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Philosophische Geschlechtertheorien: Ausgewählte Texte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Edited with an introduction by Sabine Doyé, Marion Heinz, Friederike Kuster. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002.

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“What began as research into women’s issues (*Frauenforschung*) has since transformed itself into research into gender (*Geschlechterforschung*).”¹ This is actually the first line of the preface by Marion Heinz and Friederike Kuster to an earlier book they edited, consisting of a set of essays presented at a colloquium entitled *Geschlechtertheorie—Geschlechterforschung* [Gender Theory – Gender Research] (1998). But the shift they point to there also forms the backdrop for their latest intervention: a volume entitled *Philosophische Geschlechtertheorien* [Philosophical Gender Theories], edited together with Sabine Doyé and published by Reclam whose *Universal-Bibliothek* series is famous in German-speaking countries for its trademark bright yellow covers, smaller-than-pocket-size, and budget-friendly prices. The book is rather humbly subtitled, “selected texts from antiquity to the present”. This is in fact highly deceptive. For one thing, the excerpts account for only about three hundred of the book’s five hundred pages. For another, the sheer quality of the writing and research contained in the other two hundred pages of “commentary” leaves one with the distinct impression that they could quite easily stand up on their own in the shape of a book on the history of the concept of gender.

The book consists of a sixty-page jointly written introduction followed by selections from different philosophers, each of which is preceded by a mini-introduction (often actually a mini-essay), written by one of the three editors. A quick survey of the table of contents confirms the historical stamp of the book—the first selections are from Plato and Aristotle—as well as the naturally surprising fact that only three of the eighteen philosophers considered are women (Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Butler). This in fact represents the quiet admission of an unspoken element of the simple thesis that forms the leitmotif running throughout the entire book, namely, that the philosophical concept of gender is an ideological construct, which also happens to have been constructed by male philosophers. As the editors explain in the Introduction, “The purpose of this work is to

¹ All translations from the German are my own.

demonstrate in an exemplary way both the conditions of emergence of this ideology as well as the various concrete forms it assumes in the history of European philosophy” (7).

The very uniqueness of this critical anthology deserves to be highlighted. No equivalent book exists in English, although one did appear in France in 2000. The latter is entitled *Les Femmes de Platon à Derrida* [Women from Plato to Derrida] and, as an interesting parallel, is edited by three French women (Collin, Pisier, and Varikas 2000). This too is an anthology of selections from philosophers in history, complete with introductions to each, but the similarity ends there. The French anthology, running to over eight hundred pages, has a broad compass both conceptually and in terms of the philosophers treated—fifty-nine in total. Its objective, according to its three editors, is primarily to render visible in largely canonical texts what the interpretative tradition in France has rendered invisible with respect to the difference of the sexes. The informed and thoughtful introductions to each selection, they acknowledge, are not motivated by any collective thesis but rather represent particular ways into the texts (multiple in each case) and bear the mark of the intellectual style and field of the individual editor who wrote it. This is a very worthwhile project in its own right. The volume by Doyé, Heinz, and Kuster, however, differs strikingly in its conception and range.

The more modest array of philosophers selected from is the least of the differences. First and foremost, the reader cannot help but sense that although this is an anthology, it also reads like a tightly argued treatise. There is indeed a “collective thesis” which the three editors are seeking to explore and defend in both the sweeping historical narrative of the Introduction and across all the mini-introductions to the selections: the concept of gender underlying the practical philosophies of thinkers throughout history is a philosophical construct related to the biological concept of gender and serving to assign women a particular status in the social order. Both the structure and content of the Introduction provide the best statement and fleshing out of this argument which then serves to orient the reader over the course of the texts that follow. The Introduction is divided into five parts, each of which treats the ideas of a specific set of the philosophers included in the anthology. Part One discusses Plato and Aristotle; Part Two, Aquinas; Part Three, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Humboldt, Fichte, and Hegel; Part Four,

Engels, Horkheimer, and Marcuse; Part Five, Freud, Georg Simmel, Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Butler.

Lesson number one is that after the promising beginning with Plato and his belief in the equality of the sexes, Aristotle amounts to a serious disappointment, his separation of *oikos* and *polis* and related confinement of women to the former laying the groundwork upon which all subsequent philosophical treatments of gender and sexual difference build. Through the economic independence he wins in the *oikos* or household ruling over his slaves, children, and wife, the *oikos-despot* is then able to participate on equal terms with other such men in the political life of the *polis*; thus he fulfills his nature as *zoon politikon*, a nature in which women do not share. We have a slight variation in Aquinas who rejects the political *telos* in favor of a divine one, but who still sees the reproductive work of the household as of lesser value. That being said, woman, though inferior insofar as she originates from a rib of Adam, is equal to man to the extent that she is also made in the image of God and belongs to the *communita divina*.

For our three editors the truly fateful moment comes with the philosophers treated in Part Three of their Introduction. Actually, this moment has two parts. The first has to do with the rise of the modern social contract tradition, whose arch-representatives are taken to be Hobbes and Locke. The revolution Hobbes effected was to move away from basing the relations of rule on teleology and social hierarchy and to preclude natural differences between human beings from playing any pivotal role. Every political order is fundamentally artificial and must proceed from the freely given consent of all its participants. What is interesting to note in all this is that the relationship of man and woman is not given any theoretical consideration by Hobbes. This changes with Locke who explicitly treats marriage as a contractual relationship. At the same time, however, Locke preserves the traditional legal subordination of women by means of the “common sense” argument for their natural inferiority; man, being “abler and stronger”, is given the final say in the household. The conclusion for our editors is obvious: adducing natural differences in order to justify the subordination of women contradicts the fundamental premise of this nascent liberal thought that no rule can be grounded in natural differences. Our editors thus claim that this new tradition failed in two important ways. First, ideas of individual freedom and equality should have had a more transformative impact on the

relationship between man and woman, and second, the domains of marriage and family should have been given, along with civil society, a natural law-based normative foundation. These are penetrating criticisms, but they inevitably strike our twenty-first century ears, which are sensitive to the argument that the private is political, as far more understandable than they would have appeared to Hobbes and Locke. Although it must be acknowledged that the three editors show themselves to be aware of this point, one does get the impression that they are perhaps too surprised at times that theories that originally emerged out of more narrowly and traditionally political contexts were not logically imported into the spheres of marriage and the family.

The second part of the fateful moment for the conception of gender comes with Rousseau, upon whom is bestowed the dubious honor of creating *die bürgerliche Geschlechtertheorie*, which may be roughly translated as modern civil gender theory.² Rousseau is accused of buying into the modern natural law discourse when it suits him, as he does in formulating his radical democratic theory in *The Social Contract*, but dispensing with it when it doesn't, most notably in his formulation of gender differences. In this latter case, Rousseau places nature above law and argues that the former has designed the relationship of man and woman to be one of complementarity of natural masculine and feminine endowments. In accordance with the established sexual division of labor, the family forms the sphere of love that is indispensable to the emotional and moral formation of the male *citoyen*. In all this, Rousseau is seen to be making a seamless connection with Aristotle's theory of the *oikos*, reformulating it in such a compelling manner that it lays the groundwork for all subsequent reflections on the notion of gender and the relationship of the sexes, as we later see in the treatment of Kant, Fichte, Humboldt, and Hegel. Indeed, all four of these philosophers reproduce the Rousseauian division of labor and portray the depoliticized sphere of the household as where true human nature (*Menschensein*) can grow and develop, as witnessed perhaps in the most exemplary fashion by Hegel's placement of marriage squarely within the domain of *Sittlichkeit*. Fichte, it is true, does recognize the rational and autonomous nature woman shares with man, but this same nature is then forsaken by the wife who voluntarily

² There is a fascinating parallel one cannot help but notice here between "misogyny/modern civil gender theory" and "anti-Jewishness/modern anti-Semitism" à la Arendt.

subjects herself to the autonomy of her husband, making marriage not a contractual community but a community of love. Only the late Kant views marriage as a contract between two equals, albeit in the narrowest of terms (namely, for the mutual use of one another's sexual organs). This same private sphere / political sphere division is later mirrored in Marxist and socialist theories that both introduce and problematize the distinction between the familial sphere of reproduction and the economic sphere of capitalist production.

Given the pride of place, then, that the three editors award to Rousseau and the modern natural law tradition, the omission of any and all mention of Mary Wollstonecraft is all the more glaring. The editors do acknowledge that they have excluded from their purview those writings that can be classified as concerned with the “political emancipation of women”, and presumably Wollstonecraft (as well as Mill's *The Subjection of Women*) falls into this category. But to reduce *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to its emancipatory intentions is to do it a serious injustice. For one thing, Wollstonecraft engages more with Rousseau than with any other philosopher. For another, she long predates our three editors in observing the inconsistencies of modern conceptions of natural rights (she is writing only twenty years after Rousseau's death). But perhaps the most important point is that Wollstonecraft has a remarkably finely-hued analysis running throughout her book of how members of her sex “become women”. Our editors begin the last Part of their Introduction with a discussion of Freud in which they portray his question, “How does one become a woman?”, as the beginning of a new era in which the previously “natural” connection between sex and gender begins to come undone and which ultimately bears fruit in the 1990s in the theories of Judith Butler on compulsory heterosexuality and the discursive construction of both “gender” and “sex”.³ Although not explicit, the distinction between sex and gender in fact informs much of Wollstonecraft's analysis as she investigates how men, social norms and expectations, and educational treatises on manners geared at women all conspire to produce the particular brand of women of her day she so deplors.

³ Here English has an advantage over German: English has two separate terms, *sex* and *gender*, where German has only one for both, *Geschlecht*. Although they provide rough German equivalents, the editors opt for using the English terms.

But it is only with Simone de Beauvoir, and more recently Luce Irigaray, that the direct and open attack on the sexually dichotomized spheres of *oikos* and *polis* and their various conceptual offspring first sees the light of day. Their objective, our editors tell us, is not an antipatriarchal concept of femininity, but rather a questioning of gender reality as a whole. The established gender order represents a socially institutionalized deformation of human possibilities for both women *and* men, one that prevents true recognition between two autonomous subjects.

It might have escaped the reader during this brief overview that fully nine of the eighteen philosophers excerpted from in the anthology wrote in German. But this is only a more obvious aspect of a feature of the anthology which the reader would do well to keep in mind: its “Germanness.” The three editors, for example, are also all German academics who have written tomes on German philosophy. Sabine Doyé has published a book on Schelling, Marion Heinz one on Herder (in particular on his metaphysics and epistemology), and Friederike Kuster one on Husserl.⁴ The particular philosophical style that these three editors bring to this material sets a standard for those working in the history of philosophical conceptions of gender that will be hard to meet. It is incisively analytical and philosophically rigorous. The first class research in this book can be also chalked up to yet another particular feature of both German philosophy and philosophizing in general—in a word, system. The mini-introductions do not simply dive into a deconstruction of the texts they precede; rather, each author is approached on the terms of her or his own philosophical language and system, which is laid out in as much detail as is both required and possible within the space available (which means they can make for challenging reading) and against the backdrop of which the text at hand is then discussed.

It should be apparent by now that this book represents a significant intervention in the domains not just of feminist theory and gender theory but equally of the history of philosophy. In fact it inserts itself into a new trend in feminist and gender theory, which

⁴ Sabine Doyé, *Die menschliche Freiheit und das Problem des absoluten Vernunftsystems: Zur Entwicklung des Schellingschen Systems*, Stuttgart (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Cologne, 1972); Marion Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik des jungen Herder (1763-1778)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994); Friederike Kuster, *Wege der Verantwortung: Husserls Phänomenologie als Gang durch die Faktizität* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996).

is taking the history of philosophy more seriously and which is engaging with it in a more sophisticated manner, as the French volume mentioned above betokens. Genevieve Lloyd, in the preface to a recent collection of essays in English called *Feminism and History of Philosophy*, also makes this very point (2002, 1-3). It is a trend which can only be encouraged. Digging deep into the philosophical roots of our traditional conceptions of gender and tracing their evolution and genealogy is a form of activism whose ultimate consequences, though less visible, may be formidable.

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