

JOHN STUART MILL CONFRONTS REV. E.J. HARDY

Pam Alessia
Nursing
Bishop Noll Institute, Hammond, IN

Rev. E.J. Hardy and John Stuart Mill have opposing and conflicting views when addressing issues concerning women and their role in society. Although Hardy's passage is a short one, it is full of his ideas concerning the role and nature of women. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill, on the other hand, states that these facts and ideas presented by Hardy become hazy due to the fact that, in Mill's eyes, the true nature of women, and men as well, still remains unknown.

Hardy claims that it is naturally a woman's first priority to please others and make them happy at all costs. Even though women may experience pain or unhappiness, they must always mask themselves with a delightful smile. "True, she will often have a 'tear in her eye,' but, like the bride of a young Lochinvar, it must be accompanied with a 'smile on her lips'." He states that some women, however, lose sight of their duty to please the men in their families. "Girls and women are willing enough to be agreeable to men if they do not happen to stand to them in the relation of father, brother, or husband."

Mill argues that the things which seem natural to people are a result of not experiencing anything else. Mill argues that no one knows the nature of women because they live in a world in which women are educated to please men. When viewing women in this type of society, one may be falsely led to believe that women are naturally inclined to please and serve men, as Hardy states. However, Mill suggests that to completely understand the true nature of women and men we would need to somehow place the sexes into two different societies, where one sex does not dominate or control the other. Every domination appears natural to the dominators. "The subjection of women to men being a universal custom . . . departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural." Individuals presently view the sexes in relation to one another. If women were allowed to live without men, and men likewise were allowed to live without women, then one could perhaps determine their nature and their true reactions to problems or situations.

Hardy states that it is a woman's "first business to be happy, a sunbeam in the house, making others happy." He seems to be under the impression that this type of cheerful behavior is customary for women. Mill refutes this argument by stating that although this ever-present, pleasant disposition may seem customary and universal, one should not assume it to be correct and right for society. Mill states that the idea that this custom is the best rests entirely on theory because the system has never been any other way.

Mill also expresses his belief that the subjection of women and the way they act is molded by society. He states that from a very early age, women are taught to be the passive and cheerful sex, while men are taught to be the rugged, domineering sex. These notions not only stem from societal experience but also come from the beliefs passed on by parents and siblings. Therefore, women believe that it is their nature to live and work for others by forfeiting their own personal happiness in order to provide for these individuals. Mill points out that "all women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is

the very opposite to that of men; not self will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others" (16). In essence, Mill is stating that women are taught to believe that they are born to engage in acts of self-sacrifice.

Rev. E.J. Hardy believes that a woman's role is to please others at all times, because this is naturally the way they can make their best contributions to society. However, the clever rationality of John Stuart Mill seems to completely disqualify Hardy's argument and position on the subject. Mill states that the reason women have taken amazing strides in other areas of society or in areas of technological advance is due to the fact that, among other things, women are too preoccupied pleasing others, mainly the male figures present in their lives. Mill expresses a very 1990's view of women and expresses it in a very obscure, yet rational and informative manner. The essence of Mill's work lies in his belief that the nature of women is an "artificial thing." It is the result of submission and forced repression.