

bibliografia tematica

Bibliography on Feminist Philosophy

The present bibliography on Feminist Philosophy has been prepared by Pia Francesca de Solenni. Dr. de Solenni currently works as a policy analyst in life studies at the Family Research Council, Washington, DC. She is also working on a book entitled Teologia del femminile, to be published within the year.

Like most fields of philosophy, feminist philosophy offers extensive bibliography based on many, often opposing, perspectives. Many articles and books have been written discussing feminism, but few offer any type of a starting point for discussing the very nature of woman (or man). Nevertheless, their paucity is atoned for by their quality.

Regardless of one's understanding of feminist philosophy, it is imperative to have an overview of the preceding theories. *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – A.D. 1250* and *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250 – 1500*, by Sr. Prudence ALLEN, RSM (Herder Books, Grand Rapids 1996 and 2002), give an extensive view of the development of the concept of woman in western civilization. Starting with the pre-Socratics, she illustrates the origins of differing theories of feminine and masculine complementarity. Her work manifests the progression of these theories and how they were received or modified by subsequent philosophical schools.

Rosemarie Tong has authored two comprehensive books on feminist theory which can serve as historical primers for modern feminist thought:

Rosemarie TONG, *Feminist Thought*, Westview Press, San Francisco 1989.

Rosemarie TONG, *Feminism and Philosophy*, Eds. Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong, Westview Press, San Francisco 1995.

Both books give concise summaries of feminist thought, and by their juxtaposition illustrate the historical progression or development of feminist philosophy. Tong's books are also a good reference source. Despite the apparent chronological gap between Allen's and Tong's works, taken together, they can provide a basic understanding of the development of feminist thought. Tong's are best understood when read with at least some background in modern philosophy.

By far one of the most provocative books, Karl STERN's *The Flight From Woman* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, New York 1965) gives shape to the feminine question. Up to this point, most feminist theories had concentrated upon reducing or eliminating the differences between men and women. Stern, one of

the first moderns to maintain that the feminine difference is essential and quickly disappearing, argues from epistemology. Beginning with Descartes, he maintains that western civilization has largely left aside the feminine aspect of epistemology, the part of coming to know that measures itself against reality, against objective truth: *intellectus* which actively takes in and receives. Now, the individual determines reality for himself. The act of knowing is pure *ratio*: “*Cogito ergo sum.*” Stern explains the impact: “If we equate the one-sidedly rational and technical with the masculine, there arises the ghastly spectre of a world impoverished of womanly values.” Although Stern’s work deals largely with psychology, it contains many philosophical and sociological implications.

The Flight From Woman serves to refocus the contemporary and ensuing feminist discussion. Stern aptly points out that the task before us lies more in recovery rather than discovery. Within the Western tradition, despite what some scholars maintain, there has been an estimable understanding of woman and her particular capacities. It is only within the last 200 or 300 years that we have forgotten this.

Particularly in light of Stern’s work, Joseph F. HARTEL’s book **Femina Ut Imago Dei: In the Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas** (Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome 1993) becomes a suitable tool for reexamining the lost tradition beginning with the thought of Aquinas who has been notably maligned by contemporary scholars. Hartel does not articulate a particular Thomistic feminism. Instead he illustrates the inclusiveness of Thomistic thought. Wherever Aquinas discusses human nature, Hartel shows that Aquinas consistently upholds woman (and man) as a being made to image God, as a free subject and not as a slave.

Although Aquinas’s consideration is primarily philosophical, Hartel’s use of Aquinas helps to resituate the feminist discussion. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, this discussion took place largely outside of the Catholic Church. Not infrequently, Catholicism has often been attacked as anti-woman. However, with perhaps the exception of Tong’s books, all of the bibliography has suggested that in order to develop an integral feminism we must first recover the tradition we lost. That tradition is rooted in Catholicism; hence, we find ourselves turning almost exclusively to Catholic thought. Aquinas’s philosophy illustrates this perfectly. Within a particular (Catholic) understanding of nature and mankind, emerges an unexampled understanding of difference and complementarity which can be used to understand both man and woman because one is not known without relation or reference to the other.

From Aquinas’s thought, we can extrapolate an integral feminism based on his anthropology and epistemology. For a more detailed analysis, I recommend my text, *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas’s ‘Mens’ Through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology: Towards an Understanding of Woman as ‘Imago Dei’*, published in the series *Dissertationes* (Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome 2000).

Based on a constructive understanding of difference, John Paul II has been able to situate his call for a “new feminism” within the context of the Catholic

tradition. Although this new feminism need not be particular to Catholics or even Christians, it needs the context and vision of Catholicism.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has published a compilation of John Paul II's various addresses dealing specifically with the question of woman's nature: *The Genius of Women* (Washington, DC 1999). This publication also includes his "Letter to Women" (29 June 1995) and an excerpt from his 1995 "Holy Thursday Letter to Priests". Throughout these discourses, the Pope consistently emphasizes a unique "feminine response". This, he explains, is the gift and vocation of all women. It sets the groundwork for n. 99 of his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. Here, within the context of an encyclical devoted entirely to life issues, John Paul II officially calls for the "new feminism".

Although John Paul II has not articulated a systematic philosophy of the new feminism, he has given some very noteworthy guidelines for it. One of the most telling is found within a subsequent encyclical: *Fides et Ratio* (1998). After putting forth a detailed discussion of the relationship between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, he closes with his customary invocation of Mary the Mother of God. Immediately preceding this prayer, he holds up Mary as the paradigmatic philosopher. Therefore, Mary, who is the most perfect woman, plays an essential role in revealing an aspect of woman that has either been long forgotten or perhaps has never been completely articulated.

Within much of feminist philosophy, the thrust has been to emphasize that a woman can do just about anything that a man can do. To a degree this is probably true, but at the same time we've lost what's particular to woman. Whatever she does, she does as a woman, not as a man. Being a woman should, therefore, contribute something to the *way* in which she exists. The discussion of women's ordination illustrates this in a unique way. The USCCB has also published a compilation from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) entitled *From "Inter insigniores" to "Ordinatio sacerdotalis"* (Washington, DC 1998). Originally published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City State 1996). Within the context of a theological question, CDF offers philosophical commentary from various scholars including Hans Urs von Balthasar which consider the questions related to the philosophy of woman.

Angelo SCOLA's book *Il mistero nuziale* (Mursia, Rome 1998) also serves as a good primer for discussing the philosophy of woman. Scola begins with an interpretation and explanation of John Paul II's teachings on the complementarity of man and woman to arrive at a theological understanding of the question. In the course of arriving at the theological aspect, Scola presents various philosophical underpinnings that are necessary for the theological consideration. Hence, within his theological work, there can be found various philosophical discussions relating to the question.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it presents some of the key works for framing a development of a philosophy of woman which is much needed and desired amid the current feminist discussion.

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