

“Moral Philosophy and Curricular Reform”: Catharine Beecher and Nineteenth-Century Educational Leadership for Women

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Catharine Beecher, daughter to Lyman Beecher and reared in New England Calvinism, struggled against it as a means of acquiring life orientation. Convinced of the mind's superiority in resolving moral and ethical matters, she developed pioneering views on women's education with its three linchpins which became known as moral philosophy: transference of soul salvation from theological to social grounds; creation of a moral code to regulate behavior without the presence of an angry God; and assumption of a new class of moral guardians to promote this code. In 1823, she opened The Hartford Female Seminary, in Hartford, Connecticut, and went on to establish the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. She helped in the formation of women's colleges in Burlington, Iowa, Quincy, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Although Beecher later incorporated support for childhood education, her priority was to women's education as teachers and writers in her curricular advances. A review of her educational program, its curriculum, her emphasis on physical health for women, the way she changed the role of teaching as a career for women, and her extensive writings shows the far-reaching influence of Catharine Beecher in nineteenth-century education in opening educational and writing careers to women.

Catharine Beecher's energies and accomplishments flowed naturally from her family and the example of her father.

The Beechers were a formidably energetic group, ceaselessly generating qualities of tension and anxiety that they aimed outward into their culture, leaving a deep imprint on the nineteenth century and keeping their mutual loyalties miraculously intact. Their insatiable enthusiasm for public life, their quick response to cultural nuance, and their ability to orchestrate the basic themes of popular democracy, made them a phenomenon unto themselves. Like the Adams family in the eighteenth century and the Kennedys in the twentieth, they welcomed the role of cultural interpreters and relished the chance to forge their own unity out of the manifold variety of American culture.¹

As she grew and matured, she took her place in the role of public activist.

Catharine Beecher did not arrive easily at the career which consumed her life and was sustained by her extensive writings: education for women, study of curricular reform, and teaching as a career for women. Education for women in the early 1800s consisted of basic courses embellished by instruction in social skills for young ladies. When her clergyman father, Lyman Beecher, moved from his East Hampton parish near the north end of Long Island to Litchfield, Connecticut, Catharine became a citizen in the same town as Miss Pierce's School for Young Ladies, reputed to be one of the most celebrated in the country at the turn of the century. At ten, Catharine entered the school which offered courses in science and mathematics as well as

¹ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) xii-xiii.

literature, painting, and dramatics², more like the curriculum of a young man's preparatory program than other schools for young ladies. The program helped configure Catharine's later ideas about education for women. Miss Pierce's school also offered training in the social instincts of the students with "instruction on those rules of delicacy and propriety so important for every young woman" as well as "lady-like manners" and "cultivated and refined and conversation."³ For Catharine Beecher, this early social consciousness was an invaluable asset. The religious and moral instruction for young women was meant to make them agreeable and was urged upon them as social usages, only secondarily as the path to holiness. With a gregarious, out-going personality, Beecher found social skills to be a principal strength. At the time, Litchfield was also reputed to have the best law school in the country.⁴ She moved with ease within the scintillating environment of intelligent young people. On a visit to relatives in Boston as an older teenager, she replicated her social abilities among the family and young people there.

At twenty, Catharine was marriageable, a dangerous state for a young woman who had not yet espoused conversion. She entered into a three-year struggle with her father and, eventually, her preacher brother, Edward, over the state of her soul. A young woman could be free and investigative in her father's household, but as she approached marriage, she had to settle into the parameters of conversion and obedience to a husband to fit the New England Calvinist mold. Lyman had struggled with each of his children to bring them to salvation and overt conversion. For her seven preacher brothers, conversion meant obedience to God and ministerial careers. For Catharine, a woman, "religious submission was linked to civil and social submission in marriage which commonly followed it as the second step to adulthood,"⁵ and "submission to God was a prelude to a lifetime of earthly submission to a husband."⁶ In the spring of 1821, as she prepared to leave for a New London school to assume responsibilities for classes in domestic arts, drawing, and painting, Lyman intensified his efforts for her religious conversion before she left home.

In the same period, Alexander Metcalf Fisher appeared on the scene. Intelligent and dedicated to scholarship, at 24, he was appointed to Yale's Professorship in Natural Philosophy. Three years Catharine's senior, he had established a reputation for his skill in scientific thought, mathematics, and a character influenced by New England orthodoxy. Having read one of Catharine's poems in Lyman's magazine, *The Christian Spectator*, he accompanied a ministerial classmate to Litchfield who was to preach for Lyman so he could meet Catharine. Although the romantic road was rocky, at length they were reconciled to love for each other and engaged within a year.

² In Joseph Van Why's "Introduction" to *The American Woman's Home* by Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, originally published in 1869. (Hartford, Stowe-Day Foundation, 1987) iv-v and i-xxi.

³ In Catharine Beecher, *Educational Reminiscences and Suggestions* (New York, J.B. Ford & Co., 1874) 15.

⁴ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 15.

⁵ In Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis's *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1988) 17.

⁶ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 31.

Lyman's quest for her soul intensified because a young woman approaching marriage without conversion posed a crisis. In spite of his and Edward's letters and efforts, she remained unconvinced of the need for spiritual regeneration in the context of Lyman's theology. In April, 1822, Fisher sailed for England for a year of additional study with the plan for the two to marry when he returned. His ship, the *Albion*, went down off the coast of Ireland, and Fisher was lost. Lyman offered little consolation, pressing rather for conversion from her to avoid the fate of Fisher who also had not experienced conversion. The struggle between Catharine and her father illustrated the increasing nineteenth-century cultural resistance to the Calvinist theology of New England Puritanism. Catharine spent the rest of the year with Fisher's parents, poring over his writings and diaries, to learn of his doubts and anxieties. She resolved to develop a new system of moral philosophy to supplant the dogma of regeneration and predestination. Although her theory was still steeped in the Calvinist view of social order and hierarchy, it was enacted by a flexible social outlook.

Beecher structured her views on a plan whereby women would accept a submissive role to men in the public arena but in the home, the private sphere, women would be dominant as the principal shapers of morality to elevate morality to such heights that national reform would become reality without the boundaries of political, religious, gender, or class distinctions because the domestic space could both integrate and assimilate personal and national objectives. In this way, women would be morally superior because they were the instructors, the teachers of morality. Like others involved in both personalizing and nationalizing "the American domestic environment" in the cult of womanhood and domestic ideology, she found the key to her task in gender roles.⁷

While Catharine was with the Fishers, she taught the younger siblings of the family. At the end of her stay with them, she determined not to return to New London, but to develop her own school. With the beginning aid of some of Lyman's friends in Hartford, she established the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823. Housed first in a space above a harness shop, five years later, her school enjoyed its own imposing building, boasted a faculty of eight, and counted its trustees from the leading citizens of Hartford. Further, it allowed her to pursue social, religious, and intellectual leadership, clarifying in the process her own social, religious, and intellectual beliefs. She sought "intellectual progress" with Latin studies with Edward, "arranged her academic and social life, taught in the mornings and tended to her social life in the afternoons and evenings, socializing as an equal with the leaders of other schools, pastors of the churches, a series of Saturday evening gatherings," and meetings with the women.⁸ Her sister Mary came as a teacher and Harriet and Henry Ward came as students. In the fall, she told her father quietly that she wanted "to join the church," and he calmly approved, putting an end to their three-year struggle over his insistence on her radical conversion. Catharine entered her career as an educator with the typical Beecher zeal learned from Lyman, expanded her moral and social

⁷ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) xii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

influence beyond her school, and launched an energetic publishing program that recast the religious, intellectual, and social dimensions of her life into a composite of educational reform.

In the fall of 1826, Catharine launched her plan to change her private school into an endowed seminary with the desire to expand her Mental and Moral Philosophy into a discipline that would have far-reaching educational changes. She projected a new building, a full teaching staff, and a system of educational reforms. Because of her contacts through churches and the town's citizenry, she had access to the people who could make her dream happen. In her article, "Female Education," published in the new *American Journal of Education* in 1827, she described the reforms she proposed and the reasons for them. She recognized the vested support for the typical girls schools and did not discard that tradition, but she did change the supporting mechanisms for the practice. She wrote, "A lady should study, not to *shine* but to *act*" and she called for the result of women's education to be action, not ornamentation for the "refined" women. She said, "Both parents and pupils sometimes thus demand the structure and ornaments of an education before the indispensable foundations are laid." Further, she wrote, "[P]ublic sentiment has advanced so much on the subject of female culture that a course of study very similar to that pursued by young men in our public institutions is demanded for young ladies of the higher circle".⁹

When the Hartford men who had supported her initial school failed to underwrite her program for its expansion, she turned to their wives whom she had been cultivating in meetings, clubs, and social gatherings. She wrote in her *Reminiscences*, "The more intelligent and influential women came to my aid, and soon I had all I sought."¹⁰ The use of social power, learned as a child from her father, placed in the hands of women became a component she would put to use in her future reforms, claims, and results. As she worked on the curriculum for her school, she began to assimilate three themes from her own life and the educational process she had engineered for herself: salvation of the soul, reshaping of social forms, and both the role and the experience of women in each endeavor. With *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education* in 1829 (Hartford, Packard & Butler) and *The Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Founded Upon Experience, Reason, and the Bible* in 1831 (Hartford, Peter B. Gleason and Co.), she created an architecture with a three-fold foundation which she and others continued to build upon: movement of salvation from the theological to the social arena, a moral code to provide a behavioral foundation without the intrusion of an angry God, and a corps of moral guardians who would teach, model, and implement it. "All of Catharine's later thought was based on this volume of moral philosophy"¹¹ and by recasting the "teacher and the mother as female counterparts of the minister," she articulated a statement of her social philosophy which held her commitment "for the rest of her life."¹²

⁹ In Catharine Beecher, "Female Education," *American Journal of Education* 2.4-5, 1829 (221).

¹⁰ In Catharine Beecher, *Educational Reminiscences and Suggestions* (New York, J.B. Ford & Co., 1874) 33.

¹¹ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 78.

¹² In Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis's *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1988) 19.

Emphasis on character formation instead of conversion answered the need to extend a more inclusive arm for studies and offered a way to rise above regional matters to those of the nation in a context of morality and ethics at a time when the country was moving beyond eighteenth-century attitudes in cultural exploration. By providing behavioral methods as a way of learning self-guiding ethical principles, character could be expressed. Those young women who taught in her school and those who studied in it had a clarion call to be the army of soldiers who would go forth to save the nation as examples of the way to live and, further, to invest themselves in the lives of others for the public good. Two ancillary benefits were the creation of a professional career for women who chose to remain single and still contribute to the common weal, and the elevation of the role of women as cultural shapers.

A difficult time came for the Beechers in 1829 with Lyman's two heresy trials in denominational squabbles because of views he held: a unified society, merging of piety and morality, and modification of orthodox Calvinist doctrine in regard to grace. He and Edward in Boston made no headway against the conservative Presbyterians or liberal Unitarians. In Hartford, Catharine met disappointment when her trustees and supporters failed to donate funds to move her school to full seminary status with dormitory facilities, an endowment, and expanded building program. For much of 1829, eighteen-year-old Harriet ran the school, but Catharine rebounded with her customary energy and ambition. However, she ended her role as principal in 1832 when a way out came with Lyman's invitation to become president of the new Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, which he saw as a call to evangelize the West. As Forrest Wilson notes of all the unmarried Beechers, packed and moving with him, "The hegira of the Beechers had begun" [...] "Lyman Beecher had only to sound a crusade to rouse his clan to the same enthusiasm" and he carried "them with him in his holy enterprise"[...]; they "were an army with banners."¹³ Joseph Van Why writes that Lyman "embued his children with a zeal and confidence that the Lord was on their side and victory was imminent" in all causes.¹⁴ Lyman saw the move as a summons to train preachers to win the West. Catharine viewed it as a way to marshal women in the cause of social betterment and self-actualization through a reformed educational structure and role.

In the outskirts of Cincinnati, Catharine and Harriet began the Western Female Institute as associate principals at Walnut Hills with Mary Dutton and Anne Tappan as teachers in a setting "dedicated to moral development as well as to academic and domestic education."¹⁵ Catharine moved about in Cincinnati society promoting her educational ideals and moral philosophy. Acceptance and progress came at first. Although she remained in Cincinnati a decade, within three years, she had alienated prominent citizens who could have been her support base. She violated rules of polite society, meddled in their cultural and literary clubs, and encouraged social barriers between New Englanders and people from western origins. Sklar

¹³ Forrest Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1941) 90-91.

¹⁴ In Joseph Van Why, "Introduction," *The American Woman's Home*. By Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1869 (Hartford, Stowe-Day Foundation, 1987) iv.

¹⁵ In Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis's *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1988) 114.

comments, “By the late 1830s, polite Cincinnati society viewed the Beechers as a cut beneath them in manners and social style.”¹⁶ Conversely, the Beechers viewed the New England way as superior. In her Eastern travels and lectures for recruitment and fund raising, Catharine spoke of the West as an inferior place and called for “a corps of women teachers to civilize the barbarous immigrants and lower class of the West”; “Cincinnati society rejected both Lyman’s Calvinism and Catharines’s pretensions to cultural superiority.”¹⁷

After Cincinnati, Catharine turned her skills to establishing other schools and educational organizations. The women’s colleges were in Burlington, Iowa, Quincy, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her principal organization was The American Woman’s Educational Association, founded in 1852. She engaged in extensive travel, promoting the schools. Part of each year was spent training teachers in four-week courses under the auspices of The Ladies Society for Promoting Education in the West, her organization, headed first, reluctantly, by Calvin Stowe and three years later by William Slade. After finishing the training, the young women were matched with communities seeking teachers, and a profession that had been in the male domain became the female’s and Catharine pushed her program for the “special mission of women as the conduits of civilization and the teachers of morality.”¹⁸

Catharine’s various movements and efforts always held a particular focus on women which found expression in attention to their physical health as well as an emphasis on teaching as uniquely a women’s career. She included daily physical activity for students, a sort of Physical Education precursor, and developed a routine of calisthenics performed to music. Beyond the school, more than any other lay author, she advocated and wrote openly about female complaints and difficulties. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, first woman physician in the country, wrote *The Laws of Life* in 1852 (New York, George P. Putnam), and Catharine used it for promoting her views on women’s health in *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* in 1855 (New York, Harper and Row). Her writing addressed the body and bodily functions in clear, lucid prose with attention to exercise, correct diet, non-restrictive clothing, fresh air, and cleanliness, much coming from Dr. Blackwell. She approached gender differences in clothing, the cultural role of nineteenth-century women’s invalidism-suggesting good health practice as an answer to invalidism-and opposed corsets as harmful to women’s health. In *Letters*, she discussed women’s need for sex education and for access to available information on contraception. She placed great importance on homeopathic methods used in the various water-cures which were accepted as health centers, primarily for women. In the water cures, which were used and staffed by women more than men, the clients could find sympathetic and rational attention to conditions related to female physiology: menstruation, generative organs, and child birth. The water cures, free from the usual constraints of general society and often in advance of the nineteenth-century male-dominated medical practice, offered a context of social equality and respect for women. “The psychic and social dimensions of illness for women” with the “value of the water-cure centers”

¹⁶ In Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 123.

¹⁷ In Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis’s *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women’s Rights and Woman’s Sphere* (Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1988) 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

[...] offered female communality” in “bodily sensuality that could be safely indulged” and “meliorated the female preoccupations associated with reproductive processes”.¹⁹

Catharine’s commitment to carving a career for women as professional teachers can be seen as a result of her own struggles as an unmarried woman in the nineteenth-century context of home as woman’s sphere. She emerged from the concomitant life crises of losing her fiancé and battle with her father for ownership of her soul with the decision to remain single. In every goal, book, essay, program, or idea she projected, the background of her marital state always cast a long shadow. She had neither the social badge of a husband’s name, as her sisters did, nor the accepted authority of a profession, as her brothers possessed simply by being male. With her determined spirit and keen intellect, she set about creating a profession for herself and, in the process, claimed one for all women. Even while resisting her father’s theological stance, paradoxically, she adopted certain dimensions of her religious heritage. Principle among them was the orthodox Calvinist understanding of hierarchy as a means for social order. Catharine held to hierarchy, but turned to a liberal application of it in social interactions; she retained “the piety of the Puritan wife but cast it in the Revolutionary mold.” For Beecher, the “power of womanhood had become inseparable from the politics of class.”²⁰ In crafting her theories, Beecher was “reclaiming her father through the model of her mother.”²¹ However, she did not adopt the New England obsession with self-introspection, but rather, turned that dynamic of self-analysis outward on others to arrive at morality instead of piety. In a letter in 1828 to Edward on the inner self, in response to his comments about his “inner man,” she wrote, “I wish I could catch my *inward woman*, and give her such an inspection and exposition”[...] “but she is such a restless being that I cannot hold her still long enough to see her true form and outline.”²²

Catharine’s view on hierarchy held a political edge. She said, “Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station, but while woman has the subordinate relation in society [...] It is not because [...] her influence should be any less important” [...] “a woman must conquer by “kindly, generous, peaceful, and benevolent principles.”²³ She determined to develop a corps of teachers, convert the teaching profession to being one for women and elevate the nation with the superior example of women as the guardians of morality. Their students could either continue in teaching or carry valuable lessons from mental and moral philosophy into their roles as homemakers in the hardy task of republican motherhood. Glenna Matthews says of the newly articulated importance in homes as the production sites for virtuous citizens, women gained acceptance into education, demonstrating “how significant the ideology of Republican Motherhood was in promoting better education for

¹⁹ In Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 205-206.

²⁰ In Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis’s *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women’s Rights and Woman’s Sphere* (Chapel Hill, University of Carolina Press, 1988) 121-122.

²¹ *Ibid*, 20.

²² In Boydston, Kelley and Margolis (225) and Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*. New York, Norton, 1976 (79).

²³ In Catharine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolition with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, Henry Perkins, 1837) 98-101.

women.” As Matthews writes, “For the first time in American history, both home and woman’s special nature were seen as uniquely valuable.” A homemaker could “see and hear her value and the value of the home for which she was responsible being affirmed.”²⁴

At first contact, Beecher seems to espouse the traditional view of the day of woman’s place, but a closer investigation reveals the skillful subversion of her writings and moral philosophy, because she politicized the traditional female sphere in education and the home. She had doubts about the nation’s ability to “weather the storms of democratic liberty.” Let men argue in the political arena, for political power as it was being exercised seemed destined for self-destruction. The democratic process she said was not sufficient to promote either private or public happiness. Locate the nation’s moral center in the home and let its spirit through the activities of women “be infused into the mass of the nation, and then truth may be sought, defended, and propagated, and error detected and its evils exposed”; “Let every woman become so cultivated and refined in intellect, that her taste and judgment will be respected”.²⁵ She took the traditional submissive role of women and turned it into a sign of superior moral sensibility. As she continued to write and speak of the moral superiority of women, that social power was first taught in their schools by their own and then released into the culture through other schools and the home with “the parlor as a cultural podium and described the home as the base from which women would launch their influence on the culture, not as their isolation from influence.” With the slavery debate escalating, Sarah and Angelina Grimke entered the public forum with their call for women to have a direct cultural contribution. The rise of feminist awareness in early to mid-nineteenth-century America faced the choice of a double philosophy: whether to structure “female influence as a function of their difference from men or on the basis of their human equality; Grimkes took the second, Catharine, the first.” Beecher outlined three points in her arguments.

the present was a time of rapid social change, when all past beliefs were being questioned and new ones being tested; abolitionists were part of this contemporary pace of change but threatened to turn change into destruction; and women were uniquely qualified to heal social divisions and work as ameliorative rather than destructive agents of social change.²⁶

The following years illustrate a greater acceptance of Catharine’s tactics, due perhaps to their requiring less radical change, striking a response to cultural anxiety about perceived rapid change, and introducing a security from known sources into the national ideology. The Grimkes’ vision pushed founding ideology of natural rights into arenas where no application existed. Americans moved ahead with the Grimkes on slavery, but allied themselves with Catharine’s positions for women. As she claimed power for women, she pushed educational reforms, created

²⁴ In Glenna Matthews’s *Just a Housewife: The Rise & Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987) 34.

²⁵ In Catharine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolition with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, Henry Perkins, 1837) 106 and 127-28.

²⁶ In Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 137.

a professional power base for women, and provided a way for a livelihood through teaching and writing, both for herself and for those in her schools.

Catharine Beecher was a publishing phenomenon. She held views on every subject and no hesitation to speak them and write them whether on religion, social issues, education, or domestic science. Religion, the domain of men, posed an incoherent forum, ripe for her sharp pen, and she never missed an opportunity to sally forth with correctives although ministers and church members often expressed shock for a woman to plunge herself into the midst of theological disputes. In 1836, she published *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* which urged people of all Protestant sects to recognize that a moral code and a social order applied to all denominations and were of far greater importance than doctrinal differences. On free will and fatalism, she said:

Yet still they claim to hold to free agency and moral accountability, and attempt to show that it is not inconsistent with their theory of mental constitution. But it is just the same, to my mind, as if they should describe a square as that which has four sides, and four right angles, and still maintain that they believe this is at the same time a circle.²⁷

Although she advocated submission of women to men in politics, Catherine never suffered a crisis of self-confidence when facing a man on any subject, whether politics, religion, or agendas of the social scene. Perhaps she was not aware of the irony in her personality, but her family did, in particular Harriet and Isabella, though Harriet and Catharine enjoyed a closeness.

Catharine's own actions, biography, and career do not suggest a submissive person who is domestically circumscribed, the central role she preached for women. Of all the Beechers, perhaps she most closely reflected her father's personality, nature, and energy, consistently raising a voice offered with passion about contemporary prominent matters of the day.²⁸ Once she reached a decision, she proceeded with a single focus, with never a thought of how others might be affected. Lyman Beecher Stowe, Harriet's grandson, reflects both the public and private panoply of Catharine's personality in *Saints, Sinners, and Beechers* when he writes of her love and tragedy and her school program and speaks of her as both a Puritan heretic and saving the nation through schools.²⁹

Her writings on religion are legion. In 1840 she published in the *Biblical Repository* an article on Free Agency, acknowledged at the time by competent critics as the ablest refutation of Edwards on The Will which had appeared. As reported by Charles Stowe:

²⁷ In Catharine Beecher, *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* (Hartford, Belknap & Hammersly, 1836) 339.

²⁸ Lyman Beecher never hesitated to put forth his ideas for the public domain couched in his theology. In the movement toward bringing religious life into the public, society was faced with Sunday closing laws to suit church-affiliated preferences of people. In 1829, Lyman sent a letter to President Andrew Jackson, with the assistance of Reverend Ezra Stiles Ely of Philadelphia, asking that Jackson not ride on Sunday en route to Washington "in an effort to impose on Sunday restrictions of travel, transport, and mail delivery." Jackson went in on steamboat as his only accession. See Jon Meachum, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York, Random House, 2008) 55.

²⁹ In Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Saints, Sinners, and Beechers* (New York, Blue Ribbon Books, 1934) 73-117.

A certain eminent theological professor of New England, visiting a distinguished German theologian and speaking of this production, said, "The ablest refutation of Edwards on 'The Will' which was ever written is the work of a woman, the daughter of Dr. Lyman Beecher." The worthy Teuton raised both hands in undisguised astonishment. "You have a woman that can write an able refutation of Edwards on 'The Will'? God forgive Christopher Columbus for discovering America!"³⁰

With the death of her brother George in 1843, a minister in Chillicothe, Ohio, very likely a suicide, she examined his life and letters, finding a soul struggle similar to her own, and published *The Biographical Remains of Rev. George Beecher*. The experience held similarities to her examination of Fisher's letters and life twenty years earlier to become a personal change in Lyman's influence and re-energize her to her commitment of redefining woman's role in society.

Perhaps Beecher's most vehement attack on organized clergy came with *Truth Stranger than Fiction* in 1850 after a clerical court trial of a breach of promise suit brought by Delia Bacon against a New Haven minister, Alexander MacWhorter, several years her junior. Delia Bacon had been an outstanding student at Hartford in the 1820s, wrote historical fiction, and gave lectures on literary subjects, including Shakespeare. In response to Beecher's queries, MacWhorter stated publicly that Bacon pursued him, but she responded that he had proposed to her, and the clergy lined up in battle, with Delia's brother, Leonard Bacon, defending her and Nathaniel Taylor with MacWhorter. In the two weeks of eight-hour sittings, Catharine was present and heard the committee's decision that MacWhorter, though acting imprudently, was not guilty. In her book, she attacked Yale, Nathaniel Taylor, and the institutional structure of the Congregational Church.

Beecher wrote volumes on education, educational reforms, and educational philosophy, and, until Harriet wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she was the best known woman in America. Most offensive to leaders in societies such as Cincinnati was a lecture by Catherine in New York in 1835, *An Essay on the Education of Female Teachers*, calling for the recruitment of women in the East who would be trained in educational methods and moral philosophy to take teaching positions in the mid-West, refining the cruder elements of frontier society. In 1838, Catharine published *The Moral Instructor for Schools and Families* with an attempt to reconcile economic and social disparities between the poor and the growing middle class. She put forth two principle arguments: (1) she stressed the work ethic as a guiding principle for the poor and the prosperous, arguing that sacrifice and hard work are the national unifying means by which society is bound together and the down-trodden may be elevated; and (2) she warned that economic prosperity is of a transient nature, therefore the prosperous middle class has just as great an obligation as the poor to imbue their children with high respect for the work ethic as necessary training for the uncertain future of Jeffersonian democracy. She further argued that those who have attained

³⁰ In Charles Edward Stowe, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1891) 26).

economic security are more exposed to the temptations of sin and hence more openly tested to show their moral strength.³¹

Social issues delineated Catharine's views on anti-slavery. She took the anti-slavery position of her family, but with an agenda; in *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, she argued for the preservation of hierarchical authority, but with the proviso that women must exert a major role of moral leadership within the home. She opposed the women's equal rights movement fostered by Angelina and Sarah Grimke; Catharine asserted that the moral influence of women should ". . . be infused into the mass of the nation, and then the truth may be sought, defended, and propagated, and its evils exposed."³² This *Essay* suffered from inconsistencies in its line of reasoning and argument; she is guilty of criticizing the methods of the Abolitionists without answering the moral issues they were raising. In her own family, it put her in opposition to her brother, Edward, whose close friend Elijah P. Lovejoy, was killed by a mob at Alton, Ohio, incensed by Abolitionist views he published in his newspaper, *The Observer*. The Beechers often disagreed with each other on religious and political subjects, but of all of them, Catharine was the one who most often created agitation within the family.

Catharine's belief that women by nature should center their activities in the home and accept a role submissive to men satisfied the majority of Americans in the 1830s and 1840s. Most settlers of the mid-West felt uneasy or vehemently opposed the notion that political equality applied equally to women as much as to men. Suffrage was delayed by more liberal Americans until after the Civil War as Abolitionists began to assume the prominence in social reform. The Quaker Grimke sisters from the South had established a friendship with Catharine and her Hartford school before they had begun to raise their voices against slavery and the exclusion of women from the ranks of social activism. In her eastern tour of 1836, Catharine sensed Angelina Grimke as her competitor for the allegiance of the newly self-conscious generation of American women. In early 1837, Angelina announced plans to tour the North and form anti-slavery societies. Catharine immediately challenged Angelina's leadership and defined her counterproposal for the role of women in American society.³³ In her *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, she began a task that was to preoccupy her for the rest of her life, interpreting and shaping the consciousness of American women. The Grimkes and Catharine Beecher engaged in a two-year debate; the Grimkes linked the cause of women's rights with that of abolitionism; Catharine urged the unification of American culture around a new image of politically transcendent womanhood. For Beecher, the influence of women should be as different in kind as it was in method; the "transition from piety to morality as the basic system of belief in the US was congruent with an increasingly democratic and individualized ethos, but emphasis on moral behavior also created new

³¹ In Catharine Beecher, *The Moral Instructor for Schools and Families: Containing Lessons on the Duties of Life, Arranged for Study and Recitation, Also Designed as a Reading Book for Schools* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1838) 129.

³² In Catharine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, Henry Perkins, 1837) 128.

³³ In Kathryn Kish Sklar's *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 132.

distinctions between men and women.” Catharine designed “a single standard of conduct that would incorporate both middle class evangelical earnestness and upper class Unitarian or Episcopal assurance” [...] and “began to explore ways in which evangelical and upper class ethics could be combined and how the new standard could be carried forward by American women.”³⁴

Catharine Beecher reached her zenith with her writings on domestic science. In 1841, she published *Treatise on Domestic Economy*. During the next two decades, its success assured her of economic independence allowing her to travel and lecture throughout the east and west. The *Treatise* was revised and refined to become *The American Woman’s Home* (1869) which shows a pragmatic concern for every aspect of housekeeping and child-rearing. Although carrying Harriet’s name as co-author, who added work from her *House and Home Papers*, the major work is Catharine’s. The book offers specific plans, illustrations for an efficient home and kitchen, in which the housewife may function efficiently; an early time-and-motion study of domestic efficiency far in advance of their times. They explain in detail how best to plan a simple home, problems of sanitation, ventilation, proper diet, and personal hygiene. The American Woman’s Home is like “a modern anthology which includes articles on cooking, decorating and housekeeping along with excerpts from Spock, Genott, and Salk on child-rearing plus information on hygiene, gardening, etiquette and home-amusements.” Each “topic of interest to the homemaker” is considered to make “a bible of domestic topics up to the time. For thousands who held opinions similar to those of Catharine and Harriet concerning the role of women, it “must have struck a sympathetic response which endeared it as much for its moral philosophy as for its fund of factual information. For those who did not, it was still full of information in easily understood language, nowhere else to be found.”³⁵

Treatise on Domestic Economy (reprinted almost every year from 1841-56, met with financial success and provided her leisure to pursue her plans for a national system of female-led education. The American Woman’s Home and others of hers and Harriet’s writings established her as a national authority on the psychological state and physical well-being of the American home. With her Letters to Persons Who are Engaged in Domestic Service and Letters to the People on Health and Happiness, she pulled all the disparate elements of domestic employments together and describe their functions in the American environment.³⁶

Catharine Beecher benefited from the Beecher family’s “ability to seize the power of social definition during a time of widespread change.” Her “female identity constantly intruded into her consciousness and her career.” Although being woman “excluded her from the main vehicle of contemporary social influence, the church, and it persistently relegated her to a marginal social status when she sought a central one.” Efforts throughout her life “to overcome

³⁴ In Catharine Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia, Henry Perkins, 1837) 83, 89.

³⁵ In Joseph Van Why, “Introduction,” *The American Woman’s Home*. By Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1869 (Hartford, Stowe-Day Foundation, 1987) xviii, xviv.

³⁶ In Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York, Norton, 1976) 139, 151.

the marginal status [...] constituted a central theme in her career” and “caused her to innovate, to seek new channels of cultural influence, and to design an ideology that gave women a central place in national life.” Her central belief remained that family and home “could be redefined as the social unit that harmonized various national interests and synchronized different individual psyches” allowing her to use “this ideology to promote both cultural homogeneity and female hegemony.”³⁷

In a letter 2 to Harriet in which she detailed how she arrived at the management of her school, she concluded, “After a while I began to compare my experience with the government of God. I finally got through the whole subject, and drew out the results, and found that all my difficulties were solved and my darkness dispelled.”³⁸ In this comment equating her methods with “the government of God,” she seals her authority for moral philosophy and curricular reform with the results both for her and for nineteenth-century educational leadership for women.

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³⁷ In Joseph Van Why, “Introduction.” *The American Woman’s Home*. By Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1869 (Hartford, Stowe-Day Foundation, 1987) xiii.

³⁸ In Charles Edward Stowe, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1891) 24, 27-28. Catherine to Harriet: After two or three years I commenced giving instruction in mental philosophy, and at the same time began a regular course of lectures and instructions from the Bible, and was much occupied with plans for governing my school, and in devising means to lead my pupils to become obedient, amiable, and pious. By degrees I finally arrived at the following principles in the government of my school:

1. First. It is indispensable that my scholars should feel that I am sincerely and deeply interested in their best happiness, and the more I can convince them of this, the more ready will be their obedience. (27)

2. Second. The preservation of authority and order depends upon the certainty that unpleasant consequences to themselves will inevitably be the result of doing wrong.

3. Third. It is equally necessary, to preserve my own influence and their affection, that they should feel that punishment is the natural result of wrong-doing in such a way that they shall regard themselves, instead of me, as the cause of their punishment.

4. Fourth. It is indispensable that my scholars should see that my requisitions are reasonable. In the majority of cases this can be shone, and in this way such confidence will be the result that they will trust to my judgment and knowledge, in cases where no explanation can be given.

5. Fifth. The more I can make my scholars feel that I am actuated by a spirit of self-denying benevolence, the more confidence they will feel in me, and the more they will be inclined to submit to self-denying duties for the good of others.

“After a while I began to compare my experience with the government of God. I finally got through the whole subject, and drew out the results, and found that all my difficulties were solved and my darkness dispelled” (27-28).