

The Concept of Woman. The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC-AD 1250. Prudence Allen. *Montreal: Eden Press, 1985.*

This is a massive study of ideas on woman propounded by philosophers over a period of 2000 years. The author, a member of the philosophy department at Concordia University, Montreal, has done a meticulous analysis of the thought of ancient and medieval authors on woman. She posits three major theories of sex identity along with two derivatives: sex unity, sex complementary, sex polarity, reverse sex polarity and sex neutrality. She herself favours sex complementarity as compatible with Christian doctrine while at the same time disavowing the attempt to distort any philosopher's thought to fit it into this theory. If we may accept the translated excerpts from the ancient writers, she has largely succeeded in this respect.

The author demonstrates the devastating effect of Aristotelian thought on attitudes to women in Christian and non-Christian philosophy. Aristotle gratuitously assumes male superiority over the female and argues from this in his *Politics* that the male rules over the female. His now familiar faulty biology about woman's conception (occasioned by a moist wind from the south) is set in context and the notion of a woman as a misbegotten male is followed through its many reincarnations beyond the thirteenth century.

The author compares and contrasts Platonism with its tendency towards sex neutrality with Aristotelian sex polarity showing the latter's negative effect on attitudes to women in its many reincarnations in western thought. Particularly valuable is the discussion of the transmission of Aristotle's sex polarity theory through popular, though doubtful and spurious works in the thirteenth century. This section would merit expansion, perhaps in the projected second volume, for the popularization of Aristotle's theories, no less than the official teaching of Catholicism, helped to keep women firmly under the control of men throughout western history.

The author's main focus is on philosophical writing. Thus she bypasses some of the most virulent misogynists in early Christianity, namely Tertullian, Chrysostom and Jerome. In her progress through ancient Greek philosophy, we learn of women who studied and taught philosophy with Plato and other Greek thinkers, of Hypatia and of the distinctly un-Christian role of Cyril, bishop of Alexandria in her brutal murder. Allen also deals with the problematic existence of St. Catherine of Alexandria, demonstrating the importance of legends about her for the development of a sex complementarity theory. It should be

noted at this point that the book is illustrated throughout with a picture of Catherine on every page, and with important pages from the manuscripts of Herrad of Landesberg and Hildegard of Bingen.

Other Christian women writers and philosophers dealt with are Hilda of Whitby (abbess of Hartlepool, not Kartlepool as stated on page 253) and Roswitha of Gandersheim. The author regards Hildegard of Bingen's writings as typifying the unity of knowledge, lamented by the author in her subsequent treatment of the rise of the universities.

Allen rightly regards the thirteenth century as pivotal, not only in the development of the concept of woman, but also in Christian thought in general. A hardening of negative attitudes to women may be seen not only in the schools but also in Church discipline, especially in laws promulgated by Innocent III and his successors.

It is a pity that this important work in the history of women abounds in errors of citation and typography. Some examples of such errors are: St. Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, consistently misspelled *Brevloquium*, e.g., pp. 428 and 528, the Premonstratensians, spelled Premonstatensians on pp. 317 and 416 and not included in the index, Meg Bogin cited as Med Bogin on p. 548, *Classics of Western Spirituality* in which Hildegard of Bingen's works are to appear cited as *Classics of Western Philosophy*, p. 553 and elsewhere, *Stadium* (p. 416) for *Studium* (*Studium generale* if one is referring to a medieval university), Irnerius of Bologna consistently cited as Ireneus, p. 436 and a reference to the code of civil law developed (?) by him as *Corpus Iuris Canonici* p. 436, Pavia is Pivia on p. 431, signs is sighns, p. 456, plead is plea, p. 539, Vespasian is Vespian, p. 533 and Caesarius of Arles is Caessaries, p. 533. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, normally cited as such, is oddly cited as *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed.

These errors could be corrected by an insert of errata until a revised edition is brought out. Unfortunately, there are some more serious errors. On p. 414 the author states:

By 425, the Islamic world had an institutional structure that included philosophy in the State University of Constantinople.

The author cites E.F. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*. Either this is a misquotation or Peters is an extremely unreliable source. The institution now known as Istanbul University does date from

1453, the same date as the final conquest of Constantinople by the Moslems.

The author treats uncritically the accounts of abbesses hearing their nuns' confessions in Ida Raming's *The Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood: Divine Law of Sex Discrimination* and Joan Morris's *The Lady Was A Bishop*. It is difficult to know whether these nuns themselves regarded their manifestations of conscience to their superiors as sacramental and whether a formal absolution was given. The whole question cries out for a much more nuanced treatment than any of these authors give it.

In the author's treatment of canon law it is unclear if she is using primary or secondary sources. Some standard sources for canon law are Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* for councils and Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* for canon law in general. Regarding civil law, we are left to wonder if the author is citing Justinian's *Digest* and *Institutes* (p. 538, n. 126) from a secondary source or from the standard edition of Krueger and Mommsen. An interesting sidelight on the development of canon law and women's place therein might have been furnished by a mention of Johannes Andreae (1270-1348), a lay canonist who fathered a family of canonists, two sons, two sons-in-law, one adopted son and one daughter. It was said that when this daughter lectured on canon law she had to veil her face, so great was her beauty that it distracted the students!

Sources that would have further illuminated the discussion of women in law, education and monasticism are David Knowles' *The Monastic Order in England*, Jean Leclercq's *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, and Eileen Power's *Medieval English Nunneries*. The account of the co-education that is supposed to have existed in monasteries before the rise of the universities (p. 414) conjures up misleading images of monks and nuns sitting together in monastic classrooms and libraries, an impression which the author does not seem to wish to convey but nevertheless does. Also, her description of higher education being wrenched away from Benedictine monasteries is likewise misleading. With the knowledge explosion generated by the third and fourth entries of Aristotle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the monasteries could no longer keep up and, it would seem, had no wish to do so. The knowledge they sought after was a contemplative knowledge of God rather than the speculative knowledge that was being cultivated in the schools. Indeed, the dialectical procedures used there could prove a distraction from the contemplative vocation of monks and nuns. The debate on the place of higher learning in the

monastery continues to this day, cf. David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism*.

There are several items on which this reviewer would have liked more comment. One is the effect that the exaltation of Mary has had on ordinary women. One is left gasping at the knowledge and wisdom attributed to Mary by St. Albert the Great in virtue of her motherhood of Christ. Some of the disciplines Albert credits her with are the seven liberal arts, civil law, physics and medicine (pp. 376-385). The author's laconic comment on the effort to compensate for the devaluation of women by the exaltation of Mary is unsatisfying:

While this may sometimes be an accurate psychological explanation for this phenomenon, there is more to be said about its philosophic basis. When viewed from a philosophic stance, St. Albert's Mariology becomes the perfectly consistent consequence of his theory of generation (p. 382).

Allen goes on to point out the exclusion of women from the universities as a logical conclusion of this teaching, but one wishes she would confront the much broader issue of the devaluation of ordinary women and deal with the criticisms of Mary Daly on this point.

The author herself, commenting on Thomas Aquinas, continues his thought, again without reference to feminist theologians stating: "The one ruler, in reflecting the nature of God, should be male..." (p. 404). The notion of the maleness of western God-language has long been under-scored by feminist writers such as Mary Daly as a root of sexism in our society. But the author lets this pass. Perhaps thinking it beneath comment, Allen also lets Gratian's *non-sequitur* on p. 436 slip by. Gratian denied women the right to sue priests because women could not be ordained. Similarly, she retails the *a priori* argument used to deny women entry into the hierarchy because they were not capable of receiving the tonsure (a hair-cut!) without remark.

As I have already mentioned, the author favours the sex complementarity theory as a "belief in the equality of dignity and worth of women and men that at the same time recognizes significant differences between the two sexes," (p. 5) and because it is consistent with the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. This is a risky shift from philosophy to theology that may undermine the credibility of the book in some quarters, but will probably enhance it in conservative circles. The sex complementarity theory has also proved to be a trap which has been used

to keep women out of non-traditional occupations and relationships. Arguments based on the "nature" of women have already been used far too long to exclude women from an active role in society and the church.

Having said all this, I must still profess admiration for this pioneering synthesis. The author's dispassionate exposure of the absurdities of wise men may be more effective in reaching women and men in need of consciousness-raising than the more emotionally satisfying fulminations of some feminist theologians. The language is clear and jargon-free, accessible to the general reader. The scholarship, with the exception of the few lapses I have mentioned, is thorough. The book could serve as a text for ideas on women and as an ancillary for the history of philosophy.

This reviewer looks forward to the projected second volume and would hope for a third volume dealing with the first and second waves of feminist philosophical thought. The present volume has indeed, as the author hoped, extended "philosophy into the philosophy of man and woman."

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Women Entrepreneurs in India: A Socio-Economic Study of Delhi 1975-1985. Medha Dubhashi Vinze. *Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987.*

Relatively few studies have been conducted on women entrepreneurs and fewer still on women entrepreneurs in India. However, at the end of the International Decade on Women, Medha Dubhashi Vinze addressed this important but neglected area. She conducted a survey of middle-class women in small-scale enterprises in the formal sector of Delhi. Her study was undertaken to ascertain, first, whether ten years of discussion on women had had any significant impact on their involvement in the economy and, second, whether the Decade had affected government policy and its implementation. The result of her research, published as *Women Entrepreneurs in India: A Socio-Economic Study of Delhi, 1975-1985*, both helps fill the gap in the literature on women in the economy and adds to our understanding of women in development.

The book, which has seven chapters, begins with a detailed description of industrial Delhi. This is followed by a discussion of the theory of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. This theory is based on male character-

istics which are alien to women entrepreneurs. Then come chapters on "Women and Socio-Economic Development," "Organizations in the Service of Women Entrepreneurs," "Problems of Women Entrepreneurs and Strategy Potential," "Perceptions of Sample Women Entrepreneurs," and "Conclusions."

The major contribution of the book is found in Chapter 6, "Problems of Women Entrepreneurs and Strategy Potential." This chapter delves into the psycho-social and fiscal components of the problems of self-employed Indian women. It shows that, for tradition-induced reasons, women do not readily apply for bank loans. In fact, they form only two percent of the total bank clientele. Then, because women do not borrow, they inevitably have no creditworthiness, and thus, would have difficulty getting loans if they ever decided to apply for them. Their lack of creditworthiness is also the result of their not having collateral, which in itself is a severe economic disability. These difficulties are compounded by women's limited access to appropriate technology and the economic infrastructure. Furthermore, their lack of training, their weak management skills and their low self-esteem feed into a vicious circle that keeps them from competing in the male-dominated entrepreneurial field (pp. 178-180).

Vinze's study shows that government policies which would assist small-scale enterprises have been introduced, but a majority of the women interviewed were unaware of them. Only ten percent of the women, including some who were highly educated, knew of the existence of government agencies that could help them. Further, this ten percent knew only the names of the agencies but not their objectives nor their activities (p. 192). None of the interviewees was aware of beneficiary organizations. (The reader cannot help but wonder how the vast majority of women must fare when such a small proportion of their educated sisters knows so little about government policies.)

The study also shows that despite government policies and agencies, traditional patriarchal attitudes continue to prevail. Male officers in government organizations deter women from using the available services. Vinze says:

At the Government level, the licensing authorities, labour officers and sales tax inspectors ask all sorts of humiliating questions like, how will you manage labourers? How will you manage both the house and business? Does your husband approve? etc. (p. 187).