

**'Not a domestic utensil but a woman and a citizen':
Stella Browne on Women, Health and Society**

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Old and New Feminism

Women and citizenship and women's relation to the state have been abiding concerns of the movement for female political emancipation since its first stirrings. While it has been argued that there was a transition, subsequent to the achievement of the (limited) suffrage in Britain in 1918, from an 'Old' feminism of equality to a 'New' feminism of difference, these far from clear-cut monolithic camps represented two strands which had been present in the movement for women's emancipation for much longer. There were pre-existing tensions between the 'humanist' case for feminism derived from Enlightenment political philosophy and nineteenth-century liberal thought, most notably expressed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and a more biologically based 'essentialist' case conflating sex and gender. While there were differing interpretations of liberalism, its implicitly gender-neutral concept of citizenship could seem wanting when addressing issues involving specifically sexual abuse and exploitation of women. These were the focus of several campaigns from the mid-nineteenth century, including attempts to improve the position of woman within marriage (e.g. the struggles for the Married Women's Property Act, or greater rights of mothers to custody of their children) or to abolish the Contagious Diseases Acts which gave the force of law to the Double Standard of sexual morality by penalising prostitutes in port and garrison towns but not their male partners.

There was also a strategic use of the doctrine of innate difference to claim that men could not legitimately represent women and moreover that women would, because of their specific womanly attributes, bring something new to the political process and state-creation. This did not include acceptance of the existing hierarchical valuing of gender difference or even the idea of separate spheres of