
Abstract:

Mill and Jevons are favourable to the traditional sexual division of labour within the household. Their common adherence to this division doesn't imply a similar vision of women’s status in society and in family (Gouverneur, 2013). Nevertheless, women’s household activity, for them, forms an essential part of the overall female activity within society. They point out in particular the economic benefits issued from women’s reproductive work, this one including the acts of giving birth and upbringing children. This raises the question of whether the household activity, through which women contribute to the economic growth, can and must be treated as an economic activity. The prosperity of the nation indeed requires the constant replacement and upkeep of the productive resources, this resulting in part from women’s reproductive work. However, if Mill and Jevons admit that women play a positive role in the supply of efficient (physically and morally healthy) labour force, they refuse to recognize the economic value of women’s work. This refusal is justified by somewhat similar arguments: Mill considers that the reproductive work cannot be counted as an expense of production because it is not motivated by producing efficient workers; Jevons thinks that the expenditure on children cannot be considered as an investment of capital since they are parental obligations which do not return investment. But despite these similarities, other elements confirm the opposition of Mill and Jevons about the economic value of women’s reproductive work: In Mill, the subject is related to family limitation and female slavery; Jevons’ analysis excludes this kind of considerations.

0. Introduction

The economic value of women’s household activity is still largely underestimated, even neglected, by contemporary economists. In political economy, the general hypothesis is that gender equality can only be reached through women’s participation to the labour market. The social and economic importance of the household work is thus ignored (Ross, 2008; Hirschmann, 2008: 199). Of course, there are advances towards a greater account of women’s indirect contribution to the economic growth. Some economists admit, in line with John Kenneth Galbraith (1979: 41), the existence of an economic value of the household activity. Within the Feminist Economics, arguments have been developed in order to include this activity in the Gross Domestic Product and it has been envisaged developing indices which would allow to include tasks related to childcare in other economic measures (Folbre, 2006: 183;
Hirschmann, 2008: 200). But these advances, if they mustn’t be neglected, remain isolated and haven’t yet leaded to the real establishment of an economic measure of the household activity.

These current difficulties stem in part from the fact that women and their economic role have for a long time been ignored, notably by mainstream economists. As Dimand, Forget and Nyland sum up it, “the core treatises and primers on political economy by classical economists [...] typically neglected women’s economic roles, whether inside or outside the household” (Dimand, Forget and Nyland, 2004: 237). This doesn’t mean that there is no valuable contribution on the subject of housewives’ contribution to the economy in the history of political economy. John Stuart Mill is recognized for his fight in favour of a greater consideration of women and their interests in society and in economics. He gives them a place in his *Principles* and dedicates a work to them, *The Subjection of Women*. Unquestionably, his progressivism knows limits. In particular, while he shows himself – in a state of things where the women would beneficiate of the same legal rights of their husband – favourable towards the traditional sexual division of labour in the household, including for economic reasons, he refrains from valorising women’s household activity as a productive work. However, he presents arguments liable to open the way for a greater recognition and account of the economic value of women’s household labour. Additionally, the considerations that he puts forward about this activity cannot be examined independently of the views that he defend on the consequences of an excessive number of children by family on women and on society as a whole.

Some years after the publication of Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, William Stanley Jevons breaks with the idea that the woman can be the “equal in rights” of his husband and be left free, even in an unjust state of things, of working as she wants and thus abandoning her children in order to earn a wage (Mill, 1869: 541; Jevons, 1882a: 172). Focusing his analysis on the case of women of the working class, he celebrates the image of the “true mother and housekeeper” that he opposes to the one of “slattern” working at the factory (Jevons, 1882a: 174). Nevertheless, despite his insistence on the both social and economic impact that would have a good familial environment, he never proposes to economically take into account women’s household activity.
Thus, although Mill and Jevons represent two quite opposed tendencies as regards “the woman question”, none of them propose to take into account women’s household labour as an economic activity. They seem thus identify it to familial work of which the motive is not economic efficiency but affection. However, this fact mustn’t mask the existence of important differences between Mill’s and Jevons’ analyses, which appear at two levels. First, Mill’s and Jevons’ respective general descriptions of women’s household labour and of the figure of the housewife diverge, Jevons’ representation appearing well more restrictive than that of Mill (1). Secondly, as regards the more particular question of women’s reproductive work, Mill and Jevons, despite some similar arguments, appear definitely irreconcilable when the links existing between women’s reproductive work and pauperism are investigated (2).

1. Two visions of women’s household labour

1.1. The unproductive housekeeper

1.1.1. Mill: Women’s domestic work as an unproductive activity

The economists traditionally neglect the economic activity within the home, which is thus subject to an economic devaluation (Pujol, 1992: 31; Folbre, 1991: 465-9; Hirschmann, 2008: 199-202). Mill, as for him, offers descriptions of women’s household labour both in his Essay on Marriage and in The Subjection of Women. Nonetheless, he doesn’t recognize the economic value of this work (Mill, 1869: 514-6, 545-7; 1848: 72).

Indeed, Mill perpetuates the Smithian distinction between productive and unproductive work. He presents the domestic work as a useful but unproductive activity (Mill, 1848: 45). For him, the expression “productive labour” doesn’t refer to the work producing utilities but to the work creating material wealth (Ibid.: 46). More precisely, a productive labour generates utilities which are fixed and embodied in material objects – which can be external objects or human beings. In this sense, the majority of services are not a part of wealth. They disappear as soon as they are produced and are not liable to accumulation. All the material goods consumed by workers producing services, including domestic servants, have to be subtracted from the material products that the nation would otherwise own.

It seems then that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour results in a negative representation of the domestic work. Admittedly, Mill affirms that the term unproductive doesn’t imply any stigmatisation of the work classed as such:

“Production is not the sole end of human existence & the term unproductive, therefore, does not necessarily imply any stigma. It was never intended to do so in the present case. The question is one of mere language & classification.” (Mill, 1848: 45)

However, the fact that he classifies domesticity, the first sector of women’s employment at the time, as an unproductive activity reduces women’s visibility as paid workers in the economy (Caine, 1994: 38; Groenewegen, 1994: 6-8). The fifty-percent of women workers hired as domestic servants are never mentioned in Mill’s Principles. Not surprisingly, housewives who accomplish the same work without being paid never appear in the capacity of participants in the economy. And yet, Mill recognizes the importance of the unpaid domestic activity which, according to him, doesn’t only consist to make family members’ life more enjoyable. He indicates several dimensions of it. As we will see, he considers that women play an essential role both in the management of spending and in the upbringing of children, and that an efficient management of the household labour can have positive effects at the level of the household and the one of society.

As Folbre explains, by the end of the nineteenth century, the most part of the economists have abandoned the distinction between productive and unproductive labour and agree that “all paid services should be considered productive” (Folbre, 1991: 470). However, non-market services, which fall outside the field of economics, are not supposed to contribute to the economic growth. While paid domestic servants are seen as a part of the productive workforce, unpaid domestic workers are not: women’s household labour, the source of a non-market production, is thus implicitly defined as unproductive (Ibid.: 470). Jevons, just after Mill, illustrates this tendency.

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2 Mill talks about women working as domestic servants only in his discussion about inequalities of wages between men and women. He then affirms that the lower wages of women in the sector of domestic service are explained by custom. According to Mill, domestic servants’ wages, not determined by competition, are very in excess in relation to the market value of the work and, “in this excess, as in almost all things which are regulated by custom, the male sex obtains by far the largest share” (Mill, 1848: 395).

3 They appear only as reproducers (Mill, 1848: 40-1, 372-3).
1.1.2. Jevons: Women’s household labour as a non-market service

Jevons criticizes the classical distinction between productive and unproductive work (Okada, 2011: 25; Jevons, 1905: 16-8, 85-9). He considers that it is useless and stigmatising to classify as unproductive, such as the economists from Adam Smith to Mill and Fawcett do it, this large part of the working population constituted by domestics, soldiers, employees of the government, clergy, police officers, etc. (Jevons, 1905: 85, 88). For him, “all labour is directed to the production of utility – of useful or agreeable effect – an hedonic balance” (Ibid.: 87). As soon as July of 1857, he begins a “classification of industrial occupations” which will be published after his death (Jevons, Papers and Correspondence, Vol. VII: 115-9, cited in Bowman, 1989: 1145). He lists then ten classes of productive activities creating utilities:

1. DOMESTIC INDUSTRY: (a) Wives and other relatives, all females (mistress of household), (b) domestic servants, (c) public accommodation (inns, etc.);
2. FOOD AND MEDICINE: (i.) (a) bread, (b) flesh meat, (c) dairy produce, (d) fruit, (e) groceries, (f) liquors, (g) miscellaneous; (ii.) Agriculture–(a) males, (b) females; (iii.) Medicine;
3. CLOTHING: (a) made [...];
4. MEDICAL: (a) religion, (b) education, (c) science;
5. OCCUPATIONS GENERAL AND INDEFINITES [...];
6. INTELLECTUAL: (a) religion, (b) education, (c) science;
7. GOVERNMENT [...]

The first category, domestic industry, includes both paid domestic servants and housekeepers (Jevons, 1905: vii). The eleventh class is the “unproductive population”. It includes children and infirm persons, independents, criminal and paupers (Ibid.: viii). Thus, housewives are not explicitly defined as unproductive workers. However, if Jevons presents women’s activity within the household as a productive activity as well as paid domestic activity, he never treats the question of the economic value of this work. In his analysis, women’s unpaid domestic work appears more as a moral responsibility and a social necessity than an important economic activity.

1.2. Mill’s and Jevons’ general definition of women’s household activity

1.2.1. Mill: An evolution between On Marriage and The Subjection of Women

Between his essay On Marriage, published in 1832-33, and his work The Subjection of Women, written in 1859 and published in 1869, Mill seems to have deeply modified his vision of women’s role in the household. While, in On Marriage, he defines women’s familial obligations
as natural and few demanding, he adopts, in *The Subjection of Women*, a contrary position and presents women’s household work as an activity as time-consuming as an outdoor occupation.

**On Marriage: The belief in a natural role of women**

In *On Marriage*, Mill speaks out in favour of the traditional sexual division of labour in the household, that is to say the division in which the man is the main breadwinner and the woman performs the household tasks:

“It does not follow that a woman should actually support herself because she should be capable of doing so: in the natural course of events, she will not […] In a healthy state of things, the husband would be able by his single exertions to earn all that is necessary for both: and there would be no need that the wife should take part in the mere providing of what is required to support life: it will be for the happiness of both that her occupation should rather be to adorn and beautify it. Except in the class of actual day-labourers, that will be her natural task, if task it can be called, which will in so great a measure be accomplished by *being* than by *doing*.” (Mill, 1832-3: 74-5; see also Mill, 1869: 484)

In the household work, he distinguishes two types of activities: the superintendence of the household and the education of children (Mill, 1832-3: 75).

As regards the household superintendence, Mill considers that it can take two forms. In the case of upper or well-off households, which have sufficient resources to hire domestics, women have only an activity of supervision of the work performed by domestic servants. This activity, which requires few time and efforts, cannot be considered as an “occupation” in the same way as a paid activity (*Ibid.*: 75). By contrast, in the case of households which don’t have the necessary means to hire domestics, it follows naturally, according to Mill, that “the mistress of a family shall herself do the work of servants” (*Ibid.*: 75). Household activity then consists in a real occupation of which, additionally, the intensity – and at the same time the difficulty to conciliate it with an outside work – increases with the number of children (Mill, 1848: 372, 431).

Concerning the education of children, Mill thinks that the mother can become their “natural teacher” when the household haven’t the necessary means to recruit private teachers (Mill, 1832-3: 76). Apart from that, the most part of the education of children consists, for Mill, in their moral education by the mother, which cannot be considered as an “occupation” (*Ibid.*: 76).

Nothing indicates in this analysis that women’s household activity should lead to remuneration, even when women carry out the work which would be performed by domestics.
or by teachers if the household would have the means to pay for such workers. At Mill’s time, Barbara Bodichon presents as for her arguments favourable to a certain form of remuneration of the work accomplished by women in the household. She identifies “money” as a means to access to the power and denounces the prejudice endured by women to whom the society forbids from accepting money for their work:

“Work for love of Christ only [...] is a profound and mischievous mistake. It tends to lessen the dignity of necessary labour.” (Bodichon, 1857: 33, cited in Pujol, 1992: 40-1)

The Subjection of Women: the household activity as a full-time occupation

In The Subjection of Women, Mill argues that, in the case of families which have for sole resource the wages earned by household members, it is preferable that, in a just state of things – that is a state of things where husband and wife enjoy the same legal status and rights –, the sexual division of labour be respected (Mill, 1869: 484; see also Mill, 1848: 394). However, he doesn’t affirm, as he did in On Marriage, that the household activity falls “naturally” on women if the household is not in a position to hire domestics or teachers. This can be explained by the fact that, in The Subjection of Women, he criticizes the idea of the existence of a feminine nature (Mill, 1869: 443, 451-2). Moreover, he considers that the decision about the division of roles in the family must be left to the discretion of the spouses and insists, rather than on the idea of a women’s natural role, on their difficulty to conciliate the household activity with an outside work given the lack of sharing of the household tasks within the couple (Mill, 1869: 485; E. Smith, 2001: 187-8).

In The Subjection of Women, Mill distinguishes several aspects of women’s activity within the household and underlines, at the same time, the sustained attention that it calls for. He affirms that it includes both the education of children and the “management of the household” which, “extremely onerous to the thoughts”, consists in part to manage the household expenditure (Mill, 1869: 484, 502-3, 514-5):

“If, in addition to the physical suffering of bearing children, and the whole responsibility of their care and education in early years, the wife undertakes the careful and economical application of the husband’s earnings to the general comfort of the family; she takes not only her fair share, but usually the larger share, of the bodily and mental exertion required by their joint existence.” (Mill, 1869: 483)
Beyond these duties which, according to Mill, form in the general opinion women’s “most necessary and recognized duties”, it must be added the role which is assigned to women when they belong to a high rank, namely the supervision of the family’s “intercourse with others” or, in other words, of the social representation of the family (Mill, 1869: 515-7).

Finally, women are so occupied by their responsibilities within the household that they cannot easily devote themselves to other activities requiring a sustained effort, as for example philosophy or art, what can explain their disadvantage relatively to men in these disciplines (Mill, 1869: 516-7). However, if Mill recognizes the time and the energy that requires women’s household activity, he doesn’t propose any means to measure its economic value, unlike Marshall after him (Le Bouteillé and Charles, 2007: 21-4).

1.2.2. Jevons: The question of women’s “duties” analyzed through a class perspective

The case of women of upper classes

Contrary to Mill, Jevons doesn’t address the issue of women’s domestic work regarding well-off households. It is only possible to infer some hypotheses about his opinions on the place of women of upper classes in society and family from a letter written to his sister Lucy on 26th April 1866:

“I hope you will not be the least discouraged about your painting [...] But you must remember how much time and effort is needed in all matters of this kind. What success I have comes from labouring without cessation from the earliest years I can at all remember. A woman can seldom have the inducement or opportunity to the same constant attention and effort. No one can wish that she should. Except under very peculiar circumstances, she should not sacrifice herself and others to it. I think that women are often quite sufficiently admirable in themselves and their characters without accomplishments and works.” (Jevons, 1886: 223)

But except for some succinct and disparate elements (cf. Jevons, 1882b: 120), Jevons’ analysis focuses on the case of women of the working class, in connection with the problems of infantile mortality and persistent pauperism (Jevons, 1882a; 1882b: 1, 68-75).

The idea of working-class women’s natural duties

For Jevons, women of the working class can be permitted to work only if they haven’t young children. In “Married Women in Factories” and State in Relation to Labour, he points out the harmful effects of the absence of mothers from the household, in particular high infant
mortality. For him, the real place of women is at home (Gouverneur, 2013: 772). This is in particular justified by their maternal obligations towards their children who, if they don’t receive the care they need, are fated to the death or the indigence: “She alone can save from virtual starvation and death” (Jevons, 1882a: 177). More generally, their role as spouses and mothers consists essentially to provide a comfortable house for family members and to make their life pleasurable. If Jevons presents as “slavery” the fact that women employed in factories must perform their domestic work in addition to “a full day’s work at the mills”, he never identifies household labour to a full-time occupation (Jevons, 1882b: 73-4). Quite the contrary, he asserts that women’s paid domestic work has not to be regulated and seems thus to consider that married women can do hours as domestic servants besides their unpaid domestic work (Jevons, 1882b: 69).

Jevons specifies, to a certain extent, the duties which are incumbent on women in the house. They include the provision of different – non-market – services, such as cooking, house’s maintenance (cleaning, laundry) and child rearing (Jevons, 1882a: 178; 1882b: 74). However, he stops there and never presents these tasks as economically measurable contributions. After him, Marshall will propose to quantify services provided by women to be consumed by men in referring to the cost of similar services purchased on the market (Marshall, 1890: 67; Le Bouteillec and Charles, 2007: 21-2).

Thus, Jevons offers a narrower definition of women’s household labour than Mill’s. Amongst other things, they are at variance as regards women’s role in the household budget management, even though this task becomes crucial in a perspective of household management’s efficiency.

1.3. A specific role of women in the management of expenditures?

1.3.1. Mill: An efficient management of spending by women

With respect to the superintendence of the household, Mill insists particularly on the role of women in the management of expenditures (Mill, 1869: 483, 514, 547). To a more global level, society’s one, he puts emphasis on “the value of the advice and help of clever and
experienced women of the world, in the attainment both of private and of public objects” (Ibid.: 546-7). He considers in particular that women are more efficient than many men in the control of expenditure:

“ [...] there are important matters of public administration to which few men are equally competent with such women; among others, the detailed control of expenditure.” (Mill, 1869: 547)

Yet, if Mill calls “services” the different forms of women’s involvement in “public business”, he never presents in these terms the activities that they perform within the household (Mill, 1869: 547). These activities could only result in “services” to the society if married women, once free from familial duties, were led, by way of appropriate studies, to use “the knowledge of life and the faculty of government which they have acquired in their families [...] on a less contracted scale” (Ibid.: 546).

Such a distinction between women’s “services” at society’s level and the activities that they accomplish within the household is all the more surprising that Mill presents the allocation of household’s resources as more efficient when the mistress of the family takes directly at her charge the management of expenditures (Mill, 1869: 483). This allows indeed to avoid “the waste and malversation” incurred when this task is left to hired servants (Ibid.: 514). Moreover, women’s efficiency in the management of spending can be reinforced through their access to a better education (Ibid.: 546).

As regards more specifically women of the working class, Mill considers that they can have a role of control of their husbands’ expenditures. In his Principles, more precisely in his discussion about cooperative associations, he illustrates his proposition in favour of an equal participation of both sexes to the rights and powers linked to the direction of these associations by the example of a still existing association in which women intervene about the manner in

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5 From our point of view, Mill considers this state of affairs as a result of women’s socialisation rather than as an effect of their nature. He affirms indeed that married women acquire “knowledge of life and faculty of government” in their families and can then apply them on a vaster field (Mill, 1869: 546). Moreover, he attributes a role to habit in the fact that women’s capacities be rather directed – in the society as it is then constituted – towards practice (Ibid.: 493-4, 502-3).

6 Marshall, as for him, will affirm that a specific education must be given to women in order to develop in them the capacities required for the good running of the household and in particular for the management of the spending (Marshall, 1890: 195-6 ; Pujol, 1992: 127-8). For him, indeed, the rational management of household’s spending by wives is favourable to the increase of the amount of national saving (Le Bouteillec and Charles, 2007: 21).
which money is spend and, by this means, prevent their husband from wasting it in alcohol (Mill, 1848: 794; see also Mill, 1869: 143).

However, despite his recognition of a role of women in the management of expenditures, Mill mentions only economic benefits that this activity brings at the level of households, such as a lesser waste of available resources, but not at society’s level, such as, for example, higher saving rates.

1.3.2. Jevons: To improve the management of spending by male heads of family

Contrary to Mill, Jevons never puts forward the idea of a role of women in the management of household expenditures. If he mentions the fact that the prohibition of the work of mothers of young children in factories would cause a loss in terms of familial income, he indicates no form of compensation such as a better use of the household’s resources (Jevons, 1882a: 160; 1882b: 71). Yet, a discussion of this kind could have occurred: There is only to think about Marshall who asserts that the inferiority of French households’ income, due to the lower wages of French workers, is counterbalanced by a better allocation of the resources which is performed by the French housekeeper (Le Bouteillec and Charles, 2007: 21). Such a reasoning has important consequences: in Marshall, it justifies his proposition to give a specific education to women in order to make them able to fulfil properly their duties, including the management of the expenditures within the home (Le Bouteillec and Charles, 2007: 21; Pujol, 1992: 127).

Jevons, as for him, considers that it is necessary to improve the utilisation of working-class households’ resources through the change of individual spending behaviours, in particular those of the male heads of family. According to him, working-class households spend the familial income in immoral activities as gambling and in luxury goods as alcohol and tobacco (Jevons, 1866: xlix; 1871: 184; 1878: 6-7). Therefore, it is not desirable that they enjoy too high incomes, in particular through women’s factory work (Jevons, 1882b: 71). Jevons advocates a set of measures, which include the establishment of a compulsory system of education, necessary to change individual behaviours and secure a better utilisation of familial incomes (Jevons, 1866: xlviil). These measures aim actually at producing good heads of family, considered by Jevons as the main decision makers for all economic decisions related to the familial unit, such
as the total amount of working hours to be made by family members in order to achieve the
desired level of wealth, or the appropriate allocation of household’s resources (Gouverneur,
2013: 771). On this last point, indeed, Jevons attributes to men the role of protecting their
family against the “reversals of fortune” and the “vicissitudes of life” (Jevons, 1869: 186). Unlike
Mill, he never develops any argument in terms of a role of women in the control of men’s
spending. He mentions only an indirect effect of the exclusion of mothers of young children
from factories: it would allow the decrease of men’s intemperance who, enjoying a comfortable
home, would be less inclined to alcoholism and gambling (Jevons, 1882a: 163, 178; 1882b: 72).

We have seen that Mill and Jevons don’t grant the same importance to the household
labour. In Mill, this labour includes the management of the household budget that women can
take on it efficiently. For Jevons, this task comes down to the husband, of which the behaviour
must be improved.

These divergences about the function of women in the family grow wider again on the
subject of children’s education. Here, Mill attributes a larger role to women than to men but
shows himself hesitant to consider this essential part of women’s household labour as a real
occupation. As for Jevons, if he considers that a good education of children is essential to fight
against pauperism and promote work efficiency, he puts only emphasis on the necessity of
women’s quasi-permanent presence in the home in order to preserve household influences.

1.4. Women’s role in the education of children

1.4.1. Mill: The education of children by mothers as a moral training?

For Mill, the access of women to an equal education to that of men would not only allow
them to make a real choice between an outdoor paid work and the household activity but also
to better fulfil the familial duties assigned to them by society, in particular that of the education
of children:

“In this as in other cases, (pre-eminent in that of the education of children), the duties permitted to
women cannot be performed properly, without their being trained for duties which, to the great loss of
society, are not permitted to them.” (Mill, 1869: 546)
This proposition implies that the education of children requires more than the simple presence of women at home, with their children. However, Mill’s analysis is rather equivocal as regards the status and value which must be attributed to this function.

Several decades before The Subjection of Women, in his Essay on Marriage, Mill argues that women’s work related to the education of children couldn’t consist in the teaching of “particular arts or particular branches of knowledge” (Mill, 1832-3: 75). It is preferable that teachers – hired by the household – be in charge of such a function. It is only when a household doesn’t have the means to recruit private teachers that the mother becomes the “natural teacher” (Ibid.: 76). In other words, Mill considers that the education of children can be seen as an occupation only when the mother accomplishes the work of a teacher. He adds that no specific disposition have to be taken in this sense. If the education of women makes them capable of teaching their knowledge to their children when it is necessary, this positive effect doesn’t constitute its object. Mill indeed affirms that “knowledge is desirable for its own sake; for its uses, for its pleasures, and for its beautifying influence when not cultivated to the neglect of other gifts” (Ibid.: 76). For him, it is absurd to consider children teaching as an occupation which necessarily comes down to the mother without worrying whether she can or not make a better use of her faculties or whether she is fitted for a “highest destiny” (Ibid.: 76).

In reality, Mill thinks that the education that belongs to mothers to give to their children consists in “the training of the affections”, “of the conscience” and of “the whole moral being” (Mill, 1832-3: 76). Now, this most necessary part of the education of children cannot be identified to a full-time occupation:

“[A] mother [...] effects it by being with the child; by making it happy, and therefore at peace with all things, by checking bad habits in the commencement; by loving the child, and by making the child love her. It is not by particular efforts, but imperceptibly and unconsciously that she makes her own character pass into the child; that she makes the child love what she loves, venerate what she venerates, and imitate as far as a child can, her example. These things cannot be done by a hired teacher; and they are better and greater, than all the rest.” (Mill, 1832-3: 76)

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7 Mill nevertheless advocates the enforcement of universal education by the State, which can give “pecuniary support to elementary [private] schools, such as to render them accessible to all the children of the poor”, either gratuitously or at a trifling expense (Mill, 1848: 947-50; 1859: 129-30). The education given by women would come down, in this case, to the moral education of children.
In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill seems to adopt a more qualified point of view. On one hand, he affirms that maternity – and the responsibilities that it implies – cannot be considered as the natural “vocation” of women (Mill, 1869: 458). On the other, he no longer mentions the idea of a moral education which would be transmitted by the mother to their children. This can be linked to his position according to which it is impossible to assert that women are morally superior to men (*Ibid.*: 476, 530-1). He rather considers that, to move towards a moral amelioration of the humanity, it is necessary to establish just relationships within families in order that they become “school[s] of sympathy in equality” (*Ibid.*: 479).

Nevertheless, in two letters of 1868 and 1869, Mill writes that “nothing can replace the mother for the education of children”\(^8\) and that there exists “an infinitely closer relationship of a child to its mother than to its father”\(^9\). This shows that he still believes to a more important role of women in the education of children.

### 1.4.2. Jevons: Moral influences of women’s presence at home

Jevons doesn’t develop the idea of a specific role of women in the moral education of children. However, he puts emphasis on the importance of the accomplishment by women of their maternal duties and of their presence in the household. The prohibition of the employment of mothers of young children in factories is both necessary to reduce infant mortality and thwart the phenomenon of pauperism. For Jevons, indeed, mother’s absence from the home leads to the degeneration of working-class families through “the destruction of household influences” or, in other words, “the destruction of a comfortable home” (Jevons, 1882a: 176-7; 1882b: 72). It perpetuates “immorality and intemperance”, criminality and pauperism (Jevons, 1882b: 72):

> “Those children who live, and reach adult life under such adverse circumstances, are physically and morally weak, and in most instances lapse into pauperism and crime.” (Jevons, 1882a: 163; see also 1882a: 178)

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In this sense, women’s return at home would be above all else a source of moral and social benefits, their role consisting only to take care of others.

To sum up, Mill and Jevons have two quite distinct definitions of the household labour. Mill, in *The Subjection of Women*, identifies it to an occupation as monopolizing as an outdoor work. He considers that the care and education of children, with the management of the familial budget, form a full-time occupation which can with difficulty be conciliated with another activity. Jevons, as for him, doesn’t address the subject of women’s household labour as such. He puts rather emphasis on the dangers of women’s factory work than on the difficulty of the work performed by women at home.

Despite these differences, none of them propose an economic measure of women’s household labour. This, as we have seen, can in part be explained by their general conception of this function: as regards Mill, it may reflect the persistence of the opinions that he expressed in *On marriage*; as regards Jevons, it is doubtless linked to his narrow characterization of women’s duties. However, the lack of such a proposition can more fundamentally be explained by Mill’s and Jevons’ treatment of women’s reproductive work, which consists in the acts of giving birth and rearing children. Although they mention economic benefits issued from this work, they don’t treat it as an economically valuable activity.

2. The economic devaluation of women’s reproductive work

2.1. The role of women’s reproductive work in the economic growth

2.1.1. Mill: The reproductive work as a condition of production

In his *Principles*, Mill argues that the work related to the care and the education of children contributes to the economic growth as it constitutes a condition of production:

“Every human being has been brought up from infancy at the expense of much labour to some person or persons, and if this labour, or part of it, had not been bestowed, the child would never have attained the age and strength which enable him to become a labourer in his turn. To the community at large, the labour and expense of rearing its infant population form a part of the outlay which is a condition of production, and which is to be replaced with increase from the future produce of their labour.” (Mill, 1848: 40-1)

Now, in *The Subjection of Women*, he explains that “the care which [the mother] is herself disabled from taking of the children and the household, nobody else takes; those of the children
who do not die, grow up as they best can” (Mill, 1869: 483). He thus points out the important burden that the care and upbringing of children form and suggests that when these tasks are not performed properly, this leads to future weakened adults and inefficient workers. Nevertheless, Mill refuses to treat women’s reproductive work as a productive economic activity (Hirschmann, 2008: 204-9). More precisely, he doesn’t consider that the work and spending devoted to children could, from the point of view of political economy, be considered as a cost of production.

Contrary to Mill, Jevons doesn’t present explicitly women’s reproductive work as a condition of production. Nevertheless, he mentions positive economic effects of the restrictions of women’s work in factories.

2.1.2. Jevons: The increase of the growth rate through women’s reproductive work

In 1866, Jevons advocated the establishment of “a general system of education” (Jevons, 1866: xlviii). He then affirmed that the access of the members of the working class to education would allow the amelioration of their moral and social condition by making them, among others, more temperate and provident (Ibid.: xlvi). But people’s education is also indispensable to increase the efficiency of work: “anything which we may lose or spend now in education and loss of labour will be repaid many times over by the increased efficiency of labour in the next generation” (Ibid.: xlix).

Later, when Jevons writes “Married Women in Factories”, a law on education, the Elementary Education Act, has been adopted (Jevons, 1882a: 176). However, for him, this measure is not totally satisfying: it is necessary to go beyond, with a new law which would concern children under the age to go to school – that is the age of 5 (Ibid.: 156-7, 160). The formal system of education must go hand in hand with a healthy familial life. It is firstly through the attention of their mother and home influences that children will become healthy, industrious and temperate workers (Jevons, 1882a: 163, 178; 1882b: 70, 72):

“As regards the interests of employers it must be obvious that whatever they might suffer from the lessened supply of labour during the first ten years would be amply repaid by the abundant supply of vigorous young mill-hands which would then begin to be available.” (Jevons, 1882a: 175)
In other words, women’s return at home and observance of their maternal duties would lead to an increase of the supply of efficient labour force, physically and morally healthy, and, by this way, of the growth rate of production (White, 1994b: 52). Conversely, the employment of women, especially mothers of young children, in mills, by increasing infantile mortality, crime and pauperism, causes a lack of efficient workers. Jevons thus establishes a link between the economic prosperity of the nation and the accomplishment of their familial duties by women of the working class. In this sense, married women contribute indirectly to the economic growth: as Jevons explains, the mother “alone can add inches to the stature, fulness to the muscles, and vigour to the mind” (Jevons, 1882a: 177).

Nevertheless, if Jevons recognizes that the nation, through women’s reproductive work, is supplied with efficient labour force, he doesn’t show any inclination to consider this work in economic terms.

So, for Mill and Jevons, women’s reproductive work has a positive impact on the economic growth. As we will see, this leads Mill to ask himself on the possibility to confer an economic status to this work. At the opposite, Jevons doesn’t directly address the question of whether the work dedicated to children can be treated as a productive investment, at least in the case of working classes. Nevertheless, his position about this point can be enlightened through elements appearing in his later – and uncompleted – human capital theory.

2.2. The reproductive work as an economically valuable activity?

2.2.1. Mill: The refusal to classify the reproductive work as a productive activity

Mill indicates two characteristics which allow to identify an activity to a productive labour (Pujol, 1992: 31). First of all, a work can be considered as productive only if it tends to increase the material wealth, that is to say if it results in fine in the creation of “utilities embodied in material objects” (Mill, 1848: 49):

10 Mill affirms that the talents and energy of artisans form a part of the national wealth as they constitute means of acquire wealth in a material sense (Mill, 1848: 48). According to him, by adopting a large definition of wealth, which would concern any useful product susceptible of accumulation, the whole of the work used in the creation of permanent utilities, whether they are fixed in human beings or any other animate or inanimate object, ought to be

“[...] I shall not refuse the appellation productive, to labour which yields no materiel product as its direct result, provided that an increase of material products is its ultimate consequence.” (Mill, 1848: 49)

According to this criterion, Mill classes among the productive works the “labour expended in the acquisition of manufacturing skill”, “the labour of officers of government in affording the protection [...] indispensable to the prosperity of the industry” (Mill, 1848: 49), or “the labour of saving a friend’s life” when the friend “is a productive labourer, and produces more than he consumes” (Ibid.: 50). Any work which contributes to the efficiency or to the safeguard of society’s productive resources must be considered as productive. At the opposite, a work which doesn’t end in the creation of material wealth must be classed as unproductive (Ibid.: 50). Although such a work can produce a permanent benefit, it is unproductive in the sense that no part of this benefit consists in the rise of material products.

Mill doesn’t refuse to treat all work “of which the subject is human beings” as an expense of production (Mill, 1848: 40). This kind of work, as he explains, produces “utilities fixed and embodied in human beings” (Ibid.: 47). In other words, it confers on human beings qualities that make them operational. Mill includes in this category “the labour of all concerned in education”, “the labour of physicians” (as it allows to safeguard the life and the physical and mental efficiency of individuals), and all the labour devoted by an individual, throughout his or her life, to improve his or her own knowledge and to cultivate his or her mental and physical faculties or the ones of others (Ibid.: 47). If a work doesn’t directly produce utilities “fixed and embodied in material objects”, it can indirectly be productive of wealth and thus be classified as productive labour (Mill, 1848: 48; Folbre, 1991: 470).

Sticking to this criterion, the work devoted to the care and education of children, given that he favours the increase of the (future) product of work, should be considered as a productive labour. However, this is not the case. Mill indeed differentiates the work related to the education of children within the household from the same kind of work accomplished within the framework of the formal system of education. A human capital theory appears through his statement that “the skill, and the energy and perseverance, of the artisans of a country, are reckoned part of its wealth, no less than their tools and machinery” (Mill, 1848: 48). The fact of considered as productive. Nonetheless, Mill retains, by convenience, a definition of wealth which is limited to material products.
building the quality of the labour force contributes to the accumulation of wealth, what justifies that the expenses of education be treated as an investment (Pujol, 1992: 33). However, this applies only for the work of “schoolmasters, tutors, and professors”, even “governments, so far as they aim successfully at the improvement of the people”, and not for the labour devoted – by women – to the education of children (Mill, 1848: 47).

Mill defines in reality a second criterion permitting to confer the statute of productive labour to an activity. A work, productive under the first criterion, can be considered as an expense of production only if its object, when it is performed, is to promote production or to get the returns arising from it (Mill, 1848: 41):

“The skill of an artisan is accounted wealth, only as being the means of acquiring wealth in a material sense [...] Thus, labour expended in the acquisition of manufacturing skill, I class as productive, not in virtue of the skill itself, but of the manufactured products created by the skill, and to the creation of which the labour of learning the trade is essentially conducive.” (Mill, 1848: 49. Italics added)

As Mill explains, the work relating to technical and industrial education of the community, or the work applied to the learning and teaching of productive arts, is really undertaken with a view to the larger produce that it generates and in such a way that the student reaps later a remuneration which compensates the upstream efforts that he has delivered, in addition of an adequate remuneration for the teacher’s work, when a teacher has been hired (Mill, 1848: 41). In other words, expenditures on technical education or training are induced by an investment motive (Bowman, 1990: 35, 38). In contrast, according to Mill, the labour and the expense of raising children are “usually incurred from other motives” than to obtain in return an increase of the produce of labour (Mill, 1848: 41). Moreover, he considers that “for most purposes of political economy, [they] need not be taken into account as expenses of production” (Ibid.: 41).

2.2.2. Jevons: Women’s reproductive work as an investment in human capital?

When State in Relation to Labour and “Married Women in Factories” are published in 1882, Jevons has not yet developed his human capital theory. It is only later, in a chapter of the extract entitled “A Fragment on Capital”\footnote{This “Fragment on Capital” has been published in appendix of the fifth edition of the Theory of Political Economy (1957) by William Stanley Jevons’ son, Herbert Stanley Jevons.}, which should have made part of his Principles of
Economics, that Jevons begins to elaborate such a theory. This one has as interest to complete his analysis of labour supply carried out in the chapter V of his Theory of Political Economy. In this work, indeed, Jevons proposes an analysis of the labour supply in terms of an arbitrage made by individuals between work and leisure. The maximizing behaviour – that is, to cite White, “the behaviour which maximizes the accumulation of wealth” – involves that individuals determine a number of work hours in such a way that, for the last hour worked, the additional utility generated by the additional consumption – derived from the supplement of income – is equal to the additional pain generated by the additional efforts (Jevons, 1871: 196; White, 1994b: 72). Individuals thus participate actively to the determination of their own wage (Bowman, 1997: 460). However, in this analysis, Jevons makes no mention of the links existing between education, productivity and wage. He doesn’t address the question of whether individuals’ expenses of education can be considered as an investment arising from a maximizing behaviour and likely to affect the supply of skilled labour (Ibid.: 463). Jevons intended to treat this subject in his Principles of Economics – never finished – of which he begins the writing in 1883.

The extract entitled “A Fragment on Capital”, which should make part of the chapter XXV of the Principles of Economics, includes an attempt to complete Jevons’ previous analysis of labour supply by describing the maximizing behaviour determining the supply of skilled labour. In this fragment, indeed, Jevons devotes a chapter to the theme of “capital invested in education” (Jevons, 1957: 300):

“Nothing is more important than to obtain clear ideas of the investment of capital throughout the course of life. How far, for instance, is capital invested in the course of education—a child at an infant school, a boy at a boarding school, a young man at college or reading for the law?” (Jevons, 1957: 300)

He applies the marginal principle to decisions in terms of education taken throughout the individual’s life. Decisions of this kind result indeed from a weighing of incurred costs and expected benefits (Bowman, 1997: 464). The costs are opportunity costs: they represent the loss of income due to a non-exploited possibility (Ibid.: 464).

Jevons distinguishes the case of young men which could earn labour incomes from children below the working age. He considers that there can be “capitalisation” only when individuals reach the age to receive their own labour income (Jevons, 1957: 301). A young man
who has the possibility to earn wages immediately can prefer to give up them in order to undertake studies. In such a case, he “forgoes present in favour of greater future earnings” (Ibid.: 301). This renunciation of the present consumption with a view to future higher earnings constitutes, for Jevons, “the measure of capitalisation” (Ibid.: 301). The portion of the income at individual’s disposal\(^{12}\) which is really capitalised is the one used for the payment of school fees, the purchase of books and the expenses required by individual’s education (Ibid.: 302). In other words, the capital corresponds to what is spent in the education of the “young man” and which ceases to be capital when he starts to work (Jevons, 1957: 300).

Here, the idea of capitalisation applies in particular to professional classes, as it is suggested by Jevons’ example of a young man “reading for the law” (Jevons, 1957: 300; Bowman, 1987: 473). However, in *State in Relation to Labour*, Jevons describes the same process in the case of skilled workers:

“It may be at least plausibly said that in his education and training a skilled operative expends no small amount of capital, which remains invested in him, to be repaid by an annuity of higher wages during his available working life.” (Jevons, 1882b: 99)

As regards household’s decisions related to the education of children, Jevons considers that there isn’t “capitalisation”. In other words, expenditures\(^{13}\) made by parents on the subsistence and the education of children cannot be considered as an investment (Bowman, 1997: 463). According to Jevons, indeed, these spending couldn’t lead to a return on investment since children are not supposed to earn wages. Thus, it doesn’t consist to give up wages in the present in order to improve the future condition of the individual:

“The sustenance and education of a young child does not return investment because the child is not capable of earning anything. No labour, therefore, is devoted to the future which might be devoted to the present.” (Jevons, 1957: 300)

As regards purchases of goods necessary to children’s subsistence, they merely correspond to an amount of commodities that the parents must supply to their offspring. The law indeed compels them to provide for their children’s needs, “whether the child is intended to labour in the future or not” (Jevons, 1957: 300).

\(^{12}\) This income can be formed, according to Jevons, by resources that the individual has already available before his studies or by a loan carried out by friends that he has to repay (Jevons, 1957: 302).

\(^{13}\) Jevons reasons in terms of money spending (capital) – not in terms of an expense of labour – devoted to children.
In this sense, parental expenditures on children can be considered as a form of consumption (Bowman, 1997: 464). The decision to have and to educate children is governed by the laws of individual choice (Ibid.: 464). Jevons quotes Shadwell who, in his *System of Political Economy*, affirms that “the common rate of wages” cannot be treated as a “return for the capital expended in maintaining children before they are able to work” (Shadwell, 1877: 140; cited by Jevons, 1957: 301). Such a proposition would be equivalent to “suppose that parents bring up children with no other object than to secure them a certain position in the world, and that they are not influenced by the pleasure which they themselves derive from the possession of a family” (Shadwell, 1877: 140). Thus, for Jevons, another type of motives determines the decision to have and educate children. This decision results from the weighing of the costs generated by a certain number of children and the pleasure derived from familial life:

> “Against the cost of any process we must set all advantage or pleasure derived in the course of the process. Now if a considerable part of the parents’ pleasure of life arises from the family circle, the expenditure on children repays itself at the moment.” (Jevons, 1957: 301)

In such a way, when an individual enters the labour market, he is “started free from capital liabilities” towards his parents (Jevons, 1957: 301).

This analysis of the decisions related to children is clearly marked by a class perspective. It seems indeed essentially apply to the households of middle and well-off classes. Jevons’ analysis of working-class households shows a quite distinct state of things: in particular, he denounces the numerous abuses to which the children of the working class are subjected (Jevons, 1882a: 161; 1882b: 10-1). It is then possible to consider that Jevons’ discussion about parental expenditures on children gives actually a more precise description of the familial model towards which working-class households should tend, namely a household in which children enjoy a good education and a harmonious familial life.

So both Mill and Jevons refuse to consider the expense of rearing children as an investment\(^\text{14}\). For Mill, the labour expended in the education of children cannot be treated as an expense of production and, therefore, as a productive labour or investment (Mill, 1848: 41, 43).

\(^{14}\) Marshall, after them, will tempt to establish a precise economic calculus, based upon the notion of human capital, or capital invested in human beings, to measure women’s indirect contribution to the well-being of the nation (Le Bouteillec and Charles, 2007: 23).
For Jevons, the expenditure on children doesn’t constitute an investment of capital but rather a form of consumption. To justify their position, Mill and Jevons give a similar argument: Mill explains that the expense and labour of rearing children are not incurred with the aim of making of them skilled and well-paid workers; Jevons considers that the expenses of raising children are usually not motivated by the wish to secure them higher wages during their working life.

The pertinence of the argument can however be questioned. Mill’s refusal of classifying women’s reproductive work as a productive labour contrasts with the views that he expresses about the labour of physicians or of savants which, although not incurred from economic motives, could be considered as productive. In Jevons, the argument comes up against the manner in which he depicts the relations between parents and children in working-class households. However, he probably thinks that these households must move towards the idyllic familial life evoked in the “Fragment on Capital”.

2.3. Two unfinished analyses.

2.3.1. Mill: From physicians and savants to housewives

Mill’s analysis shows different limits. Firstly, the argument that expenses in rearing children are not induced by investment considerations appears in contradiction with Mill’s depiction of the behaviour of parents of the working class. As it is underlined by the contemporary commentator Bowman, Mill follows Adam Smith in suggesting that, in the working classes, children are often considered as income-earning assets (Smith, 1776, 70-1). The parents indeed send their children to work early and, in so doing, neglect their need of education (Bowman, 1990: 38):

“[...] it is right that children, and young persons not yet arrived at maturity, should be protected, so far as the eye and hand of the state can reach, from being over-worked. Labouring for too many hours in the day, or on work beyond their strength, should not be permitted to them, *for if permitted it may always be compelled*.” (Mill, 1848: 952. Italics added)

Nevertheless, according to Mill, this neglect arises from the selfishness and ignorance of parents, incompetent to measure the importance of a good education. He advocates for this reason the enforcement of universal education by the State (Mill, 1848: 374-5; 1859: 128-30).
Other difficulties, more theoretical, appear in Mill’s analysis. Mill could have, by adopting a larger definition of the concept of “productive labour”, as he does for some kinds of work, open the way towards the recognition of the economic value of women’s reproductive labour. But he doesn’t, this leading to visible inconsistencies.

Mill’s refusal to consider the labour and expense of raising children as expenses of production is all the more disconcerting as he expresses quite distinct views about the labour of physicians. He considers that, in the same way as the labour which confers productive – physical or mental – powers, the labour which is employed to keep up the productive powers may be looked upon “as part of what the produce costs to society” (Mill, 1848: 41). In other words, the labour which allows to prevent the destruction or the weakening of the available productive powers – by death, infirmity or disease – can be counted as an expense of production:

“The labour of a physician or surgeon, when made use of persons engaged in industry, must be regarded in the economy of society as a sacrifice incurred, to preserve from perishing by death or infirmity that portion of the productive resources of society which is fixed in the lives and bodily or mental powers of its productive members.” (Mill, 1848: 41)

For Mill, when the individuals resort to physicians’ services, their motives are not mainly economic, even if this kind of motives usually forms, even unconsciously, a sufficient reason for accepting to submit to a medical treatment. If the labour and expense allowing to preserve the productive resources fixed in the members of society are unquestionably “conducive to production”, they are not “incurred for that end, or for the sake of the returns arising from it” (Mill, 1848: 41). Therefore, if one refers, as explains Mill, to “most of the general propositions which political economy has occasion to assert respecting productive labour”, this labour and outlay don’t enter into the category of productive labour (Ibid.: 41). But in considering the level of society rather than individuals’ one, they “must be regarded as part of the advance by which society effects its productive operations, and for which it is indemnified by the produce” (Ibid.: 41). The same kind of reasoning could have been applied to the labour and expense devoted to children. By denying this possibility, Mill assimilates women’s reproductive work to familial – unproductive – labour rather than to a productive activity.

Mill’s ambivalence is confirmed by another element. According to him, the work of savants and philosophers, despite his importance, “even in a purely productive and material
point of view”, is traditionally devaluated by political economy (Mill, 1848: 43). Savants and speculative thinkers are indeed generally classed as simple producers of books or other saleable articles (Ibid.: 43). By contrast, Mill considers that, in a national or universal point of view, their labour forms “a part of production” (Ibid.: 42). Indeed, many industrial inventions are “the direct consequences of theoretic discoveries” (Ibid.: 42). Admittedly, material fruits don’t constitute the direct object of the labour of the savants. Moreover, their remuneration is rarely derived from the increased production which may be induced by their discoveries. However, when the national and universal results are considered rather than the individual acts and motives who induce them, the intellectual speculation can be seen as “a most influential part of the productive labour of the society”, and “the portion of [society’s] resources employed in carrying on and in remunerating such labour” can be considered as “a highly productive part of its expenditure” (Ibid.: 43). Thus, Mill argues that, by adopting a larger definition of the productive labour, the labour of the savants can be classified as such. At no moment he makes the same statement as regards women’s reproductive work.

2.3.2. Jevons: The case of working-class households

As we have seen, Jevons’ analysis of the investment of capital in education, developed in his fragment on capital, is largely restricted to professional classes. Several points of contrast appear between this analysis and Jevons’ description of parental behaviours in working-class households, those ones reflecting his inclination towards a class analysis of individual behaviours (White, 1994c; Bowman, 1997: 473). As regards working-class households, Jevons condemns the bad behaviours adopted by the parents towards their children and advocates several measures aiming at generate more appropriate behaviours.

Although, in his fragment on capital, Jevons presents children as unable of earning anything, he suggests, in the second edition of The Coal Question (1866), that many working-class families see children as sources of income – or income-earning assets – and are reluctant to provide for their education, this implying to be deprived of the gains issued from their paid
work. According to Jevons, indeed, working-class households can profit by having and bringing up children who, put to work before being able to act according their own will, add their meagre wages to the familial income (Bowman, 1997: 473, footer 11):

“At present it may almost be said to be profitable to breed little slaves and put them to labour early, so as to get earnings out of them before they have a will of their own.” (Jevons, 1866: xlviii)

In other words, parents’ decisions of having and rearing children are affected by the desire – or the necessity – to increase the familial income (Jevons, 1868: 109). The remedy to such a state of things consists in larger restrictions of children’s work and in the establishment of a general system of education (Jevons, 1866: xlviii; 1868: 109; Bowman, 1997: 465):

“So from time to time, as it was made plain that children were being worked to death in factories – reduced to crippled, stunted, deformed little creatures – a further inroad was made upon the parent’s right. The presumption of good was altogether rebutted by the certainty of evil, and the State undertook, through the Factory Acts, to secure a better state of things. Quite recently the same conflict between presumed good and certain evil arose in the controversy regarding elementary education. The parent in theory was the best educational guardian of the child; but, if the result was no education at all, there was no ground for the theory. In this case, again, the State dispersed metaphysics by stepping in and ordering the child to be educated.” (Jevons, 1882b: 11)

Jevons thus considers that parents of the working class are too ignorant to take correct decisions regarding their children. Therefore, they must be compelled, through the intervention of the State, to respect their parental obligations, this concerning particularly women.

In his fragment on capital, Jevons affirms that the pleasure arising from the family circle forms the compensation of the expenditure on children (Jevons, 1957: 301). By contrast, he explains that, in working classes, the factory work of mothers of young children leads to the destruction of the familial life and, with it, of the pleasures that it is supposed to involve (Jevons, 1882a: 176-7). It is then necessary, according to him, to prohibit this work so as to secure, within households, a happy and healthy familial life:

“Many a home would be a home which cannot now be called by that sweet name. The wife, no longer a mere slattern factory hand, would become a true mother and a housekeeper; and round many a Christmas table troops of happy, chubby children would replace the ‘wizened little monkeys’ of girls, and the “little old men” boys, who now form the miserable remnants of families.” (Jevons, 1882a: 178-9)

Such a point of view can be compared to Adam Smith’s one who presented working-class children as potential income-earning assets: “The labour of each child [in North America], before it can leave their house, is computed to be worth a hundred pounds clear gain to them [...] The value of children is the greatest of all encouragements to marriage” (Smith, 1776: 70-1, cited by Bowman, 1997: 464).
Wives must be true mothers, accomplishing their maternal duties by “instinctive affection” (Jevons, 1882a: 172, 177; 1882b: 6). Jevons thus presents love as the sole motive inducing the labour and expense devoted to children. By contrast, he never presents love of children as a motive leading women to work in factories. He never raises the problem of too low incomes in working-class families and of the difficulty to provide for the needs of children. For him, the reduction of income generated by the prohibition of mothers’ work has not to be considered as a harmful consequence (Jevons, 1882b: 71). On the contrary, he considers that lower earnings correspond to “healthy children” (Black, 1973-81, V: 166; White, 1994c: 439).

In reality, it is not, for Jevons, a question of resources but rather of the manner in which they are used. In working-class households, the father, supposed to fulfill the role of main breadwinner, must learn to moderate his own desires in order to direct household’s resources towards the entire satisfaction of the needs of his wife and his children. He must become able to use appropriately household’s resources for his own good as well as the one of the others (Jevons, 1871: 93). The amelioration of individual behaviours through legal control and compulsory education will allow the improvement of the manner in which the familial income is spent. In the same time, a readjustment of the expenditure on children would probably occur.

Thus, Mill’s and Jevons’ analyses of expenses (of time or money) devoted to children in families have distinct limits. Mill introduces the notion of indirectly productive labour, what allows him to widen the range of productive activities. However, this doesn’t lead him to propose to classify women’s reproductive work as a productive labour. Jevons’ analysis focuses on professional classes. It gives an insight of the familial model towards which working-class households should tend. However, Jevons omits to consider particular problems, as financial constraints, that these households face and which can explain in part their behaviours.

That being said, there is, in Mill, another reason than merely preconceived ideas of the role and place of women in family which may explain his reluctance to class women’s reproductive work as a productive labour. Indeed, Mill associates this work to the problem of family size. These considerations don’t exist in Jevons, which insists more on the problems of bad consumption choices and saving habits than on family size’s one.
2.4. Family limitation (Mill) versus improvement of family environments (Jevons)

2.4.1. Mill: Women’s reproductive work and population growth

Mill’s reluctance to consider women’s reproductive work as a productive labour doesn’t imply necessarily that he considers it as an activity so “natural” for women that it only requires few efforts from them. Such an interpretation could be consistent with the ideas expounded in his Essay on Marriage but would contrast with the representation of the household labour that given in The Subjection of Women. Actually, other considerations may explain Mill’s attitude.

Women’s reproductive work, which consists in bearing and rearing children, has two kinds of implications. As one has just seen, it has a positive dimension in the sense that by upbringing and educating children, women contribute to the formation of human capital and play thus a role in the national supply of efficient labour. However, Mill defines also negative aspects of this work which are linked to the problem of family size. On the one hand, he affirms that population growth must absolutely be restrained through family limitation, both in the progressive state and in the stationary state of society (Mill, 1848: 337-54, 753; Pujol, 1992: 33). On the other hand, he denounces female slavery resulting from an excessive number of children and women’s confinement to reproduction.

The necessity of limiting population growth through prudential restraint

According to Mill, the limitation of population growth is essential to prevent the increase of the number of workers from absorbing the increase of capital and causing the deterioration of the condition of inferior classes (Mill, 1848: 753). Indeed, Mill adopts the wages-fund theory. For him, wages depend on the supply and demand of work, that is to say on the – employed – population and the capital – constituted by the fund devoted to the purchase of work (Ibid.: 337-8). Thus, as Mill explains in Malthusian terms, low wages are due to a working population too large compared to the available wages-fund. The general wage rate can only raises, under the rule of competition, through either an increase of the fund employed to hire workers or a decrease of the number of competitors (Ibid.: 338). Thus, the control of births allows to limit the number of future competitors exerting downward pressure on wages:
“And in a country either over-peopled, or threatened with being so, to produce children, beyond a very small number, with the effect of reducing the reward of labour by their competition, is a serious offence against all who live by the remuneration of their labour.” (Mill, 1859: 132; see also Mill, 1848: 394)

Moreover, Mill considers that prudential restraint is also desirable in the stationary state, namely the ultimate state towards which the society tends in the long run through its industrial progress (Mill, 1848: 752-8). When the economic progress will cease – in other words, when the level of capital will become constant –, the population shall remain stable. This will indeed allow to individuals to maintain their condition as well as a better distribution (Ibid.: 753, 758). However, the limitation of population growth is not solely necessary for material considerations. It promotes also the moral, intellectual and social development of human beings. In this sense, prudential restraint allows the existence of a better and happier rather than larger population (Ibid.: 756). It is therefore necessary, for the good of the posterity, that human beings limit the growth of their numbers before necessity obliges them to do.

A factor of family limitation: Freeing women from the exclusive function of reproduction

Mill endeavours to define the best way to institute prudential restraint in society. He considers that it is possible to lead the members of the working class to have a sufficient degree of caution regarding the increase of their families (Mill, 1848: 367). The first means to achieve such a state of things is to ensure that the opinion according to which the limitation of population growth is desirable spreads among the individuals of the working class. For Mill, education is “the first thing needful” to change habits (Ibid.: 374). However, the effects caused by the improvement of individuals’ education and the adoption of “provident habits of conduct” would be very accelerated by women’s social independence (Ibid.: 765). Indeed, the opening of industrial employments to women, by inducing a decrease of the fertility rate, would greatly contribute to the elimination of the problem of over-population:

“This most desirable result would be much accelerated by another change, which lies in the direct line of the best tendencies of the time; the opening of industrial occupations freely to both sexes […] On the present occasion I shall only indicate, among the probable consequences of the industrial and social independence of women, a great diminution of the evil of over-population. It is by devoting one-half of the human species to that exclusive function, by making it fill the entire life of one sex, and interweave itself with almost all the objects of the other, that the animal instinct in question is nursed into the disproportionate preponderance which it has hitherto exercised in human life.” (Mill, 1848: 765. Italics added)
Additionally, Mill affirms that the opinion in question, as soon as it would attain the slightest bit prevalence, would find powerful auxiliaries among the most part of women. Indeed, if women were supported by the moral feelings of humanity, it is certain that they would ask to be relieved from the burden of the labour caused by an excessive number of children:

“It is seldom by the choice of the wife that families are too numerous; on her devolves (along with all the physical suffering and at least a full share of the privations) the whole of the intolerable domestic drudgery resulting from the excess. To be relieved from it would be hailed as a blessing by multitudes of women who now never venture to urge such a claim, but who would urge it, if supported by the moral feelings of the community. Among the barbarisms which law and morals have not yet ceased to sanction, the most disgusting surely is, that any human being should be permitted to consider himself as having a right to the person of another.” (Mill, 1848: 372)

In other words, prudential restraint would more rapidly occur if wives beneficiate of an equal weight – this supposing that they can have access to all other occupations than those of reproduction and maternity – in the household’s decision related to the number of children to have and to educate (Mill, 1848: 372-3). Mill thus links the question of family size to that of the status of women in family and in society. He considers that family limitation is necessary, above all, in a moral point of view.

**Population restraint and improvement of the condition of women**

As Mill explains in a letter to the professor Green, dated April 8, 1852, the importance of the question of population, according to him, is not situated in a central way in its connections with the problem of material comfort:

“[...] the wife is in every sense the victim of the man’s animal instinct and not the less so because she is brought up to think that she has no right of refusal or even of complaint.” (Mill, 1852, _Later Letters_, XIV: 89)

In the same way, in a commentary about what is called at his time “hard-hearted Malthusianism”, Mill affirms that it is very much crueler to left individuals giving birth to children destined to misery or to ignore the fact that women are the victims of the abuse of the power of men who obey to their animal instinct:

“[...] there is a tacit agreement to ignore totally the law of wages, or to dismiss it in a parenthesis, with such terms as “hard-hearted Malthusianism”; as if it were not a thousand times more hard-hearted to tell human beings that they may, than that they may not, call into existence swarms of creatures who are sure to be miserable, and most likely to be depraved; and forgetting that the conduct, which it is reckoned so cruel to disapprove, is a degrading slavery to a brute instinct in one of the persons concerned, and most commonly, in the other, helpless submission to a revolting abuse of power.” (Mill, 1848: 352)
Thus, prudential restraint allows a progress much more important than the increase or maintain of material comfort: the moral and intellectual elevation of men and women making up the society. Even if appropriate standards of life can be maintained without a limitation of the number of children in families, this limitation is made necessary by moral considerations (Harris, 1956: 162). Mill is opposed to the idea that “no one ought to be blamed for having an inordinately large family if he produces, and brings them up to produce, enough for their support” (Mill, April 8, 1852, *Later Letters*, XIV: 88). According to him, this represents only “a small part of the question” (*Ibid.*: 88). Indeed, “a much more important consideration still, is the perpetuation of the previous degradation & slavery of women” (*Ibid.*: 88). No change in the condition of women can occur “while their whole lives are devoted to the function of producing & rearing children” (*Ibid.*: 88). As Mill affirms, “degradation & slavery is in itself so enormous an evil, and contributes so much to the perpetuation of all other evils by keeping down the moral & intellectual condition of both men and women that the limitation of the number of children would be in my opinion absolutely necessary to place human life on its proper footing, even if there were subsistence for any number that could be produced” (*Ibid.*: 88-9).

Unlike Mill, Jevons doesn’t consider the question of women’s reproductive labour in connection with the problem of the number of children per woman. He doesn’t envisage the possibility that women’s condition at home can be assimilated to slavery and mentions rather the idea of “slavery” in the sense that women’s employment in factories obliges them to perform domestic work in addition to a full day’s work (Jevons, 1882b: 73-4). Moreover, if he is

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16 The same condemnation of female sexual slavery and of the burden that constitutes for women an excessive number of children appears in Mill’s description of the “State of Society in America” in 1836: “Another circumstance in American society has been noticed by almost all travellers [...] the uninfluential position of married women, their seclusion from society, and the housemaid-like drudgery which appears to fill up their lives. There have not been wanting persons who have seen, even in this, one of the “degrading influences of democracy”. It is, however, an obvious consequence of that state of the labour-market, which renders early marriages and numerous families universal. Such a state of society naturally produces what, by rather a pedantic use of the term, is called regularity of morals; but when the boundlessness of the field of employment, compared with the numbers to be employed, renders a large family a fortune instead of a burden, women are likely, in their present relation to men (and while in such matters they have as little of a will of their own as everywhere, except in France, they seem to have), to be little else than machines for bringing forth and nursing multitudes of children. And it is evident, that where such is their destiny as wives, and where they become wives almost before they are women, they are likely to be sufficiently inferior in mental endowments, fully to justify, in the eyes of men, the inferiority of their social position.” (Mill, 1836: 104)
also concerned by the problem of pauperism, he puts emphasis, rather than on family limitation, on the necessity to improve family environments (White, 1994a: 101; Peart, 1990: 47; 1996: 34; Bowman, 1996: 469, 471).

2.4.2. Jevons: Family circle and consumption/saving patterns

In Jevons, the subject of women’s reproductive work doesn’t relate to the problem of over-population but is rather connected with the one of high infant mortality in working classes. It is indeed in part the necessity to allow a reproduction of the working population which justifies Jevons’ position in favour of a law prohibiting the factory work of mothers of young children. In this approach, women appear only as reproducers supposed to accomplish instinctively their maternal duties (Jevons, 1882a: 172, 177).

*Over-population versus excessive infant mortality*

Jevons considers the phenomenon of over-population as the result of the ignorance of the members of the lower classes (Jevons, 1865: 231-2; Peart, 1990: 48; 1996: 34-5):

“Surely there is always over-population when people are improvident, and unable, or careless, to provide for the inevitable vicissitudes of the seasons.” (Jevons, December 5, 1872, 1886: 271)

On this point, he adopts a position close to that of Mill (Peart, 1990: 47; 1996: 26). However, he never links over-population with the status attributed to women in society and in family. Two reasons may explain that. On the one hand, in Jevons, the prudential behaviour doesn’t include birth control as a means to induce a decrease of the birth rate: any decrease of this rate occurs through a raise of the marriage age (Peart, 1990: 49; 1996: 35). On the other hand, family limitation doesn’t appear as the primary requisite in the fight against the persistence of pauperism. Jevons shows actually a limited concern about over-population (Bowman, 1997: 469, 474: footer 17; White, 1994a: 98, 99-100). Indeed, in his works, the limitation of growth population doesn’t appear as a central object.

Firstly, Jevons rejects the wages-fund theory which establishes a negative link between working population and wages (Jevons, 1871: 255; 1882b: 95-6). He develops a theory of wages in which the wage got by each worker corresponds to the part of the product which comes
down to him or her according to his or her personal contribution to the final product (Jevons, 1871: 271; Jevons, 1882b: 92-4).

Secondly, he shows himself less alarmist than Malthus in his predictions about population: since England becomes simultaneously richer and more populated, it seems that it escapes to Malthus’ predictions of a pauperisation engendered by a growth of the population more rapid than the growth of the means of subsistence issued from agriculture (Malthus, 1798: 5; Jevons, 1865: 199-200, 221-2). However, if Malthus’ predictions will be avoided for a time, Jevons considers that the industrial progress cannot continue indefinitely in the same manner (Jevons, 1865: 275; Bowman, 1989: 1132). Indeed, the geometrical growth of the population and industry result in a geometrical growth of the coal consumption (Jevons, 1865: 196, 245, 261; Peart, 1996: 23); the increase of coal consumption then leads gradually to the exhaustion of the coal mines and, because of diminishing returns, causes an increase of the coal price detrimental to the “commercial and manufacturing supremacy” of England (Jevons, 1865: 274). Therefore, Jevons explains that “the rapid growth of our great towns, gratifying as it is in the present, is a matter of very serious concern as regards the future” (Ibid.: 232). The population shall cease to multiply (Jevons, 1865: 192-3, 232, 261; 1882b: 9).

Lastly, Jevons’ concern about the excessive infant mortality in working-class areas rules out considerations in terms of family limitation. In 1865, in *The Coal Question*, Jevons explains that the raise of early marriages in prosperous times causes an increase of population (Jevons, 1865: 231-2). Later, in 1882, he affirms that the fact that women can earn wages in mills forms an incentive to “improvident and wrongful” marriages – some men seducing young girls in order to live, once married, on the wages of their wife (Jevons, 1882a: 172). He then presents these marriages as one of the causes of the high infant mortality. Nevertheless, Jevons never raises the question of which one of the two effects dominates in terms of population variation: the increase of population caused by the raise of early marriages or the decrease of population induced by high rates of infant mortality (Peart, 1990: 39-40; 1996: 27).

**Prudential restraint versus improvement of consumption patterns and saving habits**

In a consistent way with the previous elements, Jevons doesn’t explain the most part of pauperism and poverty in terms of over-population. He puts rather emphasis on the poor
consumption patterns of the individuals, owed to their intemperance, ignorance and immorality (White, 1994a: 98-100; Bowman, 1996: 469). The objective is not a prudential check-to-population but better consumption and saving patterns. Jevons considers that members of the working class must save enough in order to be able to face up to economic changes involved by business cycles or, in the long run, by the stationary, even retrograde, condition of society (Jevons, 1865: 201, 216; 1866: xxx-xxxi; Bowman, 1989: 1132-3; 1997: 469, 471; White, 1994a: 101). It is this argument which appears as central in his different works.

In September, 1870, Jevons delivers, as president of the section F – *Economic Science and Statistics* – of *The British Association for the Advancement of Science*, a speech in which he expounds his opinions on the causes of poverty and pauperism (Jevons, 1870b: 196-7). He then explains that the successes attained in scientific arts and manufactures doesn’t give the advantages that they allow to presage because of the incapacity of a large part of the population to appreciate and accumulate the wealth brought by science. This state of things will continue as long as individuals will remain too ignorant and intemperate to use properly the wealth that they have at their disposal (*Ibid.*: 196). As Jevons explains, just a slight fall of trade lead members of the working class below the lower level of poverty:

“...the growth of the arts and manufactures, and the establishment of free trade have opened the widest means of employment and brought an accession of wealth previously unknown [...] Nevertheless within the last few years we have seen pauperism almost as prevalent as ever, and the slightest relapse of trade throws whole towns and classes of people into a state of destitution little short of famine.” (Jevons, 1870b: 196)

Because of members of the working class spend unwisely the whole of their income, when trade falls again in a phase of depression, they end up in an even greater misery than before:

“...There are comparatively few signs that the wages of the working-classes, even when sufficient, are saved and applied really to advance the condition of the recipients. All is expended in a higher scale of living, so that little permanent benefit results; and when bad trade comes again, there is as much distress as ever.” (Jevons, 1870b: 205)

More precisely, they show themselves unable to face up economic changes linked to the “credit cycles” (Jevons, 1878: 110, 115-23; Bowman, 1997: 469)\(^\text{17}\). In a long-run perspective,
Jevons considers that individuals must be able to cope with the austerity following the crisis of economic growth (Bowman, 1989: 1132-3).

The same kind of argument is developed in “Married Women in Factories”. For Jevons, as we have seen, members of the working class “know not how to spend well” (Jevons, 1882b: 71). He presents this fact as an argument against the factory work of married women which allows that households enjoy a higher familial income (Ibid.: 71). Household’s resources are indeed wasted in the purchase of luxury goods such as alcohol and tobacco. Nothing is retained in order to provide for the vicissitudes of life. Jevons makes in particular reference to the case of artisans who, although they earn a wage enough high to save one part of it, spend thoughtlessly the familial income and, as a result, don’t save enough to be able to preserve the material well-being of the family in front of adversity (Jevons, 1869: 186; 1870a: 146-7; 1878: 84-5).

The necessity of improving family environments

Jevons thus advocates the establishment of a set of measures allowing to overcome the persistence of pauperism through the adoption, by individuals, of temperate and provident habits, which will led them to modify their consumption and saving patterns. For him, it is only the raise of the character of the members of the working class which would allow a permanent amelioration of their condition. In The Coal Question, He puts in particular emphasis on the importance to establish a general system of education (Jevons, 1866: xlviij). Later, he insists also on the necessity of larger restrictions of female employment (Jevons, 1882a; 1882b: 68-75). Such restrictions are indeed necessary to the preservation of the familial environment and its influences on the character, moral – and not economic – considerations thus justifying women’s return at home.

3. Conclusion

Mill and Jevons treat quite distinctly the question of women’s household activity. Mill points out several dimensions of this activity. It comprises both the superintendence of the
household, which includes in particular the management of the domestic expenditure, and the education of children. He thus shows himself aware of the time and efforts that this work involves and presents it as a real occupation. Yet, he never envisages the possibility to economically quantify the household activity, even less of a remuneration for housekeepers. This may in part be explained by the persistence of the views that he expressed in his *Essay on Marriage*. Mill will always remain ambiguous on the subject of the education of children by women. It is likely that, in his mind, it still consists mainly in the education of the moral being.

Jevons, as for him, insists essentially on the natural duty of women to provide a comfortable household for their husband and children. At no moment it is question in his analysis of a role of women in the management of the spending, this task being incumbent upon the male head of family. Moreover, Jevons doesn’t treat explicitly the question of the education of children by women. He simply affirms that the prohibition of the employment of mothers of young children in factories will allow to restore the moral influences of the home. If he considers that women’s return at home will affect positively the future supply of efficient labour force, he merely presents it as a maternal obligation indispensable to the familial well-being.

Despite the divergences existing in Mill’s and Jevons’ respective conception of women’s household activity, none of them – this being more disconcerting as regards Mill – propose an economic measure of this activity. This can be explained by their treatment of women’s reproductive work.

Actually, the absence of a proposition of Mill of an economic measure of the household activity largely stems from his reluctance to treat women’s reproductive work, which constitutes the most essential part of their household activity, as a productive labour. He explains that the expense and labour of raising children are not undergone for the sake of the increased future produce of their labour but are usually incurred from other motives.

Jevons, contrary to Mill, doesn’t raise directly the question of whether the labour devoted to children may be treated as a productive investment. In his fragment on capital, he talks about the amount of capital, not the amount of labour, expended in the education of children. He explains that this expenditure, which doesn’t lead to an investment return, cannot be considered as an investment of capital and constitutes rather a form of consumption. To justify
his position, Jevons invokes an argument similar to that of Mill. He affirms that parents don’t bring up children only to secure them a good situation in their future working life. The expenditure on children is largely motivated by the pleasure arising from the family circle.

Both Mill’s and Jevons’ analyses present limits. Mill’s considerations about the labour of the physicians and the savants contrast with the manner in which he treats women’s reproductive work. Indeed, although the labour of the physicians or of the savants is not incurred from economical motives, it can, according to Mill, be considered as productive because it is conducive to production.

As for Jevons, his approach of the capital expended in the education is limited to the case of professional classes. Several divergences then appear between this approach and his depiction of parent-child relations in working classes. In particular, parents of working classes put their children early to work in order to increase the familial income. Such a state of things is far from the idyllic familial life which could, according to Jevons, take place in every home. Nevertheless, Jevons advocates the establishment of measures aiming at compelling parents, in particular mothers, to take on their parental obligations. In this manner, working-class households would move towards an ideal familial model, in which the “rights of children” would be respected and affection would form the sole motive governing behaviours.

Lastly, we have shown that a more detailed analysis of Mill’s and Jevons’ treatment of women’s reproductive work, in link with their analysis of pauperism, specifies their opposition. Mill’s reluctance to classify women’s reproductive work as a productive labour can be explained by other elements than his limited feminism. Mill considers women’s reproductive work under two distinct angles: he points out a positive aspect of this work in the sense that women, through the upbringing of their children, contribute to the construction of the quality of the future labour force. But he also defines, in quantitative terms, a negative aspect of this work. Indeed, Mill is in favour of the limitation of the growth of the population and considers for this reason that the number of children by family must be limited. This decrease would not only allow the release of women from an excessive drudgery and sexual slavery but also the decrease of the number of workers on the labour market, both necessary in the progressive state and the stationary state of society.
As regards Jevons, the purpose is not family limitation through prudential restraint but better consumption behaviours through the improvement of family environments. The effect of the increase of early marriages in period of prosperity on population is counterbalanced by the negative effect of the excessive infantile mortality in working-class. Moreover, Jevons shows himself less pessimist than Malthus in his predictions related to the consequences of a too rapid growth of the population. These elements can explain that he doesn’t address the subject of the function of reproduction of women in relation to the phenomenon of over-population. He is more concerned by the necessities to reduce the rates of infant mortality and to improve saving behaviours through the raising of the character of the individuals. On this second point, he indeed considers that the most part of pauperism is due to inappropriate consumption behaviours. Among the remedies that he advocates, the improvement of family environments is important because of his effects on the character of the individuals. Jevons thus puts above all emphasis on the moral benefits of the presence of women within the household. They have their role to play in the fight against pauperism and, by the same way, to the preparation of the individuals to the future stationary condition of society.

References:


