Debate

Response to: comments on psychiatry and the control of dangerousness: on the apotropaic function of the term "mental illness"

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I appreciate Professor Boyd's offer to respond to the respondents of my essay, as it gives me an opportunity to thank them for their carefully considered comments.¹⁻³

In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill sought to clarify the traditional subjection of women to men by comparing the institution of marriage with the historically hallowed, religiously sanctified, and legally sanctioned institution of slavery.⁴ For almost 50 years, I have tried to do the same thing with respect to the traditional subjection of "mental patients" to psychiatrists by comparing the legally sanctioned institution of psychiatry with slavery.⁵ Instead of re-engaging in a discussion of the difficult problems before us, I would like to rest my case—if I may use such forensic terminology—by citing Mill's reflections about the obstacles he faced in presenting his case against the subjection of women:

So long as an opinion is strongly rooted in the feelings ... the worse it fares in argumentative contest, the more persuaded its adherents are that their feeling must have some deeper ground, which the arguments do not reach; and while the feeling remains,

it is always throwing up fresh intrenchments of argument to repair any breach in the old. ... the understanding of the majority of mankind would need to be much better cultivated than has ever yet been the case, before they can be asked to place such reliance in their own power of estimating arguments as to give up practical principles in which they have been born and bred and which are the basis of much existing order of the world, at the first argumentative attack which they are not capable of logically resisting.

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