

A Woman's Philosophy of Woman

by Jenny P. d'Hericourt (1860)

You, gentlemen, describe woman in the following ways. She is more impressionable than man, since her nerves are more fully developed. Since she is weaker, she must attain what she wants by cleverness and strategy. Her weakness forces her to be careful. Her destiny as mother makes her terrified of destruction and war. Her more delicate constitution makes her fear and avoid competition and contention. She loves concrete things. She is, therefore, always inclined to transform
5 thoughts into facts, to embody them in a fixed form. Instead of a sustained process of thought, she reasons by intuition or by a quick perception of a general relation. Woman is a better observer than man, and therefore more insightful. This is woman as you men paint her.

On this basis you conclude the following. The vocation of woman is love, maternity and the household. She is too impressionable, too gentle, to be a judge or lawmaker. She is too flighty to pursue science, and her kind of intelligence makes
10 her unable to understand theories. She is too interested in particular things to be serious about general ideas.

Now, gentlemen, I agree with all your observations about how women differ from men but on this same basis, I reach entirely opposite conclusions.

1. Woman would carry into philosophy and science her subtleness of observation and her love of concrete things. She would correct the exaggerated tendency of man for abstract theories. All would recognize that a hypothesis is merely the
15 starting place for further questioning. We would see that truth is always intelligible in its nature, however presently unknown it may be. We shall avoid making simple generalities into binding laws of nature. Thus, we will finally have a true philosophy and science because they will carry the imprint of both sexes.

2. By her quick intuition and acuteness of observation, woman alone can discover the cures for psychological
20 diseases.

3. The presence of woman in judicial functions as juror and judge will be a guarantee of true human justice to all. Woman alone, through her gentleness, her mercy, her feelings of sympathy, and her subtleness of observation can understand
25 that society has its share of guilt in every crime which a criminal commits. So, society should be organized to prevent wrong rather than to punish it.

4. Under the direct influence of woman as lawmaker, we shall have a reconstruction of all laws. First and foremost,
30 we will have measures to prevent crime. Compulsory education will play a large role. Laws concerning morality will be more severe, but the criminal laws will be more rational and fair.

So, gentlemen, while accepting your data about woman, I come to different conclusions.

Until now, institutions, laws, sciences, philosophy have chiefly displayed the masculine imprint. All of these things are, therefore, only half human. To become truly human, woman must be part of all these activities. She must be trained and
30 cultivated like you. Don't fear that she will become like you. The rose and the carnation growing in the same soil, under the same sky, cared for by the same gardener, nonetheless remain rose and carnation. And they are each more beautiful as they are better cultivated.