**BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**THEORIES OF LOCKE AND ROUSSEAUAND PATRIARCHY**

Because the setting and characters in Frankenstein are so intricately tied to the culture of Shelley’s time, it would be useful to review the patriarchal system and the educational theories of Locke and Rousseau.

LOCKE



 For Locke, the moral order of natural law is permanent and self-perpetuating. Governments are only factors contributing to that moral order.

An Empirical Theory of Knowledge

For Locke, all knowledge comes exclusively through experience. He argues that at birth the mind is a tabula rasa, or blank slate, that humans fill with ideas as they experience the world through the five senses. Locke defines knowledge as the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, with the ideas humans form.

From this definition it follows that our knowledge does not extend beyond the scope of human ideas. In fact, it would mean that our knowledge is even narrower than this description implies, because the connection between the simplest human ideas is unknown. Because ideas are limited by experience, and we cannot possibly experience everything that exists in the world, our knowledge is limited. However, Locke asserts that though our knowledge is necessarily limited in these ways, we can still be certain of some things. For example, we have an intuitive and immediate knowledge of our own existence, even if we are ignorant of the metaphysical essence of our souls. We also have a demonstrative knowledge of God’s existence, though our understanding cannot fully comprehend who or what he is. We know other things through sensation. We know that our ideas correspond to external realities because the mind cannot invent such things without experience. A blind man, for example, would not be able to form a concept of color. Therefore, those of us who have sight can reason that since we do perceive colors, they must exist.

A Natural Foundation of Reason

Locke argues that God gave us our capacity for reason to aid us in the search for truth. As God’s creations, we know that we must preserve ourselves. To help us, God created in us a natural aversion to misery and a desire for happiness, so we avoid things that cause us pain and look for pleasure, instead. We can reason that since we are all equally God’s children, God must want everyone to be happy. If one person makes another unhappy by causing him pain, that person has rejected God’s will. Therefore, each person has a duty to preserve other people as well as himself.

JOHN LOCKE SparkNotes Editors. “SparkNote on John Locke (1634–1704).” SparkNotes.com. SparkNotes LLC. 2005. Web. 8 Jul. 2015. CKE (1634–1704)

ROUSSEAU:

( June 28, 1712, Geneva, Switzerland- Died: July 2, 1778, Ermenonville, France)

Defining the state of nature:

The state of nature is hypothetically a prehistoric place and time where human beings live uncorrupted by society. The most important characteristic of the state of nature is that people have complete physical freedom and are at liberty to do essentially as they wish. That said, the state of nature also carries the drawback that human beings have not yet discovered rationality or morality.

The Danger of Need

Rousseau includes an analysis of human need as one element in his comparison of modern society and the state of nature. According to Rousseau, “needs” result from one´s passions, which make people desire an object or activity.

In the state of nature, human needs are strictly limited to those things that ensure survival and reproduction, including food, sleep, and sex. By contrast, as cooperation and division of labour develop in modern society, the needs of men multiply to include many non-essential things such as friends, entertainment and luxury goods. As time goes by and these sorts of needs increasingly become a part of everyday life, they become necessities. Although many of these needs are initially pleasurable and even good for human beings, men in modern society eventually become slaves to these superfluous needs, and the whole of society is bound together and shaped by their pursuit. As such, unnecessary needs are the foundation of modern “moral inequality,” in that the pursuit of needs inevitably means that some people will be forced to work to fulfil the needs of others and some will dominate their fellows when in a position to do so.

The Unnaturalness of Inequality

For Rousseau human inequality as we know it does not exist in the state of nature.

Accordingly, all the inequalities we recognize in modern society are characterized by the existence of different classes or the domination and exploitation of some people by others. Rousseau calls these kinds of inequalities moral inequalities.

PATRIARCHY

Women in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were challenged with expressing themselves in a patriarchal system that generally refused to grant merit to women's views. Cultural and political events during these centuries increased attention to women's issues such as education reform, and by the end of the 18th century, women were increasingly able to speak out against injustices. Though modern feminism was non-existent, many women expressed themselves and exposed the conditions that they faced, albeit often indirectly, using a variety of subversive and creative methods.

The social structure of 16th century Europe allowed women limited opportunities for involvement; they served largely as managers of their households. Women were expected to focus on practical domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families, and more particularly, their husbands. In most cases education for women was not supported—it was thought to be detrimental to the traditional female virtues of innocence and morality. Women who spoke out against the patriarchal system of gender roles or any injustice ran the risk of being exiled from their communities, or worse; outspoken unmarried women in particular were the targets of witch-hunts.

 Anne Hutchinson, who challenged the authority of the Puritan clergy, was excommunicated for her outspoken views and controversial actions. Anne Askew, a well-educated, out-spoken English Protestant, was tried for heresy in 1545; her denial of transubstantiation was grounds for her imprisonment. She was eventually burned at the stake for her refusal to incriminate other Protestant court ladies.

Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, a woman who contradicted many of the gender roles of the age. She was well educated, having studied a variety of subjects including mathematics, foreign language, politics, and history. Elizabeth was an outspoken but widely respected leader, known for her oratory skills as well as her patronage of the arts. Despite the advent of the age of print, the literacy rate during this period remained low, though the Bible became more readily available to the lower classes. Religious study, though restricted to "personal introspection," was considered an acceptable pursuit for women, and provided them with another context within which they could communicate their individual ideas and sentiments. In addition to religious texts, women of this period often expressed themselves through the ostensibly private forms of letters and autobiographies.

The seventeenth century was not an era of drastic changes in the status or conditions of women. Women continued to play a significant, though not acknowledged, role in economic and political structures through their primarily domestic activities. They often acted as counselors in the home, "tempering" their husbands' words and actions. Though not directly involved in politics, women's roles within the family and local community allowed them to influence the political system. Women were discouraged from directly expressing political views counter to their husbands' or to broadly condemn established systems; nevertheless, many women were able to make public their private views through the veil of personal, religious writings. Again, women who challenged societal norms and prejudices risked their lives—Mary Dyer was hanged for repeatedly challenging the Massachusetts law that banished Quakers from the colony. Though their influence was often denigrated, women participated in various community activities. For example, women were full members of English guilds; guild records include references to "brethern and sistern" and "freemen and freewomen." During the seventeenth century, women's writings continued to focus on largely religious concerns, but increasingly, women found a creative and intellectual outlet in private journal- and letter-writing. Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, published in 1682, is a famous narrative written ostensibly for personal use that was made public and became a popular success.

The eighteenth century brought the beginning of the British cultural revolution. With the increasing power of the middle class and an expansion in consumerism, women's roles began to evolve. The economic changes brought by the new middle class provided women with the opportunity to be more directly involved in commerce. Lower-to middle-class women often assisted their husbands in work outside the home. It was still thought unseemly for a lady to be knowledgeable of business so, though some class distinctions were blurring, the upper class was able to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. The rise in consumerism allowed the gentry (the rich) to place a greater emphasis on changing fashion, further distancing themselves from the middle-class. With the advent of changes in rules of fashion and acceptable moral conventions within society, some women established a literary niche writing etiquette guides. Also due to the cultural revolution, mounting literacy rates among the lower classes caused an increase in publishing, including the rise of the periodical. Men and women of all classes found new means to express ideas in the wider publishing community. Though women's writing during this period continued largely to be an extension of domesticity, and focused mainly on pragmatic, practical issues, women found a wider market for publication. The act of professional writing, however, was still considered "vulgar" among the aristocracy. Significant colonial expansion during this period provided would-be writers with unique subject matter—letters written by women abroad discussed foreign issues and culture and offered a detailed view of far-off lands. These letters were often circulated among members of an extended family, as well as in the larger community. In defiance of social strictures (statements of severe criticism and disapproval), women such as Mary Wollstonecraft (Mary Shelley´s mother) began to speak out publicly on women's rights, including education and marriage laws. Though women had better access to education, the goal of women's education was to attain an ideal "womanhood"—a "proper education" was viewed as one that supported domestic and social activities but disregarded more academic pursuits.Women such as Wollstonecraft advocated access to education for women that was equal to that of their male counterparts. Marriage laws, which overwhelmingly favored men, also spurred public debate, though little was accomplished to reform laws during this period.

Throughout the world, women took action to advance their political and social rights. Catherine the Great of Russia devised a coup d'etat to take the throne in 1762, an aggressive act to prevent her son's disinheritance. Catherine continued to rule in an unconventional, independent manner, withdrawing from the men who made her ascension possible and remaining unmarried to ensure her power. Catherine was a shrewd politician, and used wide public support to enact laws that significantly altered the Russian political system. In France, Olympe de Gouges demanded equal rights for women in the new French Republic, and was eventually executed by guillotine in 1793. Madame Roland, who also met an untimely death in 1793, influenced revolutionary politicians and thinkers during the French Revolution through her famous salon. She, too, was an activist for women's social and political rights and was executed for treason, largely due to her outspoken feminist ideas. Phillis Wheatley, an African-American slave, examined slavery and British imperialism in her poetry, and became a notable figure among abolitionists in America and abroad. Increasingly, women rebuked traditional roles and spoke out against the social and political inequalities they faced. The century closed with the deaths of visionaries such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine the Great, and the births of a new breed of female writers and scholars. The political and social changes that took place in the eighteenth century paved the way for these future writers and activists to advance the cause of women's rights.