in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, eds. S. Collini, D. Winch and J. Burrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 156-7. John Skorupski describes ethology as Mill's 'scientific utopianism', speculating that Mill never finished it because he recognised that the social sciences were moving in a different direction (see Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 277).

¹³ Terence Ball, 'The Formation of Character: Mill's "Ethology" Reconsidered', *Polity* 33 (2000): 25.

¹⁴ Jennifer Ring, '“The Subjection of Women”: The Methodological Limits of Liberal Feminism', *The Review of Politics* 47 (1985), 27.

progressive psychology insists that as to the nature of women, nothing whatsoever can be known because women are, at present, the products of particular principles of association that, in a more equal society, might produce a very different female ‘nature’. Because of his commitment to causal social science, Mill cannot make positive claims about the family or women in a state of equality. But Ring joins other feminist historians in censuring Mill for a deeper failing—that is, for building his case on the assumption that the feminine nature observable in traditional society (in a state of inequality) would remain broadly the same in a state of equality (and thus women could continue to provide the ‘moral cultivation of mankind’, encouraging an ‘aversion to war’ and ensuring an ‘addiction to philanthropy’). Ring sees this as a dilemma between Mill’s progressive, egalitarian ambitions and his methodological empiricism, arguing, ‘to the extent that Mill chooses methodology over politics, an empirically verifiable past in preference to an untested future . . . he relinquishes his argument for change, especially radical political change for women’.¹⁵

In this account Mill struggles between viewing the family as a product of nature—at the very least as an institution with foundations in a feminine ‘nature’ that holds normative claims for future society—and as a product of culture and circumstance. Evidence that Mill regarded the family as ‘artificial’ or as a product of society is easy to find: *The Subjection of Women* is full of references to the family as a ‘school of morality’ that will become more egalitarian and democratic as society progresses.¹⁶ But in so far as Mill accepts the family as a product of culture, it becomes useless to him as a source of normative moral claims. Thus the family question was bound up with puzzles of British empiricism from Hume through to Mill: like Hume, Mill struggles with the question of how to devise a social science based on observation without embracing a reductive account of human nature; he wants to make broad progressive claims about humanity that are grounded on narrow and observable laws of human behaviour. The problem, according to James Adams, is

¹⁵ Ring, ‘Limits of Liberal Feminism’, 40-41.

¹⁶ Mill’s notion of the family as a type of moral school has been thoroughly discussed in scholarly literature. See Mary Lyndon Shanley, ‘Marital Slavery and Friendship: John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*’, *Political Theory* 9 (1981), 229; Nadia Urbinati, ‘John Stuart Mill on Androgyny and Ideal Marriage’, *Political Theory* 19 (1991): 637; Ring, ‘Limits of Liberal Feminism’, 40-41.

that Mill was not consistent as to whether he regarded nature as a source of moral normativity. Adams argues that Mill's dualistic approach to the family was not the product of an inconsistent mind (Adams notes that that Darwin's son, George, described Mill as 'rather in a muddle on the whole subject' of the moral authority of nature);¹⁷ rather, according to Adams, Mill's ambivalence about nature is 'one facet of a manifold but clear-cut dilemma that goes to the heart of his thought'.¹⁸ This dilemma was, at its heart, an inability to reconcile the methodology and principles of social science with what Mill took to be its aims. On the one hand Mill wanted to discover a natural basis of morality grounded in observable empirical laws, but he also feared that efforts to ground morality in innate feelings, the project of the intuitionists, would ultimately support conservative social and political power arrangements. Ethology was meant to get Mill around this problem, but it failed. Mill is either true to his principles of social science or he is true to his expansive notion of human perfectibility. He cannot be both.

In giving this account of Mill this dissertation has said very little that is new. This is the account of Mill found in many intellectual histories, and although it has been recast to suit the language of the family problem as outlined in this dissertation, the intellectual puzzles are represented here in much the same form that they can be found in other secondary accounts of Mill's thought.¹⁹ This was deliberate because this dissertation rests its case not on establishing a new account of Mill but on establishing a new account of Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times, and in demonstrating that these movements have been treated very differently by historians than thinkers like Mill, despite their shared struggle with a particular set of puzzles about the family, morality and social science. Mill's struggle between moral

¹⁷ James Eli Adams, 'Philosophical Forgetfulness: John Stuart Mill's "Nature"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992), 445.

¹⁸ Adams, 'Philosophical Forgetfulness', 445.

¹⁹ This account of Mill's social theory (and its intersection with his other works, specifically *On the Subjection of Women*) has been based on the following scholarly works: Nicholas Capaldi, 'Mill's Forgotten Science of Ethology', *Social Theory and Practice* 2 (1973): 409-20; Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 265-6; Collini, 'John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Method', 127-60; Shanley, 'Marital Slavery and Friendship', 229-47; Urbinati, 'John Stuart Mill on Androgyny', 626-48; Ring, 'Limits of Liberal Feminism', 27-44; Adams, 'Philosophical Forgetfulness', 437-54; Ball, 'Mill's "Ethology" Reconsidered', 25-48; Jones, 'Mill as Moralist', 287-308.

naturalism and perfectibility was, of course, the same dilemma of social theory that grew out of the radical familialism of Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times. Ethology was not more successful in resolving this dilemma for Mill than Owen's 'Science of Society' or Noyes's 'vital sociology', but it has been treated with more nuance by historians of cooperative thought. Mill has been cast as a careful and conscientious thinker, aware of the subtle dualities of his social theory and struggling to resist the reductive implications of his social and moral psychology. Thinkers like Robert Owen and John Humphrey Noyes have received the opposite treatment, being cast as political or spiritual radicals whose efforts at defining social theory—and in particular their utopian pursuit of a 'master science' of humanity—justify their placement in a sub-category of puerile intellectuals and simplistic fanatics. But the family tells a different story of these movements: it reveals the extent to which they resisted the reductive implications of their own social theory, and the extent to which they were aware of the impossibility of a true 'Science of Man'.

The conventional account of John Stuart Mill sets him in opposition to these reductive or utopian social theories, and in particular to the social theory of the Owenites, which influenced Mill in his younger years.²⁰ Historians have read Mill's *Autobiography* very carefully, paying close attention to those passages in which Mill outlines his intellectual struggle with Owen's doctrine of necessitarianism. In these passages they have discovered that during the period of his mental distress, many of Mill's friends were Owenites and, having been brought up under the rigorous and unrelenting attentions of his father, who subscribed to something very similar to Owen's doctrines on the formation of character by circumstance, Mill feared that he might be 'a "made" or manufactured man, having had a certain impress of opinion stamped on me which I could only reproduce'. In his *Autobiography* Mill explains that this fear of 'what is called Philosophical Necessity weighed on my existence like an incubus. I felt as if I was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances . . . I often said to myself, what a relief it would be if I could disbelieve

²⁰ For a recent example of this characterisation of Mill, see Alan Ryan, 'J.S. Mill on Education', in Brooke and Frazer, *Ideas of Education*, 212.

in the doctrine of the formation of character by circumstances'.²¹ Mill believed that his character had been formed for him and not by him (to borrow Owen's phrase); however, Mill could not accept this doctrine and its obliteration of free will and individual autonomy, and historians have paid particular attention to Mill's resistance to the implications of Owenite social theory. Ultimately, Mill rejected what he regarded as a one-dimensional account of human nature and developed his own social theory, which emphasised the distinction between causal determinism (on which one could build a true social science) and the fatalism of the Owenites. In so doing Mill believed he had rescued the concept of free will and restored a limitless notion of human perfectibility.

This is a common account of Mill and this dissertation does not wish to dispute or modify it. However, this narrative has been built on a simplistic account of Owenism, which requires historians to read Owen's writings on the family with far less care and attention than they have read Mill's *Autobiography* or *The Subjection of Women*. It requires historians to neglect Owen's profound intellectual conflict on the entire question of the family, morality and social science, and the serious ideological fragmentation that these questions caused within the Owenite movement. Any serious engagement with Owen and the family challenges that account. It suggests that Owen and his followers were reluctant to fully apply their own doctrines on the formation of character because they recognised that too strict an application would ultimately defeat their larger social, moral and scientific goals. They resisted the methodological foundations of their social theory, which were grounded on an immutable notion of a causally determined human nature, because like Mill they wanted to preserve a sphere of moral action in which it was possible to discuss concepts like autonomy, free will and rational self-determination. This new account recognises that Mill struggled with the reductive implications of Owenism, but it suggests that many Owenites, including Robert Owen himself, also struggled with the reductive implications of Owenism, particularly in its application to defining human nature and the role of social and moral science.

²¹ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, *CW*, Vol. 1, 175-77.

But Owenism is not the only movement that has been marginalised in the history of cooperative thought or oversimplified in intellectual histories of social science. As this dissertation has demonstrated, other spiritual, economic and political movements engaged with this same set of puzzles that grew out of the family question, and although they produced disparate solutions, they shared a commitment to answering a particular set of questions about the family, morality, perfectibility and social science. Thus the family question tells a new story about Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times: it highlights how each of these movements have been simplified and relegated to narrow descriptive categories. Spiritual movements like Oneida and Mormonism have been repetitively reduced to their spiritual fanaticism, and to maintain this account historians have neglected their rich dialogue about the family's moral, social, economic and scientific role. Movements like Owenism and Modern Times—two reform movements, one economic and one political—have similarly been reduced to the most fanatical and superficial aspects of their doctrine, a narrative that requires historians to either neglect their writings on the family or give them only the most cursory attention. Owen's interest in the family question is dismissed as a corollary of his hostility for private property, and the sovereigns at Modern Times are dismissed as anarchical free loviters.

But as this dissertation has shown, these accounts are, at best, simplistic and at worst actively misleading. However their interest in the family began, most of the radical family practices of Owenism, Oneida, Mormonism and Modern Times did not grow out of economic, spiritual or political fanaticism; rather, they emerged out of an approach to social theory that put the study of human nature at the very heart of the social and political sciences. They set about to solve the puzzles of Smith and Hume, but they did so in a new and intoxicating era of scientific discovery and disciplinary proliferation. They approached the myriad of social and moral sciences—psychology, physiology, phrenology, sociology, history, economics, moral philosophy, etc.—as if they were harmonious links to one continuous whole, a 'master science' that would finally bring order to the disorderly and inscrutable laws and practices of human society. They were fearless in the face of what they perceived to be a scientific

revolution, accepting that ‘science’ might ultimately require a complete renegotiation of their most cherished institutions. But their unflinching devotion to scientific positivism did not produce the social and moral uniformity that they sought. In fact, the more theories they discovered and applied, the more incoherent their family practices became, and the more aware they became of a tension between the methodologies of scientific utopianism and its aims.

Thus the story told in this dissertation—of an intellectual puzzle extending from Smith and Hume to Grote and Mill, and, in the median, passing through the interpretive aspirations of radical spiritualists, economic egalitarians and political anarchists—is more than a story about the family and its social and moral dualism. It is a history of social science. Because of the nature of its discourse this particular history has been largely imperceptible to modern disciplinary approaches to intellectual history. The irony is that although the modern human sciences have failed to perceive this discourse, they have largely accepted its central shortcoming as an inevitable and irreparable property of social science:²² that is, rather than trying to bridge the practical and theoretical gap between a deterministic methodological approach grounded on moral naturalism and an account of human beings as autonomous, rational agents with free will and the capacity to pass moral judgment on the validity of their ‘innate’ or biological tendencies, the modern human sciences have instead deepened the gap by dividing and subdividing, segregating and reclassifying the study of human beings and social life. They have addressed the gap between the methodology and the aims of social science by partitioning the human sciences into various categories, according to their methodological principles and normative aspirations. They have accepted this tension as irreconcilable to such a degree that ultimately disciplines taking a ‘scientific’ approach to the study of human beings and

²² A.J. Ayer has defined the central problem facing social science in very similar terms: Ayer claims that the nature of human beings makes it impossible for social scientists to make the types of generalisations that have produced success in the physical sciences. He also suggests that it is uncomfortable for human beings to think of themselves as a part of nature and the natural world. I suggest that the social sciences, rather than confronting these problems, have instead chosen to conceal them through the application of disciplines. See A.J. Ayer, ‘Man as a Subject for Science’, in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, third series, eds. Peter laslett and W.G. Runciman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 6-8.

human societies (an approach that requires experiments, control groups, repetition and other principles of causal determination, generally found in the physiological or psychological disciplines) are carefully segregated from the prescriptive disciplines, such as moral philosophy and political theory, which are allowed to make normative moral judgments so long as they do so without overt appeals to a scientifically determined human nature. These two approaches, in addition to their separation from each other, have been separated from a third category of human science, which may perhaps be termed the observational sciences, such as history and anthropology, because they are neither explicitly prescriptive nor experimental.

The result of our multi-disciplinary approach is a collection of related but estranged discourses on the methodologies and purpose of social science. Ironically, to a casual observer it might appear as though the modern response to moral and scientific discontinuity is not so different from that of our nineteenth-century cooperative counterparts. In the face of this great puzzle about the nature and limits of human beings, human institutions and human societies, cooperative radicals turned to an ever-expanding corpus of social and scientific theories, believing (or perhaps only hoping) that the next 'science' would resolve the conflicts and contradictions of all the rest. In a similar fashion we have addressed this puzzle, not by facing it full on and treating the problem as a complex whole, but by partitioning the problem, dividing it into disparate disciplines where the full puzzle is never fully visible and, therefore, never fully present to offend either our sense of scientific credibility or our trust in human exceptionalism. Our solution has been to segregate, creating new outlets to keep these tensions apart from each other, even if that separation is often little more than a flight of stairs—the twenty or so steps that separate the department of psychology from the department of history.

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