

PHILOSOPHY AND WOMEN⁽¹⁾

EDITED BY SHARON BISHOP
AND MARJORIE WEIN ZWEIG,

Though the title of the book indicates that its approach is philosophical, some of the writers could not be called philosophers in the classic sense. At this stage of their development many are modern feminists and must be accepted as such.

However, the editors have done an unusual type and amount of research, going back to Plato and Aristotle.

These two ancient Greeks agree, after their usual lengthy introductory remarks in the vein of logic and reason, that men and women, having been created equal, are equally able to carry on similar activities. Men were engaged in music and war. Could not women do the same? Women by nature do not have the physical strength of men, but in war, certainly could carry out duties equal to their physical abilities. And in the public baths? Why not? Old men are no more attractive than old women!

Of particular interest is John Stuart Mill, who in 1869 expressed views startlingly similar to those concerning women in the present decade. He was concerned with what was known as «The nature of women... an eminently artificial thing». Mill did not feel that men understood women psychologically, including their own wives, even though their views were held in affection and respect.

At some length he points out in historic perspective the equal abilities of men and women, using Queen Elizabeth I, Joan of Arc, and Queen Victoria as primary examples. Men had to accept these as fact, but still would not acknowledge the equal ability of women as basic to their point of view.

Mill respects women's intuition, which he sees as «an ability to see more of what is before her than what a man is able to do». She discerns, discriminates, and finds general principles, while men can see only facts as they understand them...

The article by Sigmund Freud finds Freud at his usual self-seeing women as consistently and constantly troubled because they are not men! Women's envy of men's stronger sex drive and their own lack of the more elaborate sexual equipment of men is seen by Freud as a source of consternation, envy, and discomfiture. But one must remember that Freud's association with women, other than his own family, consisted primarily of those who were neurotic or psychotically disturbed and cannot be attributed to all women, merely because they are women.

«On Sexual Equality» by Alison Jagger⁽²⁾ spells out

(1) Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. Belmont, California, 1979

(2) From *Ethics*, University of Chicago Press, July 1974

again the current feminist views of the role of women and a further plea for their equality.

Jagger first raises the question, «Integration or Separation?» and concludes that since the attempt at integration has not been universally successful and therefore challenged, a look at equality through separation is called for.

Her argument, however, leads to such questions as whether or not sexual identity is essential to the definition of a person or the maintenance of his identity. And to claim nonsexuality is not a strong position since it is remote, to say the least, that it is impossible to deny that the people we meet are either men or women.

Concerning the differences between the sexes, the only valid one has to do with the reproductive roles of each sex, which does not have application as to the place of either one in job roles or as persons in society.

The most complete and overriding statement Jagger makes is that «the rights of women can be protected quite adequately in a society which recognizes basic human rights», since the difference between the sexes can be defined only as biological.

The approach of the book is unusual and more academic than the average volume of this nature. It is worth reading.

Reviewed by Jane Leasor

CUSTOMS OF THE ARABIAN GULF

DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS
BY SCHOOL CHILDREN
IN BAHRAIN AND DUBAI
BY BAHIA FAKHRO AND ANN WALKO

A group of teachers, headmistresses and school principals contributed to the production of this book of colorful pictures made by school children living in the Arabian Gulf and carefully commented on in English by two authors: Bahia Fakhro and Ann Walko.

Though the Arab people living in Saudi Arabia and in the Gulf countries have begun to change their style of living since the 1930's, old customs and traditions persist especially in the celebrations of festivals connected with religion. The book contains a display of Arabian customs and traditions seen through Arab children's eyes.

Bahia Jum'a Fakhro, co-author of the book, is a graduate of Beirut University College in 1964 with a B.A. in child development. For five years she taught at the Manama Secondary School for girls in Bahrain where she also served as deputy headmistress of the school. Originally from Bahrain, she now lives in Dubai

with her husband and three daughters, and occasionally takes part in cultural activities.

The other co-author is Ann Walko, a former newspaper reporter, editor, teacher, in the U.S. and Turkey. She presently lives in Dubai where her husband's company has been assigned since 1975. Together with Mrs. Fakhro she conceived the idea of using Arab children's views of their society to educate Western children about life in the Arabian Gulf.

(1) For information, write to Arab Customs, Box 6023 Hamden, Connecticut, 06517, U.S.A. or to Bahia Fakhro, Box 1699, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

«WOMAN IN CHURCH THEOLOGY»⁽¹⁾

This book is the second collection of lectures and studies published by the Council of Churches of the Middle East about the topic, «Woman's Status in Church and Society»⁽²⁾.

The title is «Woman in Church Theology»; the authors are a group of religious leaders representing the various Eastern Christian Churches, including a Muslim university professor who spoke on woman in Muslim theology.

The writers discuss the possibility of finding, within the religious texts and teachings of the early Church Fathers, a ground for raising women's role in church service to equal that of men. Among the topics discussed were: the position of woman as archdeaconess in the early Church period, its abolition and whether it should be revived; the evolution of the concept of bodily purification in church rituals and regulations, comprehensively analyzed by Dr. George Bibawi, who insisted on the necessity of wiping out the influence of Manichaeon doctrines from Christian theology.

As a group, the writers seem to agree that the biological and social differences existing between the sexes do not signify woman's inferiority nor do they destroy the unity of the human being. According to them, the Church Fathers should remain a chief source of inspiration. The principal aim for men and women of today should be the revival of Christian virtues which are threatened to the point of disappearance. Only creative living, not new positions, can make this revival possible. Through creative living, new spiritual signs may visit us and lead us into new paths.

(1) Arabic text: published by the Council of Churches in The Middle East. Beirut, 1980.

(2) See *Al-Raida* (Arabic publication), Aug. 1979, vol. II, no. 9, p. 16.