

The Power of Three Guineas and the Feasibility of Women Leaning In

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Abstract

It seems preposterous that all the socio-political problems which Virginia Woolf brought into attention almost a century ago continue to be. Her Three Guineas along with her Essay-Novel, The Waves, together form a powerful attest against a general fascist tendency of her contemporary British society to completely overlook female subjectivity as well as sexuality. Votes and the civic and political rights to join campaign are never as important as five hundred pounds a year with some spare guineas to give. By procuring independent wealth, power of speech is obtained and rightful claims follow. But, is gender issue, especially that of social equality, largely an economic issue? While Woolf wonders around 1930s why women remain poor decades after university education and numerous professional opportunities are granted to them, Sheryl Sandberg, a successful American business woman, published a book, Lean In, in 2013 and raises once again the dilemmas of female professionals and the general gender injustice of any professional workplace. By cross-examining these two powerful, nonetheless controversial, arguments of Woolf and Sandberg, the present study seeks through them possible implementations of gender justice that can be achieved in current society.

Keywords: Wealth, *Three Guineas*, *Lean In*, Femininity, *The Second Sex*, gender justice

In 1931, in a speech to the London and National Society for Women's Service, Virginia Woolf drew attention to an unrecognized villain, the "Angel in the House," who had for so long haunted the Victorian household. This character wrung out whatever personality, subjectivity, and intellectual capacity there was within a woman in order for her to fit into the male ideal of what a woman should be: "She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. [...] She was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure" (PW 237).¹

Not surprisingly, this "praiseworthy" villain is none other than woman herself. What men have invented, women have endorsed and enshrined. In fact, the villain has so completely transformed women that, perhaps as a result of Stockholm syndrome, they take the fictitious image of the Angel in the House as the ultimate definition of femininity and the true nature of womanhood, leading Woolf to reiterate in *Three Guineas* (1938) that women must first kill "the woman" in themselves (262). As this paper attempts to argue, almost a century after Woolf raises the issue, we still very much remain, as Michel Foucault has observed, delicate and sentimental Victorians, with all our gender prejudices hidden within high-minded mannerisms and a scientifically supported ethos. In spite of the promise of gender equality via burgeoning social movements and influential feminist theory, women, feminist or not, are still largely trapped between a sense of all-sacrificing self-denial (in the resonant words of Alice Walker, they have become "more even than mere women," they have become "saints") and an excruciating sense of guilt over their need for independence from expectation (401). The fact that women are still struck by this internal strife gravely undercuts the feasibility of Sheryl Sandberg's advocacy for women to *Lean In* and invigorates a will to lead.

¹ Text transcribed from an untitled typescript by Virginia Woolf which is latterly presented in a reduced version and published as "Professions for Women."

As a woman who has taken writing as her profession and who therefore must account for herself, Woolf confesses that committing the violence of killing this Angel in the House is a necessary evil, an imperative duty to her true self and to the true nature of woman.

Only by exorcising this phantom could we possibly aspire to a more genuine understanding of women as they truly are. Wedged within the conventional Western tradition of political philosophy, Woolf has recourse to nature as the most important referent of socio-political justice. As a true disciple of Plato, one must always first enquire into the essential property or feature that defines something *per se* and just as Woolf has questioned, one must ask, if we do not understand the true nature of women, how are we to argue for gender justice and, as she put it in *The Years*, “to make laws that fit” (Y 205)? Ironically, Woolf herself also dodges the question of the true nature of woman, as exemplified by *A Room of One’s Own*, for to distil the essence of “womanhood” from the vast interfusion of linguistic, cultural, and political consciousness is to do so at one’s peril. To cast away this social structure and intersubjective narrative would, *ipso facto*, amount to a full dissolution of social recognition and a complete loss of a socio-politically sustainable identity. Thereby, in *A Room of One’s Own*, with women and fiction as her subjects, Woolf exposes the fictionality of any traditional conceptualization of “woman” and “femininity,” while carefully providing us with a security net in the form of a presumably fictive narrative, alerting her readers to the very process of a general fiction of women.

Against the Western metaphysical and philosophical tradition, Toril Moi provides us with a well-supported argument that unreels the mistaken belief that “any use of the word ‘woman’ (and any answer to the question ‘What is a woman?’) must entail a philosophical commitment to metaphysics and essentialism” (7). Moi appeals to Simone de Beauvoir’s theories on the oppression of human beings who happen to be born in a female form and “invites us to study the varieties of women’s lived experience,” which resonates closely with Woolf’s entreaties in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* (82). Most ingeniously and akin to Beauvoir’s later petition, Woolf, while postulating the present false account of women, never attempts to provide her own generalized and presumptive universal statement about women; any norm that demands conformity is oppressive, as Terry Eagleton also avers when commenting on the postmodern and post-structural trend.² On denouncing patriarchal bigots and fascist dictators, Woolf forewarns women not to support those patriarchal despots from whom “the practical obliteration of [our] freedom by Fascists or Nazis’ will spring” and not to collaborate in “stereotyp[ing] the old tune which human nature, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is now grinding out with such disastrous unanimity” (TG 176). And just as what Eagleton has claimed libertarians like Oscar Wilde to be, Woolf likewise “dream[s] of a future society in which everyone will be free to be their incomparable selves” (Eagleton, *After* 14). So, Woolf resorts to the British empiricist method and invites women to follow her example: assuming an “I” and accounting for oneself.

As Woolf has claimed in *A Room of One’s Own*, it is not until the bookshelves are full with writings by women in all possible categories – novels, autobiographies, travel journals, scientific reports, etc. – that one could begin to deduce an initial understanding of women. Only when women stop being perceived in relation to men and recognized in relation to the reality they observe, respond to and are immersed in, can women be a true socio-political subject. Though she posits a neo-platonic inquiry into the essence of what it means to be a woman and the possibility of a justice that registers with such a nature, Woolf (with almost Socratic irony) leaves the question open and therefore extricates herself from poststructuralist critiques which reject sex as in essence “immobile, stable, coherent, fixed, prediscursive, natural, and ahistorical” (Moi 4). Woolf withholds any oppressive generalization that in one way or another would preclude singularity. And with this idea of androgyny, Woolf pre-empted the poststructuralist contention of gender dynamics.

Moi mercilessly attacks those feminists who, in their complex academic discourse, have forgotten that the abstract language of knowledge and the impersonal narrative voice they now adopt represent the very patriarchal conventions and worldviews that they are trying to refute. In other words, while some feminists try to rescue the true nature of womanhood from the injustice of patriarchal discourse, in trumpeting their own version of womanhood they are simply placing another straitjacket on women.

² In *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton writes: “For some postmodern thought, consensus is tyrannical and solidarity nothing but soulless uniformity...What is under assault here is the normative. Majority social life on this view is a matter of norms and conventions, and therefore inherently oppressive ... Norms are oppressive because they mould uniquely different individuals to the same shape” (13-14).

There are even feminists who conform to patriarchal bias and language: instead of rescuing women from the despotic demand of the Angel in the House, they every so often perpetuate the image with their very defense of a certain conceptual femininity and motherhood. Just as Beauvoir cautions, “we should consider the arguments of the feminists with no less suspicion, however, for very often their controversial aim deprives them of all real value” (xxxii).

Furthermore, beneath the profusion of current feminist discourse that attempts to define women in one way or another, one almost forgets that in *Three Guineas* Woolf accuses those who believe that they have a right “to dictate to other human beings how they shall live” are fascists, regardless of sex or race, and before one fights them abroad, one perhaps needs to destroy them at home (*TG* 175). As women begin to gain considerable opportunities in education and work, admonitions of their dereliction and propaganda concerning their “rightful place” continue to permeate the media. A prominent example would be Charlene’s 1982 hit song “I’ve Never Been to Me.” This song, which trumpets the idea of a home with a husband and children as the ultimate feminine aspiration, topped the charts in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. These sirens interpenetrate every corner of our society and rub out any dream of women that look beyond bearing children and managing a household. “Independent opinion based upon independent income” is Woolf’s weapon against the patriarchal, fascist tyranny that limits women to the domestic quarter. Yet, killing a phantom is perhaps a quixotic task, not to mention a phantom that culture has long revered as the true and divine nature of woman. Any repudiation of such a phantom amounts to a negation of one’s socio-cultural femininity and results in a thorough social negation (i.e., becoming an outcast).

One only has to recall the thriving asylums in England around 1800, as noted by Elaine Showalter: “The mid-nineteenth century is the period when the predominance of women among the institutionalized insane first becomes a statistically verifiable phenomenon” (52). Girls who rejected their roles as daughter, wife, mother, nurturer and caretaker were deemed as abnormal by nature, by law and by religion within the patriarchal paradigm. But the very social expectation of women to be caring and sympathetic also casts them as mentally inferior and prone to emotional perturbation and mental delusion. Excessive emotional displays were often taken by Victorian psychiatrists to be the very proof of female mental weakness, and yet a logically cold and practically unfeeling woman was a socially unacceptable monstrosity. How would one not go mad in such a paradox: to feel what one does not feel and to repress what one actually is, to be fully compassionate to the extent of self-erasure? How could one ever be compassionate without first a self with which to feel?

For Woolf, nothing drives one to the verge of mental breakdown more assuredly than the constant denial and self-reprimand of who one truly is, a perpetual inner struggle to suppress any temperament which is socially-tagged as “unwomanly”. As Woolf speculates through her story of the imaginary sister of Shakespeare, “What is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare’s sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at” (*AROO* 45). Despite the dim prospects, Woolf remains optimistic and encouraging throughout her writings. Observing the socio-political progress of women as they gain further rights to education, personal property and political participation, Woolf avouches that in years to come, the Angel in the House will no longer constrain women within the household to echo the voices of their men or cook “the dinner which they may not share” (*TG* 166). Aspiration such as the following statement has come to be a leitmotif in Woolf’s *oeuvre*: “In a hundred years [...] women will have ceased to be the protected sex. Logically they will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them. Anything may happen when womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation” (*AROO* 36). Only then, when woman is granted unrestrained possibilities, when finally she can pen her own life experience without fear, are we provided with a more solid substance to measure her capacity. And only then can she be considered as a true citizen with equal civil rights to be an independent subject, responsible for her own self-development, not a subordinated second sex, pre-determined by the patriarchal authority.

Women, as Julia Kristeva would have agreed, have long been strangers to themselves. They are constantly confronted with an authoritative system which delegates and valorizes justice, which insists on the image of the Angel in the House as the true nature of women. Rendering women as fragile and dependent bolsters male superiority and fuels Victorian sentimentalism, which, in the words of Eagleton, “is really a sympathy with one’s own act of sympathizing, a self-devouring affair in which the world is reduced to so much raw material for one’s lust for sensation, or to so many occasions for exhibiting one’s moral munificence” (*Trouble* 28).

Sentimentalism, which is key to the Victorian social ethic, as Eagleton has argued through the Lacanian *Imaginary*, is more a narcissistic obsession with the self, in this case the male superior self, than true sympathy with another. Investing moral judgment in sentiment helps to evade rational inquiry into the problem of true gender justice and diverts moral responsibility by attributing the injustice to a nameless Big Other; ergo, in the words of Beauvoir, “the most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman’s concrete situation” (xxxii).

Instead, the very gender inequality underwrites the practice of sentimentalism which in return solidifies the gender inequality and effectuates it as a universal law. According to Judith Butler, the authoritative system “violently” implants “the universal,” which “fails to agree with or include the individual and the claim of universality itself ignores the ‘rights’ of the individual,” therefore creating a discrepancy between the two (*Account* 5). It is an injustice inflicted in the name of justice, and such is the disparateness that drives any talented woman to insanity. However, as Butler begins her account with Theodor Adorno, it is the very awareness of this discrepancy that elicits an awakening of the subjective consciousness that in turn questions the social presuppositions, its pride and prejudice (3-9). Assimilating the impetus towards a reflective “I,” Woolf (pre-empting Butler’s argumentation in *An Account of Oneself*) fashions a fictive but highly reflective narrative voice of the female “I” in both *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*. Not only does she assume the gesture as a fearful subject responding to the authoritative system (“I offer myself as an ‘I’ and try to reconstruct my deeds”), but also as a debunker of the falsehood of the existing judicial power (Butler 11). In *A Room of One’s Own*, the narrative poses as an ironic mirror image of the general fiction of womanhood, which has become by default a fact. The claim of the “I” – a convenient term to stand in for someone who has no real being – is an initiation of female subjectivity. By means of storytelling, Woolf exposes how the image of woman is fabricated by the patriarchal society and designated almost as universal. Indeed, as Beauvoir has enunciated, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (267).

The presumed truth piled up by the books of numerous scholars who make their way onto the shelves of British Library cannot be trusted, and the recorded facts of the historians might be misleading due to their partiality. The historical fact that there are no female poets or artists who could possibly be compared to Shakespeare does not necessarily prove what many men of significance would like it to: “The best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man. [...] A woman’s composing is like a dog’s walking on his hind legs” (*AROO* 49). Indeed, it is not possible, even for Woolf, to imagine a woman in the great Elizabethan age writing the plays of Shakespeare. This is not due to an inferiority of their mental capacity, but to a social injustice that treats women not as individual subjects but rather as possessions, as mindless auxiliaries, wombs that cannot subsist by themselves, and as non-subjects, without legal rights of their own or money to their names. Even when a few women have the courage to revolt against such abject treatment and attempt to grasp the forbidden pen, the overbearing cultural judgment of their cognitive abilities destroys their self-belief. Theirs is a reality that is incongruous with the general opinion of society, which since the Enlightenment has not only “religion, philosophy, and theology” behind it but science also.

The world is not as phallogocentric as Jacques Derrida believes; it is rather more money-logocentric. Men have for so long secured economic power that one may be forgiven for placing the origin of power in the phallus, but in fact the true buttress of any authoritative voice is material wealth. Numerous books filed in the British Library are revered as truth, but it is not because they are written by men but because they are the ones that were published. For in earlier days men alone could afford the luxury of education, of ink and paper, of a private personal space for writing. With all their material goods and property rights securely in hand, men easily filled the world with their opinions and their beliefs. Anything that countered them was nipped in the bud. Woolf demonstrates the power of money through *Three Guineas*, for now with money to give, one’s opinion simultaneously gains a weight that it has never had before. With money to spare, one no longer needs to lend support only to whatever one’s father or brother supports. “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things [...]. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time” (*AROO* 97). But money does not come easily, especially when “property is theft,” and those who at present enjoy the privilege also hold the power that upkeeps their privilege and prevents social mobility (Proudhon 13).³

³ Even thus, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is notorious for his male chauvinism.

Therefore, as Woolf observes: “It seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition. We can almost hear them if we listen singing the same old song, ‘Here we go round the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree’ and if we add, ‘of property, of property, of property,’ we shall fill in the rhyme without doing violence to the facts” (TG 249).

Thereby, Woolf argues literally and metaphorically for a room of one’s own, for an intellectual liberty that can only be supported by financial independence. Material wealth is prerequisite for an individual mind and money sustains the socio-political subject.

Woolf is very much aware of possible accusations regarding her overt concern for material wealth, but argues that one must be realistic: a good university education is built on a deep foundation of gold and silver, social truths and journalistic facts are determined by the board who holds the capital, and it is impossible for one to “think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well” (AROO 16). If not for the poverty of women, as she reflects in *A Room of One’s Own*, if Mary Seton’s mother had gone into business, “if she had left two or three hundred thousand pounds to Fernham, we could have been sitting at our ease to-night and the subject of our talk might have been archaeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography” (19). Intellectual achievement as well as the construction of truth is built on a rich material base. Therefore, as Woolf insists, a legacy of five hundred pounds a year “seemed infinitely the more important one” against the vote (34). A trip to the Oxbridge colleges stimulates one to think of “the prosperity and the security of one sex and the poverty and the insecurity of the other” and how that lack in material well-being may result in intellectual deprivation (AROO 21–2). Woolf never stops questioning why women remain poor. The lack of a tradition of their own, a literature that supports that tradition, the power to speak for themselves, all result from a single origin: they are being deprived of private property and thereby financial independence.

Almost a hundred years after Woolf’s challenge for women’s rights to be simply who they are, in 2013, the chief operating officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, published a book: *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, imploring women not to be held back by convention but to fight back the implanted cultural ideology that withholds women from being more involved in business and other professions. In the book, Sandberg indirectly testifies how women to a great extent have failed to live up to Woolf’s expectations: that, along with educational, professional and financial independence endowed by law, they would not have to be anything else but what they truly are; that they would enjoy a firm material ground on which to voice their true opinions without fear of reprisal; and above all, that they would be truly full, independent human beings. Instead, Sandberg evinces that with all the professions open to them, women still consider marriage as their primary occupation. With all the higher education they enjoy nowadays, they seem to become nothing more than “a slightly better educated housewife” as Ian McEwan has put (4).

Women are still generally advised to catch a good husband rather than to grab a good internship opportunity during their university years, while spinsterhood, unlike the stylishly presented bachelorhood, is still considered as failure in life. Consequently, women are always preparing themselves for marriage and for children when the prospect is not even within sight. Women literally withdraw from the competitive workforce before it is even necessary, as Sandberg puts it. By having marriage and children always in the back of their mind, women “stop reaching for new opportunities” (93). And when the expense of childcare exceeds the salary of a job which is “less fulfilling and less engaging,” it seems only right to quit and become a devoted wife and mother, overlooking the fact that from now on she will be financially dependent on her partner/husband (94). In truth, women continue to fall behind and on average earn less than men, while mothers “who take time out of the workforce pay a big career penalty”: “Women’s average annual earnings decrease by 20 percent if they are out of the workforce for just one year. Average annual earnings decline 30 percent after two to three years” (102).

Women today might be as well trained in almost all professions as men are, but they still tend to be excluded from the higher echelons in professions and workplaces. In contrast to the deficiency in higher education that Woolf’s female contemporaries received, Sandberg notes, “Girls are increasingly outperforming boys in the classroom, earning about 57 percent of the undergraduate and 60 percent of the master’s degrees in the United States. This gender gap in the academic achievement has even caused some to worry about the ‘end of men’” (15). And yet, “despite these gains, the percentage of women at the top of corporate America has barely budged over the past decade. A meager twenty-one of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women as Sandberg has noted.

Women hold about 14 percent of executive officer positions, 17 percent of board seats, and constitute 18 percent of our elected congressional officials” (5).

A similar phenomenon is also noted in academia: “A report published in 2008 by America’s National Science Foundation, for example, found that in most fields of science and engineering male full professors outnumbered female by nearly four to one. [...] Another report from 2006, by the American Association of University Professors, found the same ration in faculties of arts, humanities and social science, too” (the *Economist*, Aug 31, 2013). Furthermore, on September 5, 2013, the Taiwan Council of Labor Affairs published a news release demanding a celebration for the rise of female managers to 23.5 percent, which is outstanding in comparison with 11 percent in Japan or South Korea. While 23.5 percent hardly seems to indicate fairness in the workplace in Taiwan, the very fact that the CLA of Taiwan saw fit to call attention to that statistic tells of its extraordinariness.

But is 23.5 percent a percentage to be exalted, when it consists mainly of the intermediate management level? The top management group is still exclusively male only. Sandberg concludes: “The pipeline that supplies the educated workforce is chock-full of women at the entry level, but by the time that same pipeline is filling leadership positions, it is overwhelmingly stocked with men” (5).

Sandberg distinguishes various problems which continue to prevent women from performing equivalently to men in the workplace, but all merge into one single conclusion: successful, outspoken, self-promoting, interest-seeking, sociable, work–life balanced women simply do not fit into the conventional profile of what a woman should be. The fetish of “chastity that dictate[s] anonymity to women” still prevails as a general ideology (*AROO* 45–6). The merits of women who succeed in business, politics, and even academia are considerably discounted if they have not also been a productive and loving mother. But to live up to the conventional expectations of a caring mother and wife and to be a successful career woman often means double the work and stretching oneself to a full exhaustion. While men can boast that they always place work as their first priority, women must prove that they can take care of their domestic affairs and work simultaneously. Furthermore, in today’s highly competitive professional world, not being able to market and promote oneself (or in academia, to cite oneself) imperils one’s career.⁴

According to Sandberg, women are not motivated enough to jump at a good opportunity and are generally more modest about their work performance. And women generally believe their hard working and merits will be silently recognized and what they have worked for in the name of justice will be naturally granted. In short, women are still very much conditioned by the perfect image of the Angel in the House to be discreet about their success. Men who advertise and flaunt their success are generally accredited as being confident and self-promoting, while women who are preoccupied by their intellectual and professional achievements often draw negative and hostile attention and are considered unwomanly. The final kick in the teeth is that strong women are negatively judged as “bossy” or even as a “witch.” In the words of Woolf, “when, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet” (*AROO* 45). The stereotype of the wicked, domineering dark queen and the innocent, self-sacrificing Snow White is not mere a fairy tale; it is the continuing antithesis that women struggle either to repudiate or to assume in order to survive; and the medieval hysteria over women with intellect and power has never been cured.

It seems that women continue to struggle against the unspoken social rule that “the chief glory of a woman is not to be talked of” (*AROO* 46). Sandberg’s portrait of women’s predicament today betrays the enduring Angel in the House, who continues to haunt women whenever they try to present themselves as individuals, to make a statement of their own, and reminds them to be “sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure” (*PW* 237). Therefore, as one learns from Sandberg, women tend not to express themselves, let alone to fight for their own interest. Women tend to undervalue or depreciate their opinions, abilities and merits, for successful women who have too much of an opinion of their own is not only disliked by men but also – and perhaps more so – by women. This is because such overt violation of the conceded universal law of femininity and womanhood brings uncomfortable awareness to its very fictionality. Above all, women themselves are more often than not critical about other women who have “made it,” as if they are still competing against one another for men’s approval.

⁴ The *Economist* August 31, 2013.

And though secretarial and clerical posts are still largely filled by women, women who have the ambition to obtain a higher management position are unlikely to receive help and collaboration from their peers. As Sandberg has put it, “it is heartbreaking to think about one woman holding another back” (*LI* 164). However, the truth is that women themselves are still largely dominated by the “queen bee” myth: “Women are not just victims of sexism, they can also be perpetrators” (*LI* 164). As Woolf clearly acknowledges, “Women are hard on women. Women dislike women” (*AROO* 100). Women are often the ones who fortify the authenticity of the Angel in the House and reinforce the violence and injustice of the authoritative system. As a result, there is still much fear and self-consciousness within women, who view their professional success as a subtraction of their femininity. Therefore, whether to wear their hair down, to stomp about in high heels, or to wear dresses or trousers will not be decided according to their own inclination but to the gaze of the Lacanian Big Other.

The stakes are simply too high to renounce such a perfect and conventional image, so that women, instead of fighting back against gender inequality, demand of themselves that they fit into the gender norms of the workplace. As a consequence, it is women themselves who legitimize the gender bias.

Even in the twenty-first century, women are hardly given a chance to define themselves. They are judged first by their gender, not by their ability. The tenacious notion of a pure, submissive and always pleasant Angel in the House continues to make demands on women to be what the male authority expects them to be. “Woman,” which remains largely a predetermined socio-cultural concept, continues to be the magic looking glass “reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (*AROO* 32). The vision in the looking glass instills confidence and authorizes superiority. Any attempt to subvert such a concept provokes alarm and anger in the established power as Woolf has observed, since “the looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system. Take it away and man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine” (*AROO* 33). Any decrying of conceptual femininity will not only be met with severe social disapproval and indictment, but one might also sabotage one’s career, as Sandberg illustrates in *Lean In* with the examples of Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, and the current chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel: “When a woman excels at her job, both male and female coworkers will remark that she may be accomplishing a lot but is ‘not as well-liked by her peers’ (*LI* 41). She is probably also ‘too aggressive,’ ‘not a team player,’ ‘a bit political,’ ‘can’t be trusted,’ or ‘difficult’ (*LI* 41).

Hence, women nowadays are inescapably caught in an unsolvable catch-22, for how would it be possible to *lean into* a male-dominated world without selling out one’s individuality, let alone one’s female singularity, without first assuming the patriarchal norms and being “a woman.” But the very attempt to lean in and speak up is itself already an infringement of the conventional submissive female role and to a great extent still tacitly taken as a violation of the social convention. Political correctness is more often than not a superficial gesture. To be successful in a democratic capitalist society means gaining a majority of support as well as being an outspoken advocate. Thereby what possible chance is there for success when one objects outright to the common belief of the majority in a mindless, pure Angel in the House? But, to disregard social preference and remain a social outsider, unless you have a rich aunt to leave you a legacy of “five hundred pounds a year,” means poverty and abjection (*AROO* 33-4, *PW* 237).

While Sandberg talks about a practical strategy to help women negotiate their way through the professional jungle, especially securing positions that come with global influence, Woolf concentrates on monetary power alone in securing a personal spiritual realm – perhaps the only proof of one’s singularity. When women finally gain the right to be educated, they should not prostitute their minds for the sake of money. Reading between Sandberg and Woolf, one cannot but be puzzled by an unspecified paradox that lies between/within their individual claims for a woman’s right to a mind of her own. To earn a living, let alone to gain worldly power (either political influence or monetary wealth), means to immerse oneself in the value-price system of the world. As her title suggests, Sandberg advocates an active engagement in order to promote oneself and thereby one’s gender group. On the contrary, Woolf repeatedly insists on a moderate seclusion in order to preserve one’s independent mind and prevent oneself from being a conspirator of patriarchal injustice. Unlike Sandberg, who urges women to fight their way to the top, Woolf implores them to have only enough, to be chaste and not to sell one’s mind for the sake of money, and more important of all to be free from unreal loyalty, either to one’s university, to unexamined belief and opinion, to one’s nation and family and to the unreal glory of honors and badges offered by any human society.

Sandberg has set up workshops and support groups to accompany her book and has spoken frankly about the influential power she aspired to have, while Woolf exhorts her readers and audience not to “dream of influencing other people,” instead to “think things in themselves” (*AROO* 100).

For Woolf, though she stresses the importance of financial independence, she is not willing to see women subjected to another kind of servile life driven by money making and property hoarding. One should have only enough to be independent, but the truth is, only enough puts one at a great disadvantage, especially in today’s speculative market where price and value is easily manipulated by the largest capital. Sandberg, contrary to Woolf’s proposal of an outsider society, exhorts women to lean in and if possible not hesitate at working themselves up to a position of great influential power. In short, the billionaire Sandberg seems to be arguing against Woolf in a more practical sense. She encourages women to engage themselves in the great of competition life and earn as much honor and fortune as society could possible endow.

The great question, as one places Sandberg side by side with Woolf, is how would it be possible for one to have fortune, to allow oneself full independence, to go into business and earns one’s living, without sponsoring the patriarchal dictatorship?

Woolf’s criticism of the patriarchal system, which repeatedly appeals to nature, to God, to law, just to prevent women from entering the sacred gates of the university, from receiving a degree, from obtaining an appointment, echoes most closely with the infamous proclamations of Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic* that “justice is simply the interest of the stronger” and injustice is better rewarded than justice (35). Though always elusive and ironic, Woolf does attest most practically that to be able to escape from the domestic sphere, from squatting in the kitchen, education and a profession are prerequisites. Yet, to be well educated and to be successful, one is compelled to enroll in a system that invigorates people to be competitive as well as combative, to seek honor in a way that will simultaneously abase and deny others.

Thus, confrontation with the existing system is unavoidable and violation of the prescribed virtue of women is a *sine qua non*. Woolf recognizes this dilemma – of how women are to lean in and become an active independent subject in the professional and political world and still be true to oneself and to one’s own judgment – most solemnly in *Three Guineas*. She, with her guineas to promote women’s college and help women find professional employment, admonishes women: if they finally win the right to be educated and to work professionally, they must not to fall into the patriarchal convention that encourages the contentiousness of human nature and provokes antagonism. And most important of all, they must “help all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter [their] profession” (*TG* 205).

Although stating the importance of financial independence for an independent mind and expressing regret for how our mothers did not go into business, Woolf provides us with few practical steps: “By hook or by crook, I hope that you will possess yourselves of money enough to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream” (*AROO* 98). In spite of that, Woolf is generally revered as a figure of first-wave feminism (whether or not Woolf would have agreed upon such a label is another matter). On the other hand, Sandberg’s *Lean In* is deemed by renowned Pulitzer prize-winning writer Anne Applebaum unfit to be placed on the shelf alongside Susan Faludi or Gloria Steinem. Sandberg, Applebaum implicitly suggests, is a businesswoman through and through. Despite what she claims of her aspiration to help more women succeed in business and other demanding professions, to eventually create a world of gender justice, Applebaum singles out profit and a desire to be a “business guru” as Sandberg’s primary aims.

But what’s wrong with that? Doesn’t Woolf wish that Mary Saton’s mother had gone into business instead of bearing ten or fifteen children? Doesn’t she acknowledge the merit of material wealth in nurturing creativity, in avoiding spite and even in preventing fascism? And above all, in this democratic capitalist society, why should a self-promotion and profit seeking in a woman be so strongly criticized, particularly when she is the chief operating officer of a multi-billion dollar company? When Sandberg garners criticism for being elitist, does her gender become a factor? Although it would be naïve not to see Sandberg’s self-marketing for what it is and her ambition to gain influential power, still one questions whether Applebaum has fallen into the traditional gender prejudice.

Didn't Woolf contemplate the possibility that one day "we may change our position from being the victims of the patriarchal system, paid on the truck system, with £30 or £40 a year in cash and board and lodging thrown in, to being the champions of the capitalist system, with a yearly income in our own possession of many thousands" (TG 192)?

As Sandberg herself admits in various interviews, she wants women to change their own attitudes first before blaming the system, and apart from a difference in strategy, does she not also call for the killing of the Angel in the House, which has become not the second but the one and only nature of women?

Perhaps as an upper-middle-class woman, Woolf is still too idealistic in believing one can be both financially independent and uninvolved in general human affairs. Women's passivity and apathy alone, contrary to Woolf's argument, is very unlikely to discourage the bellicose sentiments of human society and change the prevailing patriarchal conceptualization of the world. One must lean in and speak up as a recognizable subject. Though one still cautions oneself not to let the pursuit of money become the end, perhaps what Sandberg advocates in *Lean In* is a more practical and effective method. Money and material wealth are powerful means for women to change their current status, which is still largely subjected to male-dominant prejudice.

And just as Sandberg herself has foreseen, only when women break from the habitual consciousness formed by patriarchal gender bias, only when they are financially independent that equips them to speak their mind without fear, only when women kill off the Angel in the House that they still cherish and nourish, can they finally conceive of themselves as fully independent subjects and become truly equal to men.

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