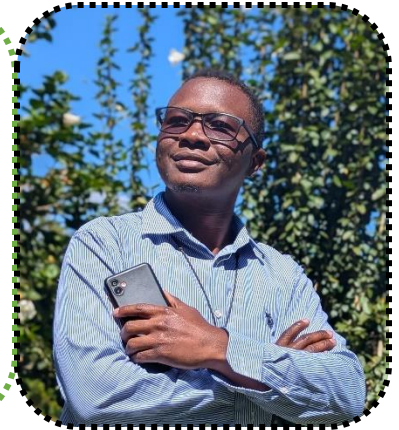


**EMPEDOCLE'S CIRCLE OF LOVE AND STRIFE DEPICTED
IN WOMAN AS THE ANIMATING POWER OF THE
UNIVERSE:**

**A REFLECTION BASED ON STUART MILL'S SOCIAL
UTILITARIANISM.**

(MUZALIWA Kennedy, sdb)_ published April 2026

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We have surely heard about the famous adages “*behind every great man there stands a great woman*” as quoted by William J. Clinton, and “*when you marry a bad woman, even the devil leaves you alone because he knows your case is already settled*” (unknown author). The truth of these expressions can be debated. However, the history of humanity has taught us that the natural influential power of a woman is incontestable. Examples and instances that prove this reality are simply uncountable.

This article is a philosophical approach to the role played by human beings of feminine gender in creating harmony (love) or downfall (strife) in the world, as an application of John Stuart Mill’s understanding of Social utilitarianism in Empedocles’ philosophy.

When “philosophy” was still at its very young commencement, and thinkers were raising from East to West, with the goal of finding out the ultimate reality that governs the universe, a non-conformist philosopher came up with a theory that is still relevant in our contemporary world: Empedocles. He lived in the 5th century (440 BCE), in the popular island of Sicily/Italy.¹

As a faithful disciple of pluralism, he understood that “Reality” is made up not with a single element as argued the monistic, but with smallest parts originating from the

¹ Frederick Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy from the Pre-Socratic to Plotinus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 63.

four elements (four roots): Air, fire, Water, and Earth. Just like his fellow pluralists, he believed that within the plurality found in the universe, there is unity.²

In his study on the notion of “*change and motion*”, Empedocles found that the world is governed or animated by two forces, which he calls “Love and Strife (or Hate)”.³ He understood on one hand “love” as force of unity, which brings together things that are not related. It is the starting point toward the coming up of newly created realities – “Love brings monsters together”.

On the other, he defined “Strife” as the force of separation and destruction, which comes to disunite and break down what love united. Then, after the damage caused by strife, love comes again to re-mingle and re-unite gradually various separated elements, and so the process carries on... this is known as the circle of Empedocles.⁴

In the reality of our world, it is revealed that the constant fight between the two elements (love and strife) can have the same origin “*Woman*”. She can be considered as a weapon. A weapon of construction, but unfortunately also of destruction sometimes. This is a reality, which must be acknowledged. Many women have destroyed the lives of their husbands or caused the ravage of great men.

Powerful empires have seen their end because of the influence of a woman; rulers of magnificent countries have fallen atrociously due to a woman; premium bourgeoisies have become pathetically psychopath simply because they pressed the red button of a woman... And this, without sorcery or magic. Only with her natural influence; a unique and often underestimated capacity. She is like the embodiment of the four elements of nature: Water, Earth, Fire, and Air.

Like water, she can soothe, refresh, and give life, or make drown and make suffocate. Like fire, she can warm the heart of the whole society, or burn it and reduce

² Christopher Ogugua, “Overview of Ancient Pluralism Philosophy,” *Nigerian Journals Online*, 46, November 2025, 6. <https://www.scribd.com>

³ Frederick C., *A History of Philosophy from the Pre-Socratic to Plotinus*, 64.

⁴ Anthony Kenny, *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 45. <https://svetlogike.wordpress.com>

everything into ashes. Like air, she can be a gentle breeze that encourages, or a storm that destroys everything in its path. Like earth, she can be fertile soil where flowers and trees can grow and blossom or a solid ground for building, or, a barren soil where nothing grows, and a sand soil that cannot sustain any building. The same music, the same melody of “love and strife”.

Woman is a realm of influence that can build up the community if the conscience of the moral agent is upright.⁵ Moreover, since conscience always needs to be formed and trained, the ethical theory of John Stuart Mill seems to be appropriate in guiding actions towards objectivity. As an important social reformer, Mill supported women’s autonomy. He wanted them to exercise their liberty as long as it causes no harm to others (no strife).⁶

John S. Mill is an English philosopher who lived in the Age of Revolution (1806-1873). The civil servant advocated widely for social theory. In his notion of utilitarianism, the latter posits that justified actions are those that promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.⁷ Building on the ideas of his predecessor Jeremy Bentham, Mill believed that an action is good when it produces more pleasure and minimizes pain.⁸

In his quote “*Woman possesses a singular power composed of the reality of strength and the appearance of weakness*”, Victor Hugo underscores the fascinating duality of inner strength combined with apparent fragility of a woman. She has a lot to contribute for the growth and sustenance of the whole community, but the fellow has been marginalized in such and such patriarchal societies, which refused for a long time to see her value and worth.

⁵ Denis Mukwege, *The Power of Women: A Doctor’s Journey of Hope and Healing* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2021), 28. <https://www.rahs-open-lid.com>

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), 86.

⁷ Berger, Fred R., *Happiness, Justice and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (California: University of California Press, 1984), 22. <https://www.ucpress.edu>

⁸ Crisp Roger, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Will on Utilitarianism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 59. <https://www.utilitarianism.com/k>

The ultimate end being an existence exempt from pain, this reflection encourages woman to always use her natural influential capacity to sow seeds of understanding, hope and create harmony. To shed more light wherever dwells the darkness of despair and distress. To bring peace where there are conflicts and calamities... In short, marrying Stuart and Empedocles theories, to take actions that support life (love) for the greatest number of people.

In so doing, she will lead to the supreme *good* or *love/pleasure*, and work together with her male partner to avoid or minimize *strife* or *pain* in the society. By using her natural gift to promote actions based on right reason, she will save entire nations, bring human races together, and free the whole world from multiple forms of wrongdoings. Then, she will be able to apply the “*dilige et quod vis fac*”⁹, meaning, “*love and do whatever you will*” as believed by Saint Augustine.

This is not a game but a key element in victory against downfall. A sure foundation in creating together a better world for our children and our children’s children.

“By all means marry; if you get a good wife, you will be happy. If you get a bad one, you will become a philosopher.” (Socrates)

⁹ John H.Parker & J. Rivington, *Homilies on the Gospel According to St John, and his First Epistle by St Augustine Bishop of Hippo* (London: Oxford, 1849), *Hom. 7, chapter 4, 4-12.*
<http://www.archive.org/details/homiliesongosp02august>