

The Social Contract and Feminism

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Introduction: Is the Social Contract Patriarchal?

The formation of the United States republic and evolution of American democracy were centered around the principles of social contract theory. The practicing of social contracts has been an influential factor in American democracy which has impacted the policies, laws, and strategies employed by the United States government. The social contract, an idea pioneered by philosophers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, encompasses the idea of equality, consent, and individual rights. Social contracts are the unspoken and unwritten rules of society. They are the agreements between people in a society or between people and their government to create a civil state or to form and implement laws. It is the agreement between the ruler and the ruled, which allows society to function. Social contract theorists argue that due to humans' natural reason, they were able to form this type of system in order to justify political authority as a product of individual self-interest and rational consent. They concluded that this is how a reasonable people can accept a useful government as a voluntary obligation. Thus, the social contract theory justifies government power as well as guards the public from oppression in limiting the scope of the government's power. Philosophers have slightly different views of social contract theory which seek to explain different facets of the relationship between the government and the governed. While social contract theory has been a widely used and accepted way to explain human interactions and the relationship between the government and the governed, there are some groups who do not believe the social contract to be accurate or fair. Feminists are a group who object to the inclusivity of the social contract. In general, feminists are deeply invested in the female experience, and take seriously the impact of theories and practices on women's lives. Due to the influence social contract theory has on social, political, and moral realms, feminists feel strongly that the social contract should provide equality and freedom for women. There are three main arguments made by feminists which they claim prove the social contract is patriarchal. The first is the argument made by feminist speaker and author Carole Pateman, who argues that the social control is related to women's subordination to men. Other arguments made by feminists concern the nature of the liberal individual, as well as the "care argument". Though many feminists believe that the social contract is by nature, anti-women, the social contract and its principles of equality, consent, and individual rights is not inherently patriarchal, and does not exclude women from achieving success or functioning as equal members of society.

Evolution of Feminism and the Anti-Patriarchy

To understand how and why feminists have arrived at this conclusion, it is important to understand the evolution of feminism. This includes the difference between radical feminists versus moderate feminists and where and when the divide between them happened. Feminism as an ideology acknowledges the importance of the female experience and female freedom, as well as individualization.¹ The roots of feminism date as early as Ancient Greece and the medieval era, and into the late 1700s and 1800s. Figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen

¹ Dean, J. (2010) Feminism in the Papers, *Feminist Media Studies*, 10:4, 391
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advocated for the basic human potential, dignity, and intelligence of the female sex.² However, most recognize the late nineteenth century as the beginning of “first wave feminism” which scholars come to a consensus is where feminism began.

Historically, early “first wave feminists” argued for women’s rights in politics and in the workforce during a period of industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. “The wave formally began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when three hundred men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women.”² One of the most notable “first wave feminists” was Jane Addams, who believed a woman’s right to vote was a of critical importance in enacting laws pertaining to labor, health and welfare programs, education, and legal equity for minorities.³ Interestingly, Addams advocated for women to be able to vote in order to “fulfill their role in caring for children and vote for what is right by them” as well as being able to preserve their home.³ Addams was one of the first major voices in feminism, whose impact greatly influenced the Women’s Suffrage Movement. She maintained traditional gender roles between men and women, while simultaneously acknowledging that women have more to offer than just being homemakers. First wave feminism also saw the first semblance of radical ideology as some claimed that women were morally superior to men, which was an argument used to justify their idea of female involvement improving the political process and public behavior.²

Following first wave feminism came the second wave spanning from the 1960s to 1990s. In the wake of anti-war and civil rights movements, the second wave of feminism rose with the increasingly radical New Left.² Second wave feminists advocated for sexuality, reproductive rights, and focused on the Equal Rights Amendment, which guaranteed social equality regardless of gender. This is where feminism began to be intertwined with critiques of patriarchy and capitalism, and questioned the fabrics of society which held the United States together, accusing society of being against women. This anti-institutionalism is where the ideas of Carole Patemen and *The Sexual Contract* gained traction, as well as the other main arguments which oppose contract theory, the care argument and criticism of the liberal individual.

The third, and what some recognize as fourth, waves of feminism brought a new generation of strong and empowered females reclaiming derogatory terms such as “slut” to deprive sexist culture of its verbal weapons.² Third wave feminism is defined by the renouncement of victimization and redefinition of feminine beauty, breaking away from being seen as objects of a sexist patriarchy. Modern feminism transcends cultural and societal boundaries and rejects simple answers or artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality.² In the modern context, feminism has evolved to become intersectional, recognizing oppression affecting multiple genders, races, sexual orientations, etc. There is also a massive emphasis among modern feminists on body and sex positivity as well as online safety. There are some elements of anti-

² Rampton, M. (2022, June 30). *Four waves of feminism*. Pacific University.
<https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>

³ Magins. (2019, June 7). *Jane Addams*. First Wave Feminisms.
<https://sites.uw.edu/twomn347/2019/06/03/jane-addams/>

institutionalist beliefs amongst third and fourth wave feminists. Modern feminism possesses elements of the anti-patriarchal and anti-institutional second wave feminist movement but is multi-faceted in its divergence from just women's rights to be inclusive of minority rights in general. It is defined by an emphasis on equity and acceptance, meaning it targets emotional and cultural acceptance, rather than simply the achievement of equal rights and opportunities.

In general, there are a few significant differences between radical and moderate feminists, in the modern context. Radicality is associated with "anti-institutionalism," and radical feminists have a more revolutionary approach to change. They seek to dismantle the patriarchy and view the government and society as having always been flawed, beyond reparation. Moderate feminists favor smaller changes to systems without being rid of them or changing them completely. Feminist theorists who oppose the social contract believe in a fundamentally flawed system, such as Carole Pateman and others. Pateman argues that female subjugation was written into the original contract, and that nothing less than systematic restructuring and change would solve the issue.⁴ Moderate feminists, however, are advocates for incremental change, and while there is commonality between them and radical feminists in their shared values of equality and equal rights for women, in general, they do not believe the entire system is to blame. Jane Addams is an example of a moderate separatist feminist, while individuals like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, another progressive era feminist, is characterized as more of a militant assimilationist, as her tactics required a more radical change to existing institutions than Addams.⁵ In opposition to social contract theory, the arguments which support that the social contract is inherently patriarchal can be more closely attributed to radical feminists in the historical and modern context. Perkins displayed this in the first wave of feminism as she, similarly to Pateman, contended that a sexual contract preceded a social contract, and bound women to household roles, with no opportunity for advancement in society.⁵ The only argument which could also swing to the moderate end of the spectrum is the care argument, which promotes the argument that caregiving roles are undervalued, and due to their typically being filled by women, present a disadvantage to women within the boundaries of society. However, in general, those who oppose the social contract, believe that the very fabric of society is against women in the sense that it was built to unfairly favor men. Therefore, their argument requires systematic restructuring, as they believe that the society we live in as such is non-inclusive to women.

Feminist Opposition to Contract Theory

In looking at the major oppositions to contract theory, Carole Pateman is a name who surfaces most every time. As a distinguished scholar and professor, she is nationally recognized for her works such as *The Problem of Political Obligation* and *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Her landmark work, *The Sexual Contract*, focuses on the traditional marriage contract and the employment contract, and contends that each is an instance in which women promise

⁴ Pateman, C. (2018). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford University Press.

⁵ Abbott, P. (2010). *Political thought in america: Conversations and debates*. Waveland Press.

their obedience.⁶ Her argument centers around political right being synonymous with sex-right, “the power that men exercise over women,” and that “the new civil society created through the original control is a patriarchal social order”⁶. Much of Pateman’s work centers around a deep-rooted disdain for subordination, which she attributes the social contract as being a direct cause for the continued subordination of women to men for generations. Pateman’s view of contracts regarding property in the person always demonstrate a relation of subordination because the weaker party (the woman) has no choice but to agree to the disadvantageous terms offered by the other party⁷. Thus, because women are constituted as subordinates through the marriage contract, just as workers are subordinate under the employment contract, husbands can exploit wives⁸. This is what the argument in *The Sexual Contract* boils down to: even if women are allowed equal rights or opportunity, due to the inherent nature of contracts, they will always be subordinate, and therefore always taken advantage of. She argues that contractualism excluded female success from the beginning and uses the concept “law of male sex right” to claim that a sexual contract precedes the social contract and always results in female subjugation.

The care theory is another approach in feminist opposition to contractualism. The care theory is one which is deeply tied with care ethics, a school of thought which involves the argument that social contract theory fails to fully explain moral and political obligation, as it undervalues the very essential role of caregiving in society. Authors such as Virginia Held in her book, *The Ethics of Care*, discuss care ethics and how its theories relate to feminism. Care ethics involve the affective bonds between individuals and responses between those who interact through relations of dependence. The care argument also describes the neglect of caregiving as an essential task in society, which is typically a role filled by women such as the in the mother-child relationship. Held makes several arguments regarding the care argument and its relationship with feminism, in that care is a symbolically feminine trait. Held also opposes social contract theories as they neglect the role of caregiving and the relational nature of people⁹. Her arguments contest the individual and contractual nature of social contract theory in favor of caring, moral, and relational perspectives in the social framework. The care argument centers around the idea that the social contract excludes relational and caregiving roles within society, which are just as essential as natural rights, freedom, and opportunity. The fear of care theorists

⁶ Phillips, A., Medearis, J., & O’Neill, D. I. (2010, October 7). *Profile: The political theory of Carole Pateman: PS: Political Science & Politics*. Cambridge Core. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/profile-the-political-theory-of-carole-pateman/478087B9095F8040CAD18D9217B36AA4>

⁷ Mansbridge, Jane. "Carole Pateman: Radical Liberal?" *Illusion of Consent: Engaging with Carol Pateman*. Ed. Daniel O’Neill, Mary Lyndon Shanley, and Iris Marion Young. Penn State University Press, 2008, 17-30.

⁸ Pateman, C. (2018). *The sexual contract*. Stanford University Press.

⁹ Held, V. (2007). *The ethics of care: Personal, political, and global*. Oxford University Press.

is that because caregiving is marginalized under the social contract, that those who choose to take on these responsibilities will be unable to fully participate and succeed in society. The feminist care argument expands on this and argues that this further places women at a disadvantage in society, as caregiving is undervalued, and typically associated with females.

In addition to Pateman's argument, as well as the care theory as it applies to the social contract, there is also an argument made by feminists surrounding the idea of the Liberal Individual, which calls into question the nature of the central person of contract theory. The liberal individual is represented by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau in their works and is used to illustrate the universal freedom of the social contract. This individual takes the form of the Hobbesian man, Locke's proprietor, and Rousseau's "Noble Savage" and is used to describe a universal, faceless, classless, sexless, disembodied, generalized model of humanity.¹⁰ However, many feminists argue that the liberal individual is actually gendered, and represents what Virginia Held describes as "economic man".¹¹ "Economic man" is concerned with maximizing his own interests and this drives his entering into contracts. This representation does not represent all people in all times and places. In fact, it fails to represent children and their caregivers, their mothers. This is where the care argument and liberal individual argument tie together. Feminists argue that the core person of the contract theory does not have any reflection of women, especially women as caregivers. The liberal individual as seen by feminists, is a driven, hard-working, economic man, who enters the social contract to improve his individual economic and political standings in life, ignores the moral and relational roles which women have traditionally played in society, thus excluding them from full representation and participation in contract theory and society. In reality, the philosophers who created the idea liberal individual, intended it to represent any person who wishes to advance their position and secure their natural rights in society through consensual participation in the social contract.

Philosophers and the Origins of the Social Contract

Much of the criticisms from feminist groups and scholars come from their criticism of the social contract's roots in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophic thought. The main three philosophers whose works and philosophical thoughts influenced the social contract theory were John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacque Rousseau. Each of their individual ideas also pioneered the image of the liberal individual. Assessment of each philosopher and their influence on contract theory reveals that the social contract is not inherently patriarchal, however, due to the language used and societal norms of their time, there is merit to feminists argument of the exclusion of women from their written works, while it may not be substantial enough to justify a systematic exclusion of women from societal success. Each of the social contract theorists discussed, have differences in their explanation of contract theory, but the basic principles remain. All three philosophers base their system on a description of human nature,

¹⁰ *Social Contract Theory*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (n.d.). <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/#SH4a>

¹¹ Held, V. (2007). *The ethics of care: Personal, political, and global*. Oxford University Press.

described as a “state of nature” and turn to the legal concept of contracts based on mutual consent to explain the basis of power in society.¹² They also share that there are two types of contracts: the contract of association and the government contract. The contract of association is the contract of individuals among themselves which occurs when they unite to make decisions which are considered to be the will of all, while government contract refers to the voluntary surrender of some individual liberty and the acknowledgement of one's obligation to obey the government.¹²

John Locke is notable as his social contract theory greatly influenced American political thought. Lockean liberalism and his ideas of the state of nature factored greatly into the Founders' justifications of natural rights.¹² Locke's state of nature ideas centered around the explanation that government emerges from a state of nature in which constituents enter into a contractual agreement to be governed in order to create a fair and functioning society. Locke contends that the state of nature is a state of complete liberty in which people are equal to each other, and equally capable of being bound by the law of nature, under which rights, as well as restrictions are equally imposed upon every person. Upon establishing a government and political society, one gives up the power to protect themselves, and relinquishes this to the government that has been created.¹² Locke's the *Second Treatise* stresses the ideas of liberty, equality, and contractual agreement which are expressed in the state of nature. His description of government reaches back to the earliest humans in which the first participants in a social contract were depicted. Locke's message was that the social contract serves as a means for a populace to stand in the stand of nature, understand their role and obligation to government, and to revolt against a ruler who breaks the social contract.¹² Thus the social contract serves as a way for a populace to participate and be successful in society, and justified the creation of the United States and the American Revolution. Locke also wrote that constitutional agreements were essentially contractual agreements between theoretically independent parties.¹² He discussed the concept of natural rights as being the right organic to all people, however, it is the obligation of government to uphold these rights for the populous. While Locke maintained that people possess a natural right to liberty, they only secure these rights by entering into a social contract, by their own free will, into a society which will protect these rights. Locke's natural law did not explicitly mention women; his writing was consistent with views of male and female roles and responsibilities of his time. However, the equality that Lockean philosophy describes is not unique to men. Locke's views on equality and natural rights, as well as consent, apply with equal worth to both men and women, and there is no indication in Locke's writing that he believed in an exclusively patriarchal social order. In fact, natural rights are inherently gender inclusive, as they assign equal opportunity, freedom, and rights to *all* people in a free society.

Thomas Hobbes rejected theory of the Divine Right of kings but also rejected the early democratic view of parliamentarians that power should be shared between Parliament and kings. Therefore, his argument rests in the idea that political authority and obligation are centered around individual self-interests of members of society, in which no single individual has the authority to rule over the rest, but simultaneously believed the “Sovereign” or a “Leviathan” must have absolute authority voluntarily ceded if society is to survive.¹⁵ Hobbes interpretation of

¹² Dienstag, J. F. (1996). Between History and Nature: Social Contract Theory in Locke and the Founders. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(4), 985–1009. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2960146>

the social contract is similar to Locke, but there are a few major differences which make Hobbes' argument unique. Hobbes' state of nature differed greatly from Locke's. While Locke's state of nature was a peaceful and free one, only disturbed by negligence of the laws of nature, Hobbes' state of nature was a constant state of fear and driven solely by self-interest.¹³ Therefore, because humans in the state of nature only seek to ensure their own survival, they are driven by their own interests. They enter into a social contract and establish government, if they believe it will preserve their lives and interests. Hobbes also believed that all people are created equally in strength and capacity; physically and mentally. In his greatest work, *Leviathan*, he states, "For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself."¹⁴ Hobbes also discusses equality, but suggests that when two people desire the same thing, they become enemies and enter a state of war, therefore they must create a contract in which they do not have to fear death. Hobbes' discussion of natural rights in *Leviathan* centers around "Jus Naturale," the liberty that each person has to use their own power for self-preservation, as well as exercise self-judgment and reason.¹⁴ In addition, Hobbes believed that according to the laws of nature, man has the natural right to everything, even each other's bodies. Thus, why the mutual transferring of right, a contract, is necessary to preserve oneself and to create a peaceful society. On this note, "Jus Naturale" and the liberty and physical or mental capabilities that each person automatically possesses is not limited to just men. In addition, self-interest and ambition is not a uniquely male trait, making his interpretation of human interactions within a social contract as well as participation in and subsequent success in society inclusive to anyone who possesses self-interest; which according to Hobbes, is everyone.

Jean-Jacque Rousseau was one of the most prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment period. His views on social contract theory describe a historical process by which man emerged from a peaceful, non-problematic state of nature which progressed into civil society upon the first invention of private property.¹⁵ This constituted a "fall from grace" for humanity from the state of nature and into a contractual society. According to Rousseau, inequality began with the introduction of property and thus began the emergence of social classes. In Rousseauian contract theory, government was created to protect property from those who do not have it but allows them to see they may acquire it by force. Therefore, Rousseau's social contract which claims to be

¹³ Seabright P, Stieglitz J, Van der Straeten K. Evaluating social contract theory in the light of evolutionary social science. *Evol Hum Sci.* 2021 Jan 20;3:e20. doi: 10.1017/ehs.2021.4. PMID: 37588528; PMCID: PMC10427299.

¹⁴ Hobbes, T. (n.d.). *Leviathan, or the matter, forme and power of a common wealth ecclesiastical and civil (1651)*. National Constitution Center – constitutioncenter.org. <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/thomas-hobbesleviathan-or-the-matter-forme-and-power-of-a-common-wealth-ecclesiastical-and-civil-1651>

¹⁵ *Social Contract Theory*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (n.d.). <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/#SH4a>

in universal best interest, only protects the interests of the rich and successful.¹⁶ Following his establishment of the flaws of the naturalized social contract, Rousseau argues for a normative social contract, meant to fix the problems which emerged with the development of society. Here Rousseau pronounces government and politics and how humans may restore their freedom, taken from them through the progression of civilization. The only way for a society to maintain this is through strong and direct democracy, and the periodic assembling of a people to ensure the general will is continued.

Rousseau is the only philosopher whose works and ideology can absolutely be characterized as sexist. In *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau states “If I were sovereign, I would permit sewing and the needle trades only to women and to cripples reduced to occupations like theirs.”¹⁷ Obviously, with this line of thinking, Rousseau was in favor of a patriarchal system, and was not an advocate for the equal rights or dignity and worth of women. He also argued that within the social contract, identity and autonomy are gender-defined by nature. He serves as one of the most cited philosophers in feminist defense of their belief in the patriarchal nature of the social contract.

Biblical Views of Women’s Rights and the Social Contract

When looking at the formation of the United States and the social contract, the Biblical worldview is extremely relevant. Many philosophers whose ideas influenced contract theory were informed either indirectly or directly by Judeo-Christian thought and biblical worldview. The founders of the United States utilized both Christian worldview and the principles of a social contract to justify the American Revolution and articulate the founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the United States constitution. The Bible itself provides a significant amount of evidence in the inherent equality between genders, races, and classes. Galatians 3:28 states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁸ In addition, the Bible presents humans as being made in the image of God, “So God created in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”.¹⁸ John Locke especially, was influenced by this idea in that being made in the image of God, humans are bound to preserve themselves and the rest of mankind.¹⁹ This theme of equality and of humans as being made in the image of God is a persisting theme, and even addressed in the context of male and female relationships, in 1 Corinthians 11:11, in which it states that “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman”.¹⁸ The Bible also discusses property and stewardship in 1 Timothy 6:17, where it

¹⁶ *Social Contract Theory*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (n.d.). <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/#SH4a>

¹⁷ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile, or On Education*. Vol. I, Basic Books, 1979 [1762]1979.

¹⁸ English Standard Version Bible. (2001). ESV Online. [HTTPS://esv.literalword.com](https://esv.literalword.com).

¹⁹ Dienstag, J. F. (1996). Between History and Nature: Social Contract Theory in Locke and the Founders. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(4), 985–1009. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2960146>

states that God has given all things richly.²⁰ Therefore, the property and ownership factors in the social contract can be traced back to the ideas of the Bible, in protecting and stewarding what is given to mankind as a natural right. Finally, the Bible is where the first model of a covenant is seen, which relates to the relationship of a people and their government in a contractual society. We see this relationship paralleled in the church's relationship with God throughout the Bible, as well as in the traditional Biblical image of a marriage covenant, which assigns different roles of equal value to men and women in marriage.

Conclusion: The Social Contract is not Patriarchal by Nature

Through the writings of contract theory philosophers as well as in the Bible, and the ideas of feminists, it is clear that understandings of the social contract differ greatly, in theory and in practice. However, it is clear that there is not significant evidence that the original social contract was intended to exclude women permanently. Locke's influential thoughts of natural rights applied to everyone who wished to claim them and to participate in a society which would protect them. Similarly, Hobbes asserted that self-interest is what drives humans to interact with each other in a social contract, a trait which does not by any means exclude the female sex. Even Rousseau's views of a social contract could not function without women to perform the duties which he deemed inappropriate for men, and whether or not his intention in describing the social contract was to include women, his society could not function without them. While it is true that at the time of Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau, many believed in the inferiority of women, even Rousseau himself, there is not significant evidence in any of the contract theory philosophers work that this an accurate depiction of women or the greater society's view of women at the time. Women, while they have come to achieve greater rights and successes than at the time of the American founding or periods during which social contract theory gained traction, have always been essential and valued in society. Even as far back as in Biblical times, women were considered equal in dignity, intellect, and capability, albeit in their own unique roles. Additionally, men are not independent of women, society requires both sexes functioning in different and complementary ways. This is not to say that women are incapable for performing tasks traditionally assigned to men. It is clear that there is nothing standing in the way of them doing so, as throughout American history there has been continuous evolution of gender roles and rights. Therefore, a complete systematic restructuring of the society in which we currently live is not necessary. It is important to recognize that women are not, and have never been, complacent, mindless, slaves to the male sex. Women have evolved in their roles in society, yes, but have been defying stereotypes and contributing to society for thousands of years. From Queen Esther, saving an entire race of people in Biblical times, due to her husbands acknowledgement of her strength and intellect, to Abigail Adams reminding her husband, President John Adams, that care and attention should be paid to the "Ladies",²¹ because they would not stand for any laws in which they had no voice or representation- women have made their voices loud and clear for all of history. And herein lies the major flaw in the feminist

²⁰ English Standard Version Bible. (2001). ESV Online. [HTTPS://esv.literalword.com](https://esv.literalword.com).

²¹ *Letter From Abigail Adams to John Adams 31 March- 5 April 1776*. Massachusetts Historical Society. (n.d.). <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa>

opposition to the social contract; women are not and have never been specifically excluded from participating fully in a free society, however, as society has continued to grow and change, so has the role of women and their opportunities, while their value, intellect, and importance to the family and to society at large has remained. While their opportunities were limited at one point in time, women have never been less worthy, less intelligent, or less dignified than men, whether or not the men of their time acknowledged it. With the concept of *Imago Dei*, every person was created equally, in the image of God. Differently yes, inherently less valuable because of their sex, no. It is for this reason that the social contract cannot be patriarchal by nature. There is no indication that if women consent, as individuals with the same natural rights as men, to be governed, that they consent to having less opportunities or rights as men. In fact, by choosing to be a participant in modern society, women are claiming the rights and privileges organic to them, which those who came before them fought for. While these rights and privileges were previously withheld by a male-dominated society, the actual social contract never explicitly excluded women, and today, women are the most free and privileged that they have ever been. Therefore, the social contract is not, by nature, exclusive to men, women have always been valuable and morally and intellectually equal to men, and the current society in which we live does not need complete restructuring to affirm this.

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