On Women

Arthur Schopenhauer

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These few words of Jouy, Sans les femmes le commencement de notre vie seroit privé de secours, le milieu de plaisirs et la fin de consolation, more exactly express, in my opinion, the true praise of woman than Schiller's poem, Würde der Frauen, which is the fruit of much careful thought and impressive because of its antithesis and use of contrast. The same thing is more pathetically expressed by Byron in Sardanapalus, Act i, Sc. 2:—

"The very first
Of human life must spring from woman's breast,
Your first small words are taught you from her lips,
Your first tears quench'd by her, and your last sighs
Too often breathed out in a woman's hearing,
When men have shrunk from the ignoble care
Of watching the last hour of him who led them."

Both passages show the right point of view for the appreciation of women.

One need only look at a woman's shape to discover that she is not intended for either too much mental or too much physical work. She pays the debt of life not by what she does but by what she suffers — by the pains of child-bearing, care for the child, and by subjection to man, to whom she should be a patient and cheerful companion. The greatest sorrows and joys or great exhibition of strength are not assigned to her; her life should flow more quietly, more gently, and less obtrusively than man's, without her being essentially happier or unhappier.

Women are directly adapted to act as the nurses and educators of our early childhood, for the simple reason that they themselves are childish, foolish, and short-sighted — in a word, are big children all their lives, something intermediate between the child and the man, who is a man in the strict sense of the word. Consider how a young girl will toy day after day with a child, dance with it and sing to it; and then consider what a man, with the very best intentions in the world, could do in her place.

With girls, Nature has had in view what is called in a dramatic sense a "striking effect," for she endows them for a few years with a richness of beauty and a, fulness of charm at the expense of the rest of their lives; so that they may during these years ensnare the fantasy of a man to such a degree as to make him rush into taking the honourable care of them, in some kind of form, for a lifetime — a step which would not seem sufficiently justified if he only considered the matter. Accordingly, Nature has furnished woman, as she has the rest of her creatures, with the weapons and implements necessary for the

protection of her existence and for just the length of time that they will be of service to her; so that Nature has proceeded here with her usual economy. Just as the female ant after coition loses her wings, which then become superfluous, nay, dangerous for breeding purposes, so for the most part does a woman lose her beauty after giving birth to one or two children; and probably for the same reasons.

Then again we find that young girls in their hearts regard their domestic or other affairs as secondary things, if not as a mere jest. Love, conquests, and all that these include, such as dressing, dancing, and so on, they give their serious attention.

The nobler and more perfect a thing is, the later and slower is it in reaching maturity. Man reaches the maturity of his reasoning and mental faculties scarcely before he is eight-and-twenty; woman when she is eighteen; but hers is reason of very narrow limitations. This is why women remain children all their lives, for they always see only what is near at hand, cling to the present, take the appearance of a thing for reality, and prefer trifling matters to the most important. It is by virtue of man's reasoning powers that he does not live in the present only, like the brute, but observes and ponders over the past and future; and from this spring discretion, care, and that anxiety which we so frequently notice in people. The advantages, as well as the disadvantages, that this entails, make woman, in consequence of her weaker reasoning powers, less of a partaker in them. Moreover, she is intellectually short-sighted, for although her intuitive understanding quickly perceives what is near to her, on the other hand her circle of vision is limited and does not embrace anything that is remote; hence everything that is absent or past, or in the future, affects women in a less degree than men. This is why they have greater inclination for extravagance, which sometimes borders on madness. Women in their hearts think that men are intended to earn money so that they may spend it, if possible during their husband's lifetime, but at any rate after his death.

As soon as he has given them his earnings on which to keep house they are strengthened in this belief. Although all this entails many disadvantages, yet it has this advantage — that a woman lives more in the present than a man, and that she enjoys it more keenly if it is at all bearable. This is the origin of that cheerfulness which is peculiar to woman and makes her fit to divert man, and in case of need, to console him when he is weighed down by cares. To consult women in matters of difficulty, as the Germans used to do in old times, is by no means a matter to be overlooked; for their way of grasping a thing is quite different from ours, chiefly because they like the shortest way to the point, and usually keep their attention fixed upon what lies nearest; while we, as a rule, see beyond it, for the simple reason that it lies under our nose; it then becomes necessary for us to be brought back to the thing in order to obtain a near and simple view. This is why women are more sober in their judgment than we, and why they see nothing more in things than is really there; while we, if our passions are roused, slightly exaggerate or add to our imagination.

It is because women's reasoning powers are weaker that they show more sympathy for the unfortunate than men, and consequently take a kindlier interest in them. On the other hand, women are inferior to men in matters of justice, honesty, and conscientiousness. Again, because their reasoning faculty is weak, things clearly visible and real, and belonging to the present, exercise a power over them which is rarely counteracted by abstract thoughts, fixed maxims, or firm resolutions, in general, by regard for the past and

future or by consideration for what is absent and remote. Accordingly they have the first and principal qualities of virtue, but they lack the secondary qualities which are often a necessary instrument in developing it. Women may be compared in this respect to an organism that has a liver but no gall-bladder.(1) So that it will be found that the fundamental fault in the character of women is that they have no “sense of justice.” This arises from their deficiency in the power of reasoning already referred to, and reflection, but is also partly due to the fact that Nature has not destined them, as the weaker sex, to be dependent on strength but on cunning; this is why they are instinctively crafty, and have an ineradicable tendency to lie. For as lions are furnished with claws and teeth, elephants with tusks, boars with fangs, bulls with horns, and the cuttlefish with its dark, inky fluid, so Nature has provided woman for her protection and defence with the faculty of dissimulation, and all the power which Nature has given to man in the form of bodily strength and reason has been conferred on woman in this form. Hence, dissimulation is innate in woman and almost as characteristic of the very stupid as of the clever. Accordingly, it is as natural for women to dissemble at every opportunity as it is for those animals to turn to their weapons when they are attacked; and they feel in doing so that in a certain measure they are only making use of their rights. Therefore a woman who is perfectly truthful and does not dissemble is perhaps an impossibility. This is why they see through dissimulation in others so easily; therefore it is not advisable to attempt it with them. From the fundamental defect that has been stated, and all that it involves, spring falseness, faithlessness, treachery, ungratefulness, and so on. In a court of justice women are more often found guilty of perjury than men. It is indeed to be generally questioned whether they should be allowed to take an oath at all. From time to time there are repeated cases everywhere of ladies, who want for nothing, secretly pocketing and taking away things from shop counters.

Nature has made it the calling of the young, strong, and handsome men to look after the propagation of the human race; so that the species may not degenerate. This is the firm will of Nature, and it finds its expression in the passions of women. This law surpasses all others in both age and power. Woe then to the man who sets up rights and interests in such a way as to make them stand in the way of it; for whatever he may do or say, they will, at the first significant onset, be unmercifully annihilated. For the secret, unformulated, nay, unconscious but innate moral of woman is: We are justified in deceiving those who, because they care a little for us — that is to say for the individual — imagine they have obtained rights over the species. The constitution, and consequently the welfare of the species, have been put into our hands and entrusted to our care through the medium of the next generation which proceeds from us; let us fulfil our duties conscientiously.

But women are by no means conscious of this leading principle in abstracto, they are only conscious of it in concreto, and have no other way of expressing it than in the manner in which they act when the opportunity arrives. So that their conscience does not trouble them so much as we imagine, for in the darkest depths of their hearts they are conscious that in violating their duty towards the individual they have all the better fulfilled it towards the species, whose claim upon them is infinitely greater. (A fuller explanation of this matter may be found in vol. ii., ch. 44, in my chief work, Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.)

Because women in truth exist entirely for the propagation of the race, and their destiny

ends here, they live more for the species than for the individual, and in their hearts take the affairs of the species more seriously than those of the individual. This gives to their whole being and character a certain frivolousness, and altogether a certain tendency which is fundamentally different from that of man; and this it is which develops that discord in married life which is so prevalent and almost the normal state.

It is natural for a feeling of mere indifference to exist between men, but between women it is actual enmity. This is due perhaps to the fact that odium figulinum in the case of men, is limited to their everyday affairs, but with women embraces the whole sex; since they have only one kind of business. Even when they meet in the street, they look at each other like Guelphs and Ghibellines. And it is quite evident when two women first make each other's acquaintance that they exhibit more constraint and dissimulation than two men placed in similar circumstances. This is why an exchange of compliments between two women is much more ridiculous than between two men. Further, while a man will, as a rule, address others, even those inferior to himself, with a certain feeling of consideration and humanity, it is unbearable to see how proudly and disdainfully a lady of rank will, for the most part, behave towards one who is in a lower rank (not employed in her service) when she speaks to her. This may be because differences of rank are much more precarious with women than with us, and consequently more quickly change their line of conduct and elevate them, or because while a hundred things must be weighed in our case, there is only one to be weighed in theirs, namely, with which man they have found favour; and again, because of the one-sided nature of their vocation they stand in closer relationship to each other than men do; and so it is they try to render prominent the differences of rank.

It is only the man whose intellect is clouded by his sexual instinct that could give that stunted, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged race the name of the fair sex; for the entire beauty of the sex is based on this instinct. One would be more justified in calling them the unaesthetic sex than the beautiful. Neither for music, nor for poetry, nor for fine art have they any real or true sense and susceptibility, and it is mere mockery on their part, in their desire to please, if they affect any such thing.

This makes them incapable of taking a purely objective interest in anything, and the reason for it is, I fancy, as follows. A man strives to get direct mastery over things either by understanding them or by compulsion. But a woman is always and everywhere driven to indirect mastery, namely through a man; all her direct mastery being limited to him alone. Therefore it lies in woman's nature to look upon everything only as a means for winning man, and her interest in anything else is always a simulated one, a mere roundabout way to gain her ends, consisting of coquetry and pretence. Hence Rousseau said, Les femmes, en général, n'aiment aucun art, ne se connoissent à aucun et n'ont aucun génie (Lettre à d'Alembert, note xx.). Every one who can see through a sham must have found this to be the case. One need only watch the way they behave at a concert, the opera, or the play; the childish simplicity, for instance, with which they keep on chattering during the finest passages in the greatest masterpieces. If it is true that the Greeks forbade women to go to the play, they acted in a right way; for they would at any rate be able to hear something. In our day it would be more appropriate to substitute taceat mulier in theatro for taceat mulier in ecclesia; and this might perhaps be put up in big letters on the curtain.

Nothing different can be expected of women if it is borne in mind that the most eminent of the whole sex have never accomplished anything in the fine arts that is really great, genuine, and original, or given to the world any kind of work of permanent value. This is most striking in regard to painting, the technique of which is as much within their reach as within ours; this is why they pursue it so industriously. Still, they have not a single great painting to show, for the simple reason that they lack that objectivity of mind which is precisely what is so directly necessary in painting. They always stick to what is subjective. For this reason, ordinary women have no susceptibility for painting at all: for natura non facet saltum. And Huarte, in his book which has been famous for three hundred years, Examen de ingenios para las scienzias, contends that women do not possess the higher capacities. Individual and partial exceptions do not alter the matter; women are and remain, taken altogether, the most thorough and incurable philistines; and because of the extremely absurd arrangement which allows them to share the position and title of their husbands they are a constant stimulus to his ignoble ambitions. And further, it is because they are philistines that modern society, to which they give the tone and where they have sway, has become corrupted. As regards their position, one should be guided by Napoleon's maxim, Les femmes n'ont pas de rang; and regarding them in other things, Chamfort says very truly: Elles sont faites pour commercer avec nos faiblesses avec notre folie, mais non avec notre raison. Il existe entre elles et les hommes des sympathies d'épiderme et très-peu de sympathies d'esprit d'âme et de caractère. They are the sexus sequior, the second sex in every respect, therefore their weaknesses should be spared, but to treat women with extreme reverence is ridiculous, and lowers us in their own eyes. When nature divided the human race into two parts, she did not cut it exactly through the middle! The difference between the positive and negative poles, according to polarity, is not merely qualitative but also quantitative. And it was in this light that the ancients and people of the East regarded woman; they recognised her true position better than we, with our old French ideas of gallantry and absurd veneration, that highest product of Christian-Teutonic stupidity. These ideas have only served to make them arrogant and imperious, to such an extent as to remind one at times of the holy apes in Benares, who, in the consciousness of their holiness and inviolability, think they can do anything and everything they please.

In the West, the woman, that is to say the "lady," finds herself in a fausse position; for woman, rightly named by the ancients sexus sequior, is by no means fit to be the object of our honour and veneration, or to hold her head higher than man and to have the same rights as he. The consequences of this fausse position are sufficiently clear. Accordingly, it would be a very desirable thing if this Number Two of the human race in Europe were assigned her natural position, and the lady-grievance got rid of, which is not only ridiculed by the whole of Asia, but would have been equally ridiculed by Greece and Rome. The result of this would be that the condition of our social, civil, and political affairs would be incalculably improved. The Salic law would be unnecessary; it would be a superfluous truism. The European lady, strictly speaking, is a creature who should not exist at all; but there ought to be housekeepers, and young girls who hope to become such; and they should be brought up not to be arrogant, but to be domesticated and submissive. It is exactly because there are ladies in Europe that women of a lower standing, that is to say, the greater majority of the sex, are much more unhappy than they are in the East. Even Lord Byron says (Letters and Papers, by Thomas Moore, vol. ii. p. 399), Thought of the

state of women under the ancient Greeks — convenient enough. Present state, a remnant of the barbarism of the chivalric and feudal ages — artificial and unnatural. They ought to mind home — and be well fed and clothed — but not mixed in society. Well educated, too, in religion — but to read neither poetry nor politics — nothing but books of piety and cookery. Music — drawing — dancing — also a little gardening and ploughing now and then. I have seen them mending the roads in Epirus with good success. Why not, as well as hay-making and milking?

In our part of the world, where monogamy is in force, to marry means to halve one's rights and to double one's duties. When the laws granted woman the same rights as man, they should also have given her a masculine power of reason. On the contrary, just as the privileges and honours which the laws decree to women surpass what Nature has meted out to them, so is there a proportional decrease in the number of women who really share these privileges; therefore the remainder are deprived of their natural rights in so far as the others have been given more than Nature accords.

For the unnatural position of privilege which the institution of monogamy, and the laws of marriage which accompany it, assign to the woman, whereby she is regarded throughout as a full equivalent of the man, which she is not by any means, cause intelligent and prudent men to reflect a great deal before they make so great a sacrifice and consent to so unfair an arrangement. Therefore, whilst among polygamous nations every woman finds maintenance, where monogamy exists the number of married women is limited, and a countless number of women who are without support remain over; those in the upper classes vegetate as useless old maids, those in the lower are reduced to very hard work of a distasteful nature, or become prostitutes, and lead a life which is as joyless as it is void of honour. But under such circumstances they become a necessity to the masculine sex; so that their position is openly recognised as a special means for protecting from seduction those other women favoured by fate either to have found husbands, or who hope to find them. In London alone there are 80,000 prostitutes. Then what are these women who have come too quickly to this most terrible end but human sacrifices on the altar of monogamy? The women here referred to and who are placed in this wretched position are the inevitable counterbalance to the European lady, with her pretensions and arrogance. Hence polygamy is a real benefit to the female sex, taking it as a whole. And, on the other hand, there is no reason why a man whose wife suffers from chronic illness, or remains barren, or has gradually become too old for him, should not take a second. Many people become converts to Mormonism for the precise reasons that they condemn the unnatural institution of monogamy. The conferring of unnatural rights upon women has imposed unnatural duties upon them, the violation of which, however, makes them unhappy. For example, many a man thinks marriage unadvisable as far as his social standing and monetary position are concerned, unless he contracts a brilliant match. He will then wish to win a woman of his own choice under different conditions, namely, under those which will render safe her future and that of her children. Be the conditions ever so just, reasonable, and adequate, and she consents by giving up those undue privileges which marriage, as the basis of civil society, alone can bestow, she must to a certain extent lose her honour and lead a life of loneliness; since human nature makes us dependent on the opinion of others in a way that is completely out of proportion to its value. While, if the woman does not consent, she runs the risk of being compelled to marry a man she dislikes, or of shrivelling

up into an old maid; for the time allotted to her to find a home is very short. In view of this side of the institution of monogamy, Thomasius's profoundly learned treatise, de Concubinatu, is well worth reading, for it shows that, among all nations, and in all ages, down to the Lutheran Reformation, concubinage was allowed, nay, that it was an institution, in a certain measure even recognised by law and associated with no dishonour. And it held this position until the Lutheran Reformation, when it was recognised as another means for justifying the marriage of the clergy; whereupon the Catholic party did not dare to remain behindhand in the matter.

It is useless to argue about polygamy, it must be taken as a fact existing everywhere, the mere regulation of which is the problem to be solved. Where are there, then, any real monogamists? We all live, at any rate for a time, and the majority of us always, in polygamy. Consequently, as each man needs many women, nothing is more just than to let him, nay, make it incumbent upon him to provide for many women. By this means woman will be brought back to her proper and natural place as a subordinate being, and the lady, that monster of European civilisation and Christian-Teutonic stupidity, with her ridiculous claim to respect and veneration, will no longer exist; there will still be women, but no unhappy women, of whom Europe is at present full. The Mormons' standpoint is right.

In India no woman is ever independent, but each one stands under the control of her father or her husband, or brother or son, in accordance with the law of Manu.

It is certainly a revolting idea that widows should sacrifice themselves on their husband's dead body; but it is also revolting that the money which the husband has earned by working diligently for all his life, in the hope that he was working for his children, should be wasted on her paramours. Medium tenuere beati. The first love of a mother, as that of animals and men, is purely instinctive, and consequently ceases when the child is no longer physically helpless. After that, the first love should be reinstated by a love based on habit and reason; but this often does not appear, especially where the mother has not loved the father. The love of a father for his children is of a different nature and more sincere; it is founded on a recognition of his own inner self in the child, and is therefore metaphysical in its origin.

In almost every nation, both of the new and old world, and even among the Hottentots, property is inherited by the male descendants alone; it is only in Europe that one has departed from this. That the property which men have with difficulty acquired by long-continued struggling and hard work should afterwards come into the hands of women, who, in their want of reason, either squander it within a short time or otherwise waste it, is an injustice as great as it is common, and it should be prevented by limiting the right of women to inherit. It seems to me that it would be a better arrangement if women, be they widows or daughters, only inherited the money for life secured by mortgage, but not the property itself or the capital, unless there lacked male descendants. It is men who make the money, and not women; therefore women are neither justified in having unconditional possession of it nor capable of administrating it. Women should never have the free disposition of wealth, strictly so-called, which they may inherit, such as capital, houses, and estates. They need a guardian always; therefore they should not have the guardianship of their children under any circumstances whatever. The vanity of women, even if it should not be greater than that of men, has this evil in it, that it is directed on material

things — that is to say, on their personal beauty and then on tinsel, pomp, and show. This is why they are in their right element in society. This it is which makes them inclined to be extravagant, especially since they possess little reasoning power. Accordingly, an ancient writer says, [Greek: Gunae to synolon esti dapanaeron physei].(2) Men's vanity, on the other hand, is often directed on non-material advantages, such as intellect, learning, courage, and the like. Aristotle explains in the Politics (3) the great disadvantages which the Spartans brought upon themselves by granting too much to their women, by allowing them the right of inheritance and dowry, and a great amount of freedom; and how this contributed greatly to the fall of Sparta. May it not be that the influence of women in France, which has been increasing since Louis XIII.'s time, was to blame for that gradual corruption of the court and government which led to the first Revolution, of which all subsequent disturbances have been the result? In any case, the false position of the female sex, so conspicuously exposed by the existence of the "lady," is a fundamental defect in our social condition, and this defect, proceeding from the very heart of it, must extend its harmful influence in every direction. That woman is by nature intended to obey is shown by the fact that every woman who is placed in the unnatural position of absolute independence at once attaches herself to some kind of man, by whom she is controlled and governed; this is because she requires a master. If she, is young, the man is a lover; if she is old, a priest.

Notes

(1) Let me refer to what I have said in my treatise on The Foundation of Morals, §71.

(2) Brunck’s Gnomici poetae graeci v. 115.

(3) Bk. I., ch. 9.