

and of the nature of the Paris Commune of 1792 ought therefore to have been appointed. And original publication dates of reprints ought to have been cited. The book is not based on quite so much new feminist scholarship as the bibliography in its present form suggests.

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Public Man, Private Woman - Women in Social and Political Thought. Jean Bethke Elshtain. Princeton University Press, 1981. Pp. 378.

In *Public Man, Private Woman* Jean Bethke Elshtain sets out to use the concepts of public and private "as a conceptual prism through which to see the story of women and politics from Plato to the present" (p. xiv), and to link the public/private distinction to various "understandings of human nature, theories of language and action and the divergent values and ends of familial and political life." (p. 3). Her subject is especially appealing to feminist thinkers, since, as she points out, the public/private distinction and the values attached to each realm are closely related to many people's beliefs about and attitudes toward women. Unfortunately, her treatment of the subject is disappointing.

Elshtain begins with a critical review of great figures in the history of political philosophy. She is clearly partial to Augustine, Aquinas and Luther and tells us that: "Christianity ushered a moral revolution into the world which dramatically, and for the better, transformed the prevailing images of male and female, public and private" (p. 56), and that: "Augustine, taken all in all, is one of the great undoers of Greek misogyny...." (p.73). Anyone making these claims surely must show some concern about Augustine's obsessive fear of women's capacity to

inspire lust, Augustine's and Aquinas' denigration of sexual pleasure, and Aquinas' agreement with Aristotle that woman is a man manqué, created for and justified by her role in reproduction. Yet Elshtain fails even to acknowledge that these are difficulties for her views, and she apparently feels no obligation to deal with feminist scholars' criticisms of Christian theology.

While Elshtain is unduly gentle with Christian thinkers, other "greats" do not escape her unfavourable, and often unfair, criticism. She is hard on J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, for example, but her reading of it is shallow and inaccurate. She misunderstands or misrepresents Mill's theory of the origin of women's subjection and his analysis of how men and women come to desire undue private and public power, both of which are clear in Mill's text. In addition, she attributes silly views to Mill without justification, claiming, for instance, that Mill always regards a human relation's or institution's being traditional as a reason to oppose it. Mill actually says: "The generality of a practice is in some cases a strong presumption that it is, or at all events once was, conducive to laudable ends."¹ Elshtain accuses Mill of failing to recognize the importance of men's economic power over their wives, yet Mill explicitly discusses this, concluding that women must have the *power* of earning their own living in order to have equality in marriage. There is much to criticize in Mill's feminist theory, and Elshtain draws our attention to some serious difficulties, but her criticisms are often misplaced because she does not deal carefully with the texts she discusses.

Elshtain's treatment of modern feminist texts in the second section of the book is no more satisfying than her discussion of the classics of political philosophy. She is ungenerous in her interpretation and criticism of feminist thinkers, apparently unwilling to see anything valuable in theories which contain mistakes and implausibilities. And although elsewhere Elshtain shows concern for the historical context of theories,

when discussing the work of modern feminists, especially radical and liberal feminists, she makes no allowance for its political context. Furthermore, some of her generalizations about schools of feminist theory are outrageous. She says, for instance, that the aim of radical feminists is to return to matriarchy. Yet she recognizes Marge Piercy's book, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, to be presenting a radical feminist picture of utopia, and that book describes a sexually egalitarian anarchist community. She claims that all liberal feminists are positivists and environmental determinists, and that they rarely speak of citizenship. She even states later in the book that feminism has tended to be hostile toward or suspicious of discussions about heterosexuality and the needs of children. One begins to wonder if Elshtain has ever seen a *MS.* magazine.

The author's own thoughts on the public and private realms are presented in the third section of the book. They divide roughly into a discussion of research methods and a presentation of her conclusions thus far. She praises Dorothy Smith's method of taking subjects' self-descriptions seriously but then expresses a serious reservation about this and other methods of inquiry and theory-building. This reservation is, I think, based upon a couple of fundamental mistakes. Elshtain equates the particularity of individuals' lives with the realm of the private, and she seems to think that any application of abstract concepts to individuals, i.e. any general description of people, especially in terms of the public world, robs them of their particularity and of their private lives. Of course, abstract description does not destroy or even deny the particularity of individuals, and theorizing about people in public terms does not cast them out of their private lives, yet at a number of points in the book (especially p. 305), Elshtain seems not to understand these things.

One of the major theses of the book's final section is that some form of family is universally necessary to meet the needs of children. Although

it is not clear what sort of family the author has in mind, she talks of children's need for intensive, eroticized relations with parents or their permanent surrogates. This is an important idea which has been discussed extensively by others. Elshtain's evidence for her thesis, however, seems to consist of the wild boy of Aveyron, the failure of many 1960's communes to raise their children well, and the cases of neglected children who turned out like Charles Manson. In the end she encourages feminists to defend family life against those pressures from the public world which erode it. But I was left wondering what sort of family life we are to defend, especially since Elshtain repeatedly implies that there can be no application of the ideals of freedom, justice and equality in the private sphere.

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NOTES

1. J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1970, page 6.

Images of Women: Report of the Task Force on Sex Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media. Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission, Government of Canada. Hull: *Ministry of Supply and Services*. 1983. Pp. 189 (available in French and English).

The Task Force began its work in Oct., 1979, originally intending to complete its report within a year. Its composition was as follows:

1. Four representatives from private broadcasting.
2. Six persons representing the public interest (including two women each from the fields of social science research and the media).
3. Four representatives from the advertising industry.