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Dogmatic Domesticity: Two Women's  
Quest for Scientific Objectivity in an Age of  
Darwinistic Patriarchy

By

Jessica Sullivan

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Faculty Advisor: Emily Kern  
Preceptor: John McCallum III

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“Many women have grievously felt the burden of laws or customs interfering unwarrantably with their property, their children, or their political and personal rights. I have felt this also; but more than any or all other forms of limitation and proscription, I have realized in my inmost soul that most subtle outlawry of the feminine intellect which warns it off from the highest fields of human research.”<sup>1</sup>

*Antoinette Brown Blackwell*

“God’s world so fresh, so beautiful, fresh from its Creator’s hand, to be so defiled and abused by Man’s world, his crumbling stupid society! To have one’s least action pulled to pieces and criticized, the more so for its being trifling. What do I care? Let the people talk, it hurts me not. But action for their sake is laid under a ban, for alas! I am not free.”<sup>2</sup>

*Mary Putnam Jacobi*

What is objectivity? Is it the idea of being impartial, fair, or truthful? If this is the definition one enlists, what are the ways one advocates and obtains objectivity, and is it even possible to obtain it? Alternatively, objectivity can be defined as the aspiration of “knowledge that bears no trace of the knower- knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgement, wishing or striving. Objectivity is blind sight, seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence.”<sup>3</sup> This thesis, spanning its research from 1825 to 1921,<sup>4</sup> focuses on

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<sup>1</sup> Blackwell, Antoinette Louisa Brown. *The Sexes Throughout Nature*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1875, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobi, Mary Putnam. *Diary of Mary Putnam Jacobi, August 1854, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi*. New York, London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books, 2007, 17.

<sup>4</sup> This thesis spans its research from 1825 to 1921 because these dates are the period that spans both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi’s lifespans.

two women who used two separate but complementary paths to strive toward their own definitions of blind-sighted, undisputed objectivity of gender equality. If objectivity is “blind sight, [and] seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence,” then proving this blind sighted knowledge of the validity of gender equality authorizes the positioning of women in male-dominated roles and initiates the passage of laws and amendments for the betterment of the safety and well-being of this marginalized group. Also, it helps diminish the soundness of the opposing argument that it is emotionality alone, not rationality, driving the push for sex egalitarianism.

The two women this thesis focuses its research on are Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Mary Putnam Jacobi. There were a multitude of individuals during the nineteenth century that fought against the constraints of the patriarchal world around them. However, both women described in this thesis are significant because they were two of the first American women to publicly use the period’s social perceptions of both science and religion to their own advantage, creating a voice for themselves in an environment that otherwise hindered them voiceless. Antoinette Brown Blackwell was one of the first American women to become a Protestant Christian minister and accomplished many feats impressive for a woman in the nineteenth century. Some of these feats include her undergraduate graduation from Oberlin College in 1847, her completion of theological seminary in 1850, in which she was not awarded a degree by Oberlin at the time due to her gender,<sup>5</sup> and finally when she became the first ordained woman minister in the United States in 1853.<sup>6</sup> Though she was a successful religious leader, she eventually left the ministry to pursue scientific writing on women’s health. She rose to

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<sup>5</sup> Oberlin later conferred an honorary Master of Arts degree in 1878 and an honorary Doctor of Divinity in 1908.

<sup>6</sup> “Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825-1921).” Antoinette Brown Blackwell, <https://www2.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/OYTT-images/NettyBlackwell.html>.

prominence and pseudo-fame in her life, demonstrated so much that later in her life, *The Boston Globe* characterized her as “in many respects the most remarkable woman in the country.”<sup>7</sup> Mary Putnam Jacobi was one of the first American women to become a physician. Most notably, she became the first woman to earn a degree from the New York College of Pharmacy in 1861, graduated from the Female Medical College in 1864, became the first female student accepted into the École de Médecine of the University of Paris, graduating in 1871, and she became the first woman to gain membership into the Academy of Medicine in 1872.<sup>8</sup> She often focused her career and writings on the betterment of health practices in pediatrics, obstetrics, and gynecology. In her memorial service, Dr. William Osler, among the most prominent living authorities in general medicine in this period, eulogized Putnam Jacobi stating, “it is no disparagement to her contemporaries to say that no other woman in the profession equalled (sic) her in the ability with which she presented a subject.”<sup>9</sup> The accolades and the public notoriety of both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi within their careers allowed them the access to argue for gender equality.

Besides their related interest in science and health, both women expressed their ideas of religion to prove the objectiveness, impartiality, fairness, or truthfulness of the arguments for gender equality in the nineteenth century. Brown Blackwell embraced spirituality and religion, while Putnam Jacobi rejected and departed from religion. Despite the differences in belief, both recognized the impact of spirituality. Religion is a central tenet in these women’s narratives, mainly because religion and the societal expectations attached to religion in the United States

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<sup>7</sup> Cazden, Elizabeth. *Antoinette Brown Blackwell, a Biography*. Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Femin/ist Press, 1983, 261.

<sup>8</sup> Perella, Chrissie. “Mary Putnam Jacobi: Still Famous after 150 Years,” Drexel University Legacy Center Archives & Special Collections, (Nov. 2013). <https://drexel.edu/legacy-center/blog/overview/2013/november/mary-putnam-jacobi-still-famous-after-150-years/>.

<sup>9</sup> Women's Medical Association of New York City (N.Y.). *In Memory of Mary Putnam Jacobi: January Four MDCCCXVII*. New York: Academy of Medicine, 1907, 5.

influenced the cult of true womanhood or the push for women's strict adherence to the confines of the domestic sphere. The cult of true womanhood, a term that was defined in the twentieth century<sup>10</sup> but was prominent in the everyday life of the average individual in the nineteenth century, consists of how the general public viewed women and how they expected a 'true woman,' or a perfect, ideal woman by societal standards to act. Some of the expectations of the ideal woman and "the attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues- piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity." As historian Barbara Welter wrote, "Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife- woman."<sup>11</sup> In other words, the ideal woman was obedient to both God and her husband or father, and fulfilled the duties and obligations of mother, wife, or housewife without complaint.

Both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi saw the direct connection of religion and the cult of true womanhood. For example, Putnam Jacobi stated in her work *Woman in Medicine*, "The limitation of sex in each case was decided by a tradition so immense, as to be mistaken for a divinely implanted instinct, intended by Providence as one of the fundamental safeguards of society and of morals."<sup>12</sup> Or, in other words the traditional gender roles were so prominent and all-encompassing that people assumed it to be natural human instinct and divinely assumed, and on the other hand because it was assumed to be instinct and the will of God, the roles became all-encompassing and unmovable.

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase "The cult of true womanhood," sometimes referred to as the "cult of domesticity," was coined by Barbara Welter in 1966 in her journal article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," published in the *American Quarterly*.

<sup>11</sup> Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179>, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobi, Mary Putnam. *Woman in Medicine*, New York: H. Holt & Co., 1891, 140.

Protestant Christianity influenced the cult of true womanhood. The subjugation of women and the promotion of women's submission within Protestantism is often justified by the usage of many passages of the Holy Bible. One of the most significant passages used is in Ephesians: "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands."<sup>13</sup> This passage has often been and sometimes continues to be, used by scholars, ministers, religious leaders, and society at large to prove the acceptability of the subjugation of women and their role within the world and also prove that 'male' was superior to 'female' in the prevailing gender binary. Proponents of traditional gender roles argue that it reflects divine will. This passage was ultimately used to prove the superiority of men and the inferiority of women, and also sometimes the complementarianism of the male and female relationship.

Complementarianism is the idea that men and women have distinct, separate roles: men demonstrating leadership and protector roles within the home and in the world, both as physical and spiritual leaders, and women demonstrating submissiveness and piety while completing their spousal and motherly duties, following the leadership of either their father, husband, or men in general.<sup>14</sup> As Beth Allison Barr discusses in her book, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, complementarianism and the following of western patriarchy have produced a hierarchy that often produces and promotes the systemic abuse and oppression of women.<sup>15</sup>

Complementarianism and the cult of true womanhood was the culture that Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi grew up with and were subjected to for the entirety of their lives, and in their own

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 5:22-24 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>14</sup> Barr, Beth Allison. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*. Ada, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

respective ways were trying to combat. For example, Brown Blackwell addressed this culture in her book *The Sexes Throughout Nature* stating,

“If this discussion should teach women to honor and reverence the natures which God has given them; if it should teach men that there is an eternal basis for the chivalry, the courtesy, with which they are wont to treat women- for which graceful attentions our own countrymen are especially distinguished- if it should teach even the rudest boyhood some discernment of the respect and tenderness which are justly due to their sisters, then women may easily more than forgive Dr. Clarke for his somewhat obtuse perception of the nature of their justly and readily wounded sensibilities.”<sup>16</sup>

Within Brown Blackwell’s book *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, she mainly critiques Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer’s ideas on the differences of the sexes, but within this quote, she critiques Dr. Edward Hammond Clarke, a leading physician in the nineteenth century. She references the argument in his popular and controversial book, *Sex in Education; or, A fair chance for the girls*, which argued that women would not be able to withstand the intellectual demands that education placed on men, and that it would cause women to suffer from nervous disorders and hysteria.<sup>17</sup> Putnam Jacobi also discussed the culture of complementarianism and the cult of true womanhood at length, and one example was when she wrote a letter to her mother, Victorine Haven Putnam. She stated, “All personal virtues receive an undue cultivation, cleanliness and order grow into ends when they cease to be means, modesty degenerates into prudery, the reserve and timidity so charming in a very young girl, instead of passing away with

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<sup>16</sup> *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, 151-152.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, E. H. (Edward Hammond). *Sex in Education: or, A fair chance for the girls*. Boston: J.R. Osgood and Co., 1873.

her natural growth and development, are petrified into a permanent existence after they are of no further use.”<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi understood the social constraints and expectations that were placed onto them, but both had an active dissatisfaction with this culture, and made this dissatisfaction publicly known.

Dissatisfied with the expectations of women perpetuated by Protestantism and the prominent religious culture around them, despite the two’s own religiosity or lack thereof, both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi created a community reminiscent of the salon culture of the Enlightenment era and full of strong homosocial relationships. This community acted as an impetus and encouraging sphere to propagate the goal of bettering and increasing career and leadership opportunities for women by the advocacy of science and healthier medical practices. Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi created this communal, salon-like atmosphere despite the fact that the two women never met, but their similarities caused the creation of these separate but complementary communities.<sup>19</sup>

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Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Mary Putnam Jacobi’s lives have been researched by several historians, especially in the contexts of women’s suffrage and gender equality, the history of science and medicine, and the history of women’s authorship. Elizabeth Cazden and Carla Bittel have written biographies on Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi, respectively: *Antoinette Brown Blackwell, a Biography* and *Mary Putnam Jacobi and the Politics of Medicine in Nineteenth-Century America*. These books were among the first to examine these women’s lives,

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<sup>18</sup> *Letter from Mary Putnam Jacobi to Victorine Haven Putnam, March 25, 1867, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi.*

<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this thesis it is assumed that Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Mary Putnam Jacobi never met because there is no report of them attending the same events and their letters and works never mentioned each other. Though this author concedes that the two women could have potentially known of each other or worked together because of their shared mutual connections.

giving a comprehensive overview of their backgrounds, career, and relationships. There also has been significant research completed on both women in Kimberly Hamlin's *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America*, Beverly Zink-Sawyer's *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, and Susan Wells' *Out of the Dead House: Nineteenth-Century Women Physicians and the Writing of Medicine*. By introducing the importance of Darwinism and its impact on gender roles and later discussing the impact of religion on these considerations, Hamlin argues that the story of "Adam and Eve provided the script, the images, and the template for Western ideas about gender until Darwinian evolutionary theory challenged their very existence and made it possible for women and men to imagine alternative origins and a whole new range of gendered possibilities."<sup>20</sup> Or, in other words, the Adam and Eve story from the Christian Bible dictated the traditional gender roles of pre-nineteenth-century America, but when Charles Darwin wrote both *On the Origin of Species*<sup>21</sup> and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*,<sup>22</sup> it allowed people to think of other possibilities for gender that they had never considered prior. If Darwin's books argued the evolution of humans and other animals, then couldn't the gender roles in place evolve? She argued further that the prominent women of the first wave of feminism, including both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi, were able to dream of more opportunities for their collective gender because of the impact of Charles Darwin.

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<sup>20</sup> Hamlin, Kimberly A. *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *On The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection, or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* by Charles Darwin was published and it argues that the many characteristics, traits, and adaptations of these characteristics that differentiate species from one another also explain how species evolved over time.

<sup>22</sup> *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* by Charles Darwin was published in 1871 and it argues that all lifeforms are subject to the same natural laws, and that humans had evolved, just as other animals and lifeforms had.

Likewise to Hamlin's argument, through the study and comparison of three women and prominent nineteenth-century women religious figures Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Olympia Brown, and Anna Howard Shaw, Zink-Sawyer argues that each woman's "religious convictions were fundamental in shaping their broader efforts to establish equal status for women throughout American society."<sup>23</sup> Without each woman's religiosity and ambitions for ordainment, they would not have had as many public speaking opportunities and, in effect, the driving force of women's rights within these speeches. Finally, Wells focused her book on the role of women's authorship in the nineteenth century and ultimately argued that gender performance played a significant role in women's authorship and women's participation in science and medicine. She argues, "Seeing gender as a performance helps us to appreciate the rhetorical skill of these women physicians and their uses of the slender rhetorical resources available to them."<sup>24</sup> Wells discusses in detail how the lack of presentation of one's own femininity opened many doors for women writers and allowed them access to male-dominated spheres.

Though there is significant scholarship that argues similar themes and motives as this thesis soon will highlight, this thesis adds to the scholarship and larger fields of the history of medicine and science, the history of religion, intellectual history, and the history of gender and sexuality by conducting a micro-history and social history of these two historical women. By comparing Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's lives and careers, this thesis will examine each woman's background and religiosity and conclude that despite the differences in each woman's relationship with spirituality, the cult of true womanhood and the rules of the domestic sphere led

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<sup>23</sup> Annus, Iren E., review of *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, by Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *Nova Religio* (2009) 13 (1): 124-125

<sup>24</sup> Wells, Susan. *Out of the Dead House: Nineteenth-century Women Physicians and the Writing of Medicine*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001, 6.

both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi to seek objectivity through the advocacy of women's health and the promotion of gender equality.

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To understand Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's road to objectivity, it is crucial first to explore both women's backgrounds and careers. Antoinette Brown Blackwell was born in 1825 to Abigail Morse Brown and Joseph Brown, who were farmers in a rural area near Rochester, New York.<sup>25</sup> The Brown family followed traditional gender roles of the period. As she was growing up, the women in her family "spent most of the day, cooking, washing, weaving, sewing, [or] preserving food" while the men of the family were outside taking care of the livestock and crops.<sup>26</sup> Despite the traditional roles implemented within the home, Brown Blackwell's family encouraged education for Antoinette and her siblings, allowing her to attend school, where she learned how to read and began her increased interest in writing.<sup>27</sup> This decision was popular at the time since young New England women's literacy rate gradually rose from 1780 to 1830.<sup>28</sup>

Brown Blackwell was also very interested in religion as a child despite her family, other than her grandmother, not being that religious in her childhood. Her family thought religion was something that should be an "internal conversion experience [that] would take place in a time and manner determined wholly by God, without any initiative on his (sic) part."<sup>29</sup> Brown Blackwell was introduced to Christianity by her grandmother, but the individualistic relationship with God that her family believed in ultimately impacted Brown Blackwell's faith and her later

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<sup>25</sup> Cazden, 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Perlmann, Joel, and Dennis Shirley. "When Did New England Women Acquire Literacy?" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1991): 50-67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2937997>, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Cazden, 8.

preaching style.<sup>30</sup> Though her family believed in a more hands-off faith during her childhood, Charles Grandison Finney, a very popular self-taught preacher in New York, largely influenced Brown Blackwell and her later teaching as well.<sup>31</sup> Finney preached that “each person had a duty to work actively for personal conversion. For Finney, this meant not just a single flash of salvation, but the beginning of a life of commitment to God and to working toward a more perfect society.”<sup>32</sup> This active work for personal conversion, especially, impacted Brown Blackwell.

She later preached the importance of one’s own accountability to work for a stronger relationship with God. Brown Blackwell’s church also influenced her religious beliefs, teachings, and writings. As Brown Blackwell grew up, the Brown family started attending the Henrietta Church, a Liberal Congregationalist church.<sup>33</sup> Liberal Congregationalists preached that God was merciful, forgiving, and friendly and emphasized the goodness in humans.<sup>34</sup> This preaching is very different from the common counterpart of the era, orthodox Christianity,<sup>35</sup> preaching that God would condemn any human to eternal punishment if they ever disobeyed His will and that humans were “sinful, depraved, and utterly helpless before a distant and powerful God.”<sup>36</sup> Due to her Liberal Congregationalist background, she wrote about the goodness of humans and argued that this goodness would correlate to the passage of amendments and reforms for gender equality.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>35</sup> The term orthodox Christianity used here is not to be confused with or associated with Orthodox Christianity or the Orthodox Church. The term referenced here refers to a type of Protestant Christianity incredibly prominent in the American northeast in the nineteenth century with a more conservative and Calvinistic approach to divine teaching.

<sup>36</sup> Cazden, 9.

After Brown Blackwell completed her secondary education, she resolved that she wanted to be a minister, which was incredibly ambitious because no woman had ever been formally ordained as a Protestant priest or minister in the United States. Female preaching was often characterized as “un-Christian and unladylike.”<sup>37</sup> Female preaching, and at times women’s teaching within the church in general, was seen as a threat, unless to children or other women. As discussed previously, the epitome ideal religious woman was supposed to be submissive, passive, docile, and soft-spoken, which are all attributes that did not correlate to female leadership or female preaching. So, in other words, some people viewed female preaching as a threat to Protestant Christian values and viewed the women who desired this career path as misguided and immoral. Despite intense opposition from her community and her family’s mixed feelings, partly because of their ideas that she should pursue other professional goals and partly due to the sudden death of four of her siblings, in the spring of 1846 Brown Blackwell chose to attend Oberlin Collegiate Institute, which was well-known for both its anti-slavery sentiments and the fact that it allowed women to study with men at the collegiate level.<sup>38</sup>

While at Oberlin, Brown Blackwell met Lucy Stone, who would become her close companion and a critical figure throughout the entirety of her life. Brown Blackwell and Stone often had different opinions on various topics, but especially religion. While Brown Blackwell was incredibly pious, Stone viewed religion and organized Christianity as oppressive. She even warned Brown Blackwell, “that wall of bible, brimstone, church and corruption, which has hitherto buried women into nothingness.”<sup>39</sup> In Stone’s opinion, religion was a parasite for women and only acted as a tool for women’s subjugation. Despite their different opinions on

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 45.

religion, politics, and social issues, their relationship was incredibly close, so much so that Brown Blackwell wrote, “I loved you Lucy as I seldom loved any human being and as I much fear I shall never love another” in one letter and in another “I have wished you were here a dozen times a dozen times...Oh Lucy I wish I could see you only one hour.”<sup>40</sup> For many women who broke traditional domestic and genteel norms, it was common to stick close with like-minded women and build a close community with each other. As with Stone and Brown Blackwell, many relationships between like-minded women bordered on the homoerotic. Other than Lucy Stone, Brown Blackwell also formed close homosocial relationships with Sarah Pellet, a woman who became a well-known public speaker; Sallie Holley, a devout Unitarian and abolitionist crusader; and Lettice Smith, a theology scholar.

The religious influence of the cult of true womanhood and the domestic expectations did not go away when Brown Blackwell went to Oberlin. Oberlin taught their male students how to write and speak well. Women, on the other hand, only learned how to write well. Their reasoning behind this exclusion was the biblical words of Paul: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness.”<sup>41</sup> This submissiveness was promoted by faculty, staff, and students at Oberlin, but one of the most prominent promoters of this culture was the Oberlin Ladies Board. The Oberlin Ladies Board, “an official group of faculty wives who watched over both the academic progress and the personal development of the female students” in the name of morality and traditional Christian values, were firmly against Brown Blackwell and every other woman at Oberlin who was conducting themselves in an “unladylike” or “secular” way, and vehemently opposed the public speaking and writing groups formed by Brown Blackwell and Lucy Stone.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 28.

Alongside her education and forming of these various writing and public speaking groups, Brown Blackwell pursued teaching during her collegiate career, where she obtained her first authentic public speaking experience.<sup>43</sup> In the summer of 1847, Brown Blackwell obtained her literary diploma and began to study theology, intending to be an ordained parish minister by the following September.<sup>44</sup> Since Oberlin did not allow women to obtain formal admission to the Theological Department, Brown Blackwell was listed instead as a “resident graduate pursuing the theological course” in the Young Ladies Department.<sup>45</sup>

During her time as a theology student, Brown Blackwell began her formal advocacy for gender equality through religion and began her path towards strategically pursuing objectivity. Brown Blackwell wrote a paper, eventually published by the *Oberlin Quarterly Review*, arguing that the apostle Paul of the Christian Bible “had been twisted by later generations to serve a purpose the apostle did not intend.”<sup>46</sup> As Elizabeth Cazden remarks, “She took the position that Paul meant only to warn against ‘excesses, irregularities, and unwarrantable liberties in public worship.’”<sup>47</sup> Brown Blackwell also became increasingly more involved in the women’s rights movement, attending the National Woman’s Rights Convention and the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. At the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, Brown Blackwell even amended her Oberlin-published paper into a speech “refuting the Biblical argument that women should not speak in public.”<sup>48</sup> Brown Blackwell graduated from Oberlin in 1850, in which the school did not list her as a theological graduate until 1908, and she then started to pursue a professional career as a religious minister turned scientific writer and activist.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 57.

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Mary Putnam Jacobi was born in 1842 to George Palmer Putnam and Victorine Haven Putnam in London, United Kingdom. However, her family spent most of her childhood and adolescence in New York.<sup>49</sup> While Brown Blackwell came from a family of rural farmers, the Putnam family was wealthy, influential, and known on both sides of the Atlantic. Several Putnam ancestors were prominent in the Massachusetts colony in the late seventeenth century, including during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, where they were among the most active and fervent accusers. In the nineteenth century, George Palmer Putnam, Putnam Jacobi's father, was one of New York's leading publishers at the time, and several Putnam relatives were active both as writers and critical figures in the publishing industry. Many of the period's most influential male and female writers often frequented the Putnam family home.<sup>50</sup> Since Putnam Jacobi grew up with influential writers in her home regularly, she became incredibly interested in writing. She even was able to publish her writing from a young age, a feat that was difficult for any woman during this period, let alone a 14-year-old.<sup>51</sup> Though she wrote short stories, she most enjoyed writing about science and medicine.<sup>52</sup>

Her family's evangelical background and strong religious influence did not stop Putnam Jacobi's dissatisfaction with the Christian faith. When she was 12, she wrote to her grandmother:

“The influence of the books wore off after a time, and I relapsed into careless, sinful habits. For the books, though perhaps the right things for me, struck at the

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<sup>49</sup> Bittel, Carla Jean. *Mary Putnam Jacobi & the Politics of Medicine in Nineteenth-century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Bittel, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Bittel, 3-4

<sup>52</sup> Bittel, 3-4.

flowers, not at the root. They made me fear damnation, but not love Heaven, nor Christ, nor seek salvation through him.”<sup>53</sup>

Though Putnam Jacobi initially tried to have faith in Protestant Christianity, after reading the Bible and other books on religion, she realized that only fear drove her to continue her belief. In response to this, Putnam Jacobi ran her own experiments for the proof of Christianity. When she found her results did not prove the existence of a divine being, she rejected religion altogether.<sup>54</sup> Her continuing dissatisfaction with Christianity led her to have an experience she titled the “conversion experience” when she was 20. She officially made science her religion and would devoutly be committed to and devote her life to science rather than any divine being, stating to the leader of her church, Reverend Dr. Anderson,

“I have waited as you requested me to do, and as I had done before I spoke to you, to fairly test whether my growing disbelief, or, to speak more truly, the growth of this opposite belief, were the result of a temporary impulse or influence, but as each day finds me freshly confirmed in these views, I can see no reason for delaying longer the final step of separation from the church.”<sup>55</sup>

At this point, Putnam Jacobi completely rejected all religion and only believed in scientific, factual proofs. Putnam Jacobi’s “conversion experience” ultimately “challenged what it meant to be a woman in nineteenth-century America. She was not alone. Interested in social reform and feminist causes, other women began to challenge the traditional authority of the church and express disagreement with women’s place in the social hierarchy.”<sup>56</sup> Her rejection of religion

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<sup>53</sup> *Letter from Mary Putnam Jacobi to Catherine Palmer Putnam, October, 1854, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Letter from Mary Putnam Jacobi, April 19, 1863, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi.*

<sup>56</sup> Bittel, 15.

epitomized the rejection of social norms, which was an increasing trend in the nineteenth century.

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Before discussing Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's path to objectivity, it is essential to contextualize the importance of the pursuit of the absolute during this period, which was not singular or unique to only the two characters of this thesis. Why prove the objectiveness of gender equality? What does that solve? More significantly, where did these women get the idea of using objectivity to their advantage? During the nineteenth century, many American writers and thinkers were heavily influenced by Immanuel Kant and other key writers of the Enlightenment era, and the ideologies of empiricism,<sup>57</sup> determinism,<sup>58</sup> positivism,<sup>59</sup> rationalism,<sup>60</sup> and mysticism continued to show up within the writings of contemporaries.<sup>61</sup> Also, certain political ideologies became more popular in nineteenth-century writing. These ideologies and political proclivities influenced how both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi wrote and how they decided what would most convince their audiences. For example, Putnam Jacobi was an avid Socialist and wrote extensively about her support for the political movement. For example, in one letter to her father, George Palmer Putnam, she stated, "Socialism, or at least French Socialism, has very little to do with religious ideas, being too conclusively concentrated upon others that have hitherto been neglected. It is the hour for Socialism at this moment, but I

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<sup>57</sup> Empiricism is the theory that human knowledge comes mainly from experiences derived from the five senses or, specifically, sensory experience.

<sup>58</sup> Determinism is the theory that all events and human action are ultimately determined by causes external to the will and by preceding events or natural laws.

<sup>59</sup> Positivism is the theory that laws are to be understood as social rules, put in force by authoritative figures or obtained logically from existing phenomena. With this understanding, it means that ideal or moral consideration should not restrict the scope of social rules.

<sup>60</sup> Rationalism is the theory that opinions and actions should be based on reason, logic, or knowledge rather than emotion or spirituality.

<sup>61</sup> Mysticism is the belief that through contemplation and self-surrender, one may gain union with God or other Deities, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect.

should be sorry to believe that that hour last forever.”<sup>62</sup> Putnam Jacobi’s socialist beliefs make sense. She had rejected religion and all the mysticism ideology offered within her life, so it is not shocking that she was drawn to the rationalistic ideology of socialism.

Ultimately, the objectivity Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi seek is a reaction to the nineteenth century’s different ideologies and political ideas. There are some ideologies and political thoughts that both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi strongly opposed, while there are others that they accepted completely. The importance of this fact is that no matter what their opinion of the ideology was, they had a reaction to it and felt it was important to respond to the philosophies of the period. One example is when Putnam Jacobi discussed her opinions on Rousseau, Voltaire, and Comte, writing to her mother her vehement disagreement and disapproval of Rousseau, “He is a man that at present I do not pretend to understand, but the greater part that I know about him, I do not like. He had a certain sentimental unhealthiness of constitution that is particularly distasteful to me.”<sup>63</sup> She then highlighted the importance of her addressing her thoughts on these theorists, that as a woman if she were to disagree with certain ideologies, her mental state and her lucidity were questioned, which points to her quest for her own defined way of objectivity throughout her professional career. She stated, “As to doubts and taking things on trust, there are certainly enough things that one must take on trust, but it is necessary to be driven to them, not to manufacture platforms when one can stand on solid ground. It is queer when you have such a clear idea of my moral constitution, that you so often mistake my mental.”<sup>64</sup> Both Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi sought objectivity but used the

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<sup>62</sup> *Letter from Mary Putnam Jacobi to George Palmer Putnam, November 12, 1868, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi.*

<sup>63</sup> *Letter from Mary Putnam Jacobi to Victorine Haven Putnam, December 09, 1866, Life and Letters of Mary Putnam Jacobi.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

different ideologies of the period to prove their writings in their professional career. Due to her significant focus on her own piety, Brown Blackwell was deeply influenced and was a proponent of the mysticism ideology. Putnam Jacobi, on the other hand, was more influenced by the rationalism ideology.

Immanuel Kant also played a significant role in the general thinking of the period and the influence of the idea of seeking objectivity. Kantian philosophy consists mainly of ideas from his three Critiques: the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In these Critiques, Kant “argues that the human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structure all our experience; and that human reason gives itself the moral law, which is our basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality. Therefore, scientific knowledge, morality, and religious belief are mutually consistent and secure because they all rest on the same foundation of human autonomy.”<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, in other words, Kant argued that the understanding of epistemology itself allows the validity of the passage of the moral laws of religion, freedom, or immortality because both epistemology and morality are interconnected.

This theory allowed many thinkers of the period to formulate their own theories about epistemology and the proving of objectivity. As a result, the quest for objectivity became ever-prominent. This prominence can be seen in the writings of Edouard Récéjac, French author, thinker, and doctor of letters, when he wrote:

“if it be that Mysticism is only obstinate persistence to know the unknowable, we shall have to accept the first conclusion. The pursuit of the impossible perverts our faculties and makes them unfit for their natural use. But, should Mysticism

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<sup>65</sup> Rohlf, Michael, "Immanuel Kant," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/kant/>.

prove to be an experience distinct from what we understand by the word  
 ‘knowing,’ it would be worth our while to inquire if something new is introduced  
 into the consciousness, and in what ways.”<sup>66</sup>

Though Récéjac was not a popular or significant writer of the nineteenth century, his contribution is important. His writing signifies how pervasive the ideologies of mysticism and objectivity had become during the period, gaining agreement within the academic community. Récéjac’s call for the pursuit of knowing symbolizes how influential this idea truly was and the importance for Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi to address it during their writings.

Récéjac is not the only example of the broader academic community vying for the pursuit of knowledge. Theosophist Carl Henrik Andreas Bjerregaard also discussed mysticism and its relationship with nature and religion, writing:

“You are all perfectly familiar with those first forms, - Matter, Spirit, and Soul. You all know the tree forms of Matter, Solid, Fluent, and Gaseous, and also those of the Spirit, Knowing and Willing and Loving, and also those of the Soul, Vegetable, Animal and Human. Each one of those has a fourth one, with which you are somewhat familiar, although not consciously.”<sup>67</sup>

He continues, “the seeing of all that is not the seeing of the eyes, or the brain, but is the seeing of your heart. The heart-life has an intellectual side, and that is the side you want to develop; in it is the true mystical life, or as I also call it, the personal or the human life; it centers there; and that is this fourth world we are so anxious to enter.”<sup>68</sup> In Bjerregaard’s work, he explains that the pursuit of knowledge does not just come from seeing the proof, but one also has to believe that

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<sup>66</sup> Récéjac, Edouard, and Sara Carr Upton. *Essay On the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Bjerregaard, Carl Henrik Andreas. *Lectures On Mysticism and Nature Worship*. Chicago: M.R. Kent, 1897, 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

proof within their heart for it to be objective. This idea is interesting when we compare it to Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's ideas. Both women are arguing for blind-sighted, undisputed objectivity of gender equality and that gender equality is to be believed not just because of scientific theory but for it to be an undisputed truth. Bjerregaard's idea is important because it shows the prominence of the quest for blind-sighted objectivity because, like Récéjac, he was not a prominent or significant writer of the nineteenth century. Participants of the academic community at large, Récéjac and Bjerregaard's writings give a better glimpse of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's motives for seeking this objectivity.

Another prominent thinker that must be discussed that had a special influence on Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi and nineteenth-century culture more generally was Charles Darwin. Two of the most notable works of Darwin were *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Both works were incredibly popular and sparked discussion in scientific and religious spheres. One potential reason for Darwin's popularity is his mentioning and use of Kantian philosophy in his works; Darwin mentioned Kant directly in *The Descent of Man*. Darwin's works were published in an environment that was "strongly influenced by the pre-existent philosophical traditions of Kant...these factors formed a complex political and philosophical environment into which Darwin's developmental view of nature and theory of the transformation of species was quickly assimilated."<sup>69</sup> After Darwin publicized his books, the academic and religious communities influenced by Kant and the other prominent theorists of the period tried to use Darwin's arguments regarding animals in human society. They tried to fit Darwin's arguments into a Kantian framework. So Darwin did address

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<sup>69</sup> Sloan, Phillip, "Darwin: From Origin of Species to Descent of Man," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/origin-descent/>.

his own theories of naturalistic epistemology, and “classical epistemology thus cannot be subsumed in naturalistic epistemology: but the two can perhaps be seen as having a detailed complementarity. This complementarity can perhaps best be described in terms of an evolutionarily-informed psychoneural identity theory.”<sup>70</sup> With the Kantian application of Darwinian ideas, like ‘survival of the fittest’ or descent with modification, the rise of Social Darwinism<sup>71</sup> and Muscular Christianity<sup>72</sup> became ideas that grew in popularity and were two ideas that were actively used to subjugate women and other minority groups during the nineteenth century. The rise of Social Darwinism and Muscular Christianity were two of the

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<sup>70</sup> C.U.M. Smith, “Kant and Darwin,” *Journal of Social and Biological Structures*, Volume 14, Issue 1, 1991. 47, ISSN 0140-1750. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750\(91\)90023-J](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750(91)90023-J).

<sup>71</sup> Social Darwinism was a movement used by conservatives and liberals in nineteenth-century America. In a basic definition, Social Darwinism describes the movement of people using Charles Darwin’s theories about the evolution of life forms to explain trends in social and economic life. People assigned class, wealth, health, race, and sex as defining characteristics of the people who were ‘the fittest’ and the unfit to survive. This movement had a propensity to assign idleness, criminality, sexual misbehavior, and alcoholism as hereditary traits, leading to conservatives of the time arguing against efforts for poor relief because they believed that it would destroy the work ethic and would continue the ‘flawed’ hereditary onto the next generation. Liberals of the era believed that humans could foster evolutionary progress, so more access to education, good nutrition, and healthy living conditions could eliminate or lessen the ‘flawed’ hereditary traits onto the next generation. Though there were different methods for conservatives and liberals who believed in Social Darwinism, they ultimately shared the same goal: restricting the traits seen as unfit or flawed to moving on to the next generation.

Hall, P.D. (n.d.). *Social Darwinism and the Poor*. Social Welfare History Project. Retrieved from <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issues/social-darwinism-poor/>

<sup>72</sup> Muscular Christianity is the idea that connects religion with physical fitness and health. The main idea of Muscular Christianity within the nineteenth century was that participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and ‘manly’ character. Heavily influenced by the Christian Socialist movement, the idea that godliness was compatible with manliness became more popular. If manliness was associated with godliness, then effeminacy became equated with secularity. Muscular Christianity can be traced back to the New Testament of the Christian Bible, where St. Paul and others used athletic metaphors to help describe the challenges of the Christian life and the belief that a man’s body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes. As this idea became more prominent in the United States, proponents of Muscular Christianity used Social Darwinism to validate their beliefs. If one was classified as ‘unfit’ within the standards of Social Darwinism, they were less godly. For example, if a person was a lower class, non-white, cis-gendered woman or non-cis gendered person, or if they had any other identifying factors that were classified as ‘unfit,’ that person was automatically classified as less godly.

Watson, Nick J., Weir, Stuart and Friend, Stephen. *The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond*. *Journal of religion and Society*, (2005), 7.

ideas that contributed to Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi to seek the objectivity of sex egalitarianism in their professional careers.

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Understanding Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's background and the ideological climate these women lived and interacted in leads to a broader discussion of Protestant Christianity and its impact. It is important to contextualize how religion and the culture surrounding religion impacted women's actions, in particular, and emphasize how groundbreaking it was for Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi to depart from these norms. Like the ideological and political theories of the Enlightenment era, Protestant Christianity and religious fervor also were pervasive during this period. For example, hundreds of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers formed churches and religious communities in upstate New York, and "by 1824 half the Presbyterian clergy for the entire nation lived in New York state."<sup>73</sup> Due to the prevalence of religious culture, it was imperative for characters of the period to consider religion when discussing political, social, or economic reform. So, Protestantism, especially during the nineteenth century, was often sparked as an impetus for social reform. Alternatively, in other words, congregationalism and the growth of religious awakening gave birth to the rise of abolitionist and gender politics. The prevalence of religion and its use in social reform shows the motives of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's considerations of religion within their own texts. As with political or moral ideologies, Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi reacted to Protestantism, Brown Blackwell being a firm believer while Putnam Jacobi being an atheist, and they used their religious responses to help prove the truthfulness and validity of their own writings.

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<sup>73</sup> Cazden, 7.

Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi are not the only people who used religion as a tool to prove their arguments. During this period, many activists used Protestantism and the idea of the divine will as a spearhead for the temperance movement, campaigns against prostitution, abolitionism, and gender equality.<sup>74</sup> One example of contemporaries using religion to prove their arguments are proponents of abolitionism. For example, Absalom Jones and many other supporters of abolitionism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used the story in the Bible of God's people leaving captivity and bondage in Egypt, and they compared the captives of Egypt to the enslaved people of the American South to prove the abhorrence of slavery.<sup>75</sup> If captives of Egypt were saved and released from bondage, why couldn't enslaved people in the United States? Using biblical means for social and moral reform is best exemplified within William L. Andrews's book *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, when it stated, "Before the fugitive slave narrator could hope for success in restoring political and economic freedom to American blacks, the black spiritual autobiographer had to lay the necessary intellectual groundwork by proving that black people were as much chosen by God for eternal salvation as white."<sup>76</sup> In order for black individuals to achieve the goal of political and economic freedom, they first had to appeal to the religious culture around them predicated on white individuals in power. If they proved that they were also God's people, the white individuals in power would be more apt to make a legal change. This idea is not singular to the abolitionist movement. This method of activism was seen within the women's rights

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, Absalom, and Michael Fortune. *A Thanksgiving Sermon, preached January 1, 1808, in St. Thomas's, or the African Episcopal, Church, Philadelphia: On Account of the Abolition of the African slave trade, on that day, by the Congress of the United States*. Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1808.

<sup>76</sup> Andrews, William L., Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1986, 1.

movement as well, especially in consideration of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi's writings.

Most of the activists within these various nineteenth-century social movements were predominately female. One potential reason that many women may have turned to religion was that they felt they could have a voice through religiosity. From approximately 1760 to 1830, Great Britain, Europe, and the United States faced the Industrial Revolution. The influx of technical innovations brought significant inventions such as the steam engine, cotton gin, and spinning mule.<sup>77</sup> This surge of technical advances "not only brought economic rewards but also provoked greater intellectual ingenuity" during the nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup> In response to the Industrial Revolution, as more machines, factories, and mills were replacing the domestic jobs that many women had prided themselves on faster and more effectively, many women faced an identity crisis feeling a loss of purpose.<sup>79</sup> Within the church, women had power. They could organize social reform campaigns and participate in different organizations that represented their values. Religion provided women with a voice and agency, but it also had another important role.

Religion and the traditional values of domesticity provided emotional relief for many women. Religiosity "provided some women comfort, security, and a sense of value in their communities. But for other women, religion was confining and limiting, especially when they struggled with the notion of conversion."<sup>80</sup> While some women used the rites of religion as an impetus for their own autonomy and power, sometimes making matriarchal positions for themselves within the church and using these roles to impact social and moral change, other

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<sup>77</sup> MacLeod, Christine. "Patents for Invention: Setting the Stage for the British Industrial Revolution?," *Empiria Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, (Oct. 2009). doi: 10.5944/empiria.18.2009.1999.

<sup>78</sup> Ashton, T. S. "The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830," Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1997, [https://archive.org/details/industrialrevolu00asht\\_0](https://archive.org/details/industrialrevolu00asht_0).

<sup>79</sup> Cazden, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Bittel, 15.

women despised the traditional roles of religion. They distanced themselves away from religion to build their own autonomy and used other non-spiritual tactics to obtain social and moral reform. To put it more simply, the culture of the cult of true womanhood, caused by the expectations and prominence of Protestant Christianity in nineteenth-century America, created two, not all-encompassing, archetypes of female social reformers. One could either be, what this author terms, the pious apologist or the unvarying secularist.

The pious apologist is a firm believer in religion and spirituality. Like the proponents of abolitionism that used the Exodus story, the pious apologist tries to demonstrate scientific or secular objectivity or truth through biblical texts and religious ideas. They try to implement new progressive ideas onto the public by appeasing the religious culture around them and are often actively a part of and proponent of that religious culture. Brown Blackwell would fit the definition of the pious apologist since she was a religious minister turned scientific writer. She used religious ideas and religious thinking to prove her arguments in her writings.

On the other hand, the unvarying secularist is against religion and its propagated culture. They try to distance themselves from religion and only focus on rationalistic, empirical thinking to prove their arguments. Sometimes, they even go as far as rebuff spirituality within their writings. Mary Putnam Jacobi fits the description of the unvarying secularist. As a self-defined atheist, Putnam Jacobi devoted her life to rational, secular thinking and often deplored the use of religion and religious meaning in proving scientific arguments. Despite people's personal views on religion within the nineteenth century, one could not deny the significant effect and influence it had on culture and the perceptions of the period. Like the sociological and political ideologies, Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi had to discuss spirituality's role or non-role within their arguments for gender equality for their contemporaries to accept their argument of objectivity.

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Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi created a community of fellow, like-minded women who were adept at writing and public speaking to promote the cause of gender equality. This community is like many during this period and in the Enlightenment era, otherwise defined as salon culture. Salon culture is a form of interaction that became most popularized within the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is when “friendship between persons with similar ways of thinking and feeling was cultivated and in which literary works and letters were read and discussed.”<sup>81</sup> It is a space where people exchange ideas and often symbolizes intellectual and social freedom for its participants.<sup>82</sup>

Brown Blackwell was not formally introduced to salon culture until adulthood, but Putnam Jacobi was raised within it. Putnam Jacobi’s father, George Palmer Putnam, owned one of the largest publishing houses within the nineteenth century, so while she was growing up, she was surrounded by key writers of the period and was encouraged to write and think freely.<sup>83</sup> Putnam Jacobi’s connection to publishing also introduced her to many other writers, especially women writers. Through those connections, she could share her ideas freely and join in intellectual discourse with academic and non-academic writers about social reform and issues of morality.<sup>84</sup> During her educational career, Putnam Jacobi also formed close relationships with Marie Zakrzewska and Elizabeth Blackwell, fellow female physicians and thinkers alongside Putnam Jacobi, which helped her gain perspective on her own intellectual development.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Deiulio, Laura, and John B. Lyon. *Gender, Collaboration, and Authorship in German Culture: Literary Joint Ventures, 1750–1850*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501351037.ch-001>, 64

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Bittel, 2-4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>85</sup> Wells, 3-4.

Though Brown Blackwell was not as engrossed in salon culture from a young age as Putnam Jacobi did, during her days at Oberlin Collegiate Institute and beyond, Brown Blackwell recognized the importance of a community of authorship and intellectualism. She stated, “my chosen public, is that already large and now rapidly-growing class of intelligent, independent, inquiring, and possibly half skeptical minds- some of whom are among my personal acquaintances and friends- who know something of science; being ready to turn a quick ear if she would but speak with unquestionable authority; but who, in the rush and hurry of active life and its duties, find only time to keenly appreciate the scientific discredit which has been brought latterly upon the subject of continuous personal life.”<sup>86</sup> Brown Blackwell was determined to build a community of fellow people who were intelligent and held the same skepticism for the traditional norms as she did. Throughout her career, Brown Blackwell was known to have built strong connections with Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony.

Throughout their careers, Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi became significant figures in the suffrage and women’s rights movement in the early nineteenth century. Their influence would not have been as noteworthy if they were not immersed in the period’s salon culture. Ultimately, the writings and the connections of these women help better the understanding of the intersections of the relationship between women, science, gender, and knowledge of the nineteenth century.<sup>87</sup>

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After providing a framework of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi’s lives and the political and social backdrop of the period, it leads to the question: what were the specific

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<sup>86</sup> Blackwell, Antoinette Louisa Brown. *The Physical Basis of Immortality*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1876, 17-18.

<sup>87</sup> Wells, 5.

aspects that these women were writing? How, specifically, are they writing for objectivity? Similarly, how are they arguing for gender equality? One of the first important aspects of each woman's writings is that Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi directly addressed the question of objectivity in their writings and why they felt it was important to pursue scientific truth. For example, in her book, *The Philosophy of Individuality, or the One and the Many*, Brown Blackwell stated,

“Truth like daylight is presented to every eye; but all truth is not like daylight- so obtrusive that every open eye is flooded with it unsought. The daylight shows us visible bodies; but truth is hidden largely within the visible, and whoever would find much of it must penetrate a long way beneath the surface of things.”<sup>88</sup>

In this text, she states that though the truth is presented to everyone similarly, just as daylight is presented to everyone, some truths are more challenging for some to see, like when the bright daylight obstructs one's view. Recognizing that some people have difficulty finding the truth in something visible, she claimed that one must recognize that fact and venture out and find the truth for oneself. This idea demonstrates the efforts that Brown Blackwell thought were necessary to prove truths within the world and the importance she placed on these proofs. Brown Blackwell continued to write on objectivity by stating that the search after truth itself was its own reward, even if it was successful in finding it or not.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Blackwell, Antoinette Louisa Brown. *The Philosophy of Individuality, Or, The One and the Many*. New York: Putnam & Sons, 1893, 1.

<sup>89</sup> *The Physical Basis of Immortality*, 20.

Putnam Jacobi also addressed the importance of pursuing the absolute in her writings.

Putnam Jacobi highlighted the importance of epistemology in her book *Infant Diet*, a handbook for mothers to teach them about safe nutritional practices for their children.<sup>90</sup> She stated,

“As scientists we should continue to study her processes and try to comprehend her laws; but then we should feel as little necessity for modifying the one or the other, as for changing the orbit of the planets, or the path of the earth around the sun. We agree, at all events, to consider perfect such parts of the universe as lie entirely beyond our control; and even when this agreement is purely conventional, it at least secures resignation to the inevitable.”<sup>91</sup>

In this argument, Putnam Jacobi explains that as a scientist, one should have the urge to learn more about the world and the universe that one inhabits: that a scientist’s true ambition should be to grow their knowledge and demonstrate that growth to the public.

Both women demonstrate that urge in their writings. They demonstrate the drive for objective, scientific truth and, in doing so, push for the advocacy of gender equality. For example, in *Infant Diet*, Putnam Jacobi wrote about the treatises on the diet, physiology, or pathology of infants or children and tried to dispel preconceived misconceptions about the correct nutrition for newborns or infants.<sup>92</sup> Though one, at first glance, could take this book as a straightforward informational handbook for expectant and new mothers, Putnam Jacobi coincides with arguments for sex egalitarianism and the promotion of female education. She wrote, “but what is told should be the same in kind as what is told to the scholar. Few women seem to be aware of the insult implied in the assertion ‘that the theory is of no importance to

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<sup>90</sup> Jacobi, Abraham, and Mary Putnam Jacobi. *Infant Diet*. Rev., enl. and adapted to popular use: by Mary Putnam Jacobi, M.D. New York: Putnam, 1874.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

them.”<sup>93</sup> In this quote, she states that she wrote this book with scientific and layman terms for women to gain knowledge and, in effect, the autonomy of their own and their children’s bodies and lives. She argues that female ignorance is detrimental and even deadly and that the allowance of female education promotes healthy physicality and mentality.

*Infant Diet* is not the only work where Putnam Jacobi argues for equality. In her work, *On the Use of the Cold Pack Followed By Massage in the Treatment of Anaemia*, she critiques Silas Weir Mitchell’s<sup>94</sup> treatment of women with hysteria and claims that he thought too narrow-mindedly.<sup>95</sup> She claimed that the considerations and arguments made by Weir Mitchell entirely overlooked scientific accuracy and instead focused on rough, practical results that did not fit every situation.<sup>96</sup> Through that work, she wrote about eleven case studies she conducted that argue the invalidity of Weir-Mitchell’s claim that women’s assumed passive nature made them more prone to neuralgic disorders, and that bed-rest would be the accurate cure.<sup>97</sup> This critique of Weir-Mitchell’s claim opened the conversation for the historical and present scientific community to consider if women’s bodies were being accurately treated and drove the increase in research. It allowed the opening of discussion of different treatment methods for women,

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>94</sup> Silas Weir Mitchell was a popular physician in the nineteenth century and is most notably known for his work on hysteria and his creation of the Weir Mitchell Treatment. This rest cure included binge feeding, systematic massaging, and the use of electrical shock. Putnam Jacobi, in *On the Use of the Cold Pack Followed By Massage in the Treatment of Anaemia*, is commenting on Weir Mitchell’s book, *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them*, which argued the nutrition benefits of massage treatment for anemic patients and also the causes of neuralgic disorders, especially gendered disorders such as hysteria or melancholia.

Mitchell, Silas Weir. *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1877.

<sup>95</sup> Jacobi, Mary Putnam, and Victoria A. White. *On the Use of the Cold Pack Followed By Massage in the Treatment of Anaemia*. New York: Putnam, 1880.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

which eventually, over time, led to the banning of cruel and inhumane methods or treatment for neuralgic disorders in the United States, such as female genital mutilation or water treatment.<sup>98</sup>

The push for sex egalitarianism was also ever-present in the non-suspecting writings of Brown Blackwell. For example, in her book, *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, Brown Blackwell conducted an in-depth study of various plants and animals' evolution and communal relations.<sup>99</sup> This book acted as a direct response and critique of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer's ideas on evolution and the growing impact of Social Darwinism.<sup>100</sup> Addressing Darwin and Spencer directly, Brown Blackwell stated, "it is the central theory of the present volume that the sexes in each species of beings compared upon the same plane, from the lowest to the highest, are always true equivalents- equals but not identicals in development and in relative amounts of all normal force. This is an hypothesis which must be decided upon the simple basis of fact."<sup>101</sup> She claimed that though this was the leading hypothesis, Darwin and Spencer failed to prove the argument's validity and that they drew from inferences rather than tested data.<sup>102</sup> So in effect, she conducted her own study. Within this book, she promoted the authority of women and women's own ideas on their bodies and rights. She claimed that women should be the ones studying and drawing conclusions about the complexity of womanhood.<sup>103</sup> For example, she stated, "Whatever else women may not venture to study and explain with authority, on this topic they are more than the peers of the wisest men in Christendom. Experience may have more weight than any amount of outside observation. We are clearly entitled, on this subject to a respectful hearing."<sup>104</sup> Through

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<sup>98</sup> Tasca, Cecilia, et al. "Women and hysteria in the history of mental health." *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health : CP & EMH* vol. 8 (2012): 110-9. doi:10.2174/1745017901208010110

<sup>99</sup> *The Sexes Throughout Nature*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

the conclusion of her book, she combatted Social Darwinist's arguments and concluded that it was unnatural for women to be confined to the domestic sphere because female domesticity was not present in the animal kingdom.<sup>105</sup>

In her book *The Physical Basis of Immortality*, Brown Blackwell also addressed gender inequality propagated by religion. She states, "but if the foundations of religious belief are to be shaken ever so slightly in the name of Science, then the first work of Science must be to search diligently for other foundation which are laid firmly in the unchanging Constitution of Nature."<sup>106</sup> In stating this idea, she argues that if religion is so easily deconstructed by the semblance of secularity and rational thought, one needs to examine the rules of morality. This point is crucial, especially when we consider Brown Blackwell's background as a religious minister. Overall, throughout their professional careers, both women used their writings, which were in the pursuit of their own definition of objective truth, to advocate for female education, safer medical practices for women, and the passage of laws in favor of gender equality.

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The writings of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi were controversial, and their contemporaries had many different reactions to both women's arguments, both positive and negative. As previously mentioned, some of the most notable critics of Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi were Silas Weir Mitchell and Dr. E.H. Clarke. However, despite the critique from these contemporaries, many people recognized the contributions that Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi were adding to the fields of medicine and health. For example, after Brown Blackwell published *The Sexes Throughout Nature*, it sparked other activists to turn to the connection between religion and science for their own arguments. Feminists of the period, such

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<sup>105</sup> Hamlin, 22.

<sup>106</sup> *The Physical Basis of Immortality*, 6.

as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Hester Pendleton, and Sarah Hackett Stevenson, started to publish scientific writing that implemented religion, and this trend was not singular to this handful of people.<sup>107</sup> For example, many people praised Brown Blackwell's writing and the logic that a woman was able to bring to the issue of gender equality. Such as one reporter, in response to Brown Blackwell, wrote in 1852:

“there were scores of men and women who went there filled with prejudice, but who felt these prejudices go down, like frost-work before the clear, steady logic of [Brown's] argument... They had before them a living witness of woman's ability of what woman can do, only give her equal facilities with the other sex...American men instead of indulging in low, narrow, and illiberal prejudices against [Brown and Lucy Stone] and their cause, will be proud that they, as well as a score of two of others like them, are *American Women*.”<sup>108</sup>

The logic, reason, and rationality Brown Blackwell was pursuing contributed to the positive response.

Brown Blackwell's ability to write and speak well were also important contributing factors. One reporter praised Brown Blackwell stating, “in the long run, however, her success depended not on novelty but on her acknowledged competence as a speaker. The training in rhetoric and public speaking that she had insisted on at Oberlin served her well.”<sup>109</sup> Some people in the audience even were stated to have forgotten to “listen to the points she made” because of their enamored of her adeptness of the English language and her speech.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Munson, Elizabeth, and Greg Dickinson. "Hearing women speak: Antoinette Brown Blackwell and the dilemma of authority." *Journal of Women's History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 108+. Gale Academic OneFile. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A20779587/AONE?u=anon~e6043d54&sid=googleScholar&xid=85a8f0cc>.

<sup>108</sup> Cazden, 61-62

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

Putnam Jacobi also garnered a similar response to her work. Richard Watson Gilder, an American poet, editor, and close friend of Putnam Jacobi, wrote of her writings,

“it is hard to see how any one can read it without being impressed by its intellectual grasp; its clarity; its grim and elucidating wit....if these and other writings of hers on subjects not medical thus impress the reader, is it not fair to infer that, had it not been for her stronger drawings, in another direction, our literature might have been enriched by writings of great exactness and reach of thought; of wit that cut to the quick; having traits of thorough scholarship, of imagination, of human sympathy?”<sup>111</sup>

After her death, the Women’s Medical Association’s Memorial Committee even created the Mary Putnam Jacobi Fellowship program in her honor for her work in “advancing the educational, economic, and legal status of women.”<sup>112</sup> Overall, both women collected respect and admiration from their academic and non-academic peers throughout their lives for their writings, advocacy, and spirit.

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As discussed previously in this thesis, Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Mary Putnam Jacobi devoted the majority of their careers to the advocacy of gender equality through their writings on medicine and science. They both combatted popular ideas from their contemporaries and used scientific truths and methods to be heard and respected in the patriarchal system that enveloped nineteenth-century America. This patriarchy was influenced by Protestant Christianity and the response of Charles Darwin. It was the culture that Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi grew up in and eventually died within. Grown accustomed to this patriarchy, these women

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<sup>111</sup> Women's Medical Association, 48.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

groundbreakingly stepped outside of the traditional roles assigned to them. They spoke to the pre-laid definitions of objectivity of the era directly and relayed their own paths to convince their audiences of the undisputed truth of the allowance of women's rights and the passage of laws that ensured the betterment of women's health and their knowledge of health. Fitting within the archetypes of the pious apologist or the unvarying secularist, Brown Blackwell and Putnam Jacobi also created a bundled community of fellow women writers, all with the same ultimate goal, to promote the education of women, promote the autonomy of women's own bodies and minds, and finally to promote the breaking of the traditional confines of the domestic sphere in order to gain agency within women's own lives.

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