

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Second Sex*. by Simone De Beauvoir and H. M. Parshley

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BOOK REVIEWS

ERRATUM

In Otis Dudley Duncan's review of T. E. Smith's *Population Growth in Malaya: A Survey of Recent Trends*, which appeared in the September issue, the words *per cent*, following the figures 1.7 and 2.6, should be deleted. They were erroneously inserted, without the reviewer's knowledge.

The Second Sex. By SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR. Translated and edited by H. M. PARSHLEY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953. Pp. xxx+732. \$10.00.

Woman, says Simone de Beauvoir, "living marginally to the masculine world . . . sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view." Indeed, rather than for the profundity, scholarship, or insight into the feminine psyche seen in it by other reviewers, this book seems to us to recommend itself as the special point of view of a gifted Frenchwoman, who is a novelist as well as an exponent of Existentialist philosophy. It should interest especially those concerned with human nature and social institutions. To students of marriage and the family it offers insight into a different culture as well as acquaintance with the extreme feminist personality type.

To enter the world of Simone de Beauvoir is to come into a world in large degree vanished from the American scene: a world in which little girls, in contrast to their brothers, dress uncomfortably and are forbidden to climb trees; in which coeducation, economic independence for women, and the dissemination of scientific methods of birth control are far from commonplace; and in which father and husband dominate the household while leaving its labors exclusively to wife and mother. We miss an account of comfortable bourgeois French home life in which *maman* plays an important part. Instead we find materials drawn from clinical reports or quotations relative to the marital difficulties of the wives of such uncomfortable geniuses as Leo Tolstoy

or D. H. Lawrence. The emotional experiences of Marie Bashkirtsev and of Isadora Duncan are perhaps even more remote from the life of the ordinary woman. But all are skilfully combined to create a fascinating, if not quite convincing, picture of "*Woman's Life Today*."

We have begun by speaking of Book II, which is closest to what we ourselves know and can judge. Book I, entitled "*Facts and Myths*," lays the theoretical foundation for an understanding of woman's low estate as imposed by man throughout recorded history. Man, the myth-maker, has built up a conception of woman as powerful, dangerous, mysterious, poetic, and desirable, but at the same time has always injured woman in failing to recognize her likeness with himself. (One chapter on biology recognizes certain biological differences between the sexes but minimizes them except in so far as man's greater physical strength permits him to dominate.) Though it is admitted that gains have been made by women toward equality with men, women at best are conceived of as "equal but different" rather than "equal and the same," the only just evaluation.

To accept the rationale of *The Second Sex*, one must accept the values implicit throughout the text. The author mentions at one point "the loftiest human attitudes: heroism, revolt, disinterestedness, imagination, creation"; but she does not elaborate these concepts. With greater enthusiasm she writes the words "danger," "risking life," "adventure," "masculine values," "violence," as "the authentic proof of each one's loyalty to himself, to his passions, to his own will," "liberty reaching out toward other liberties." The questions For what does one risk one's life? How choose among conflicting masculine values? What are the goals of liberty and what are the limitations upon their realization? are not answered. To take action, and even to risk one's life, may be comparatively easy. But to live rationally and with full humanity is difficult. We may compare this romantic Existentialism with Sartre's discussion of the forlorn-

ness, anguish, and even despair of man, who must make his choices not only for himself but for all mankind.

The simple fact is that Simone de Beauvoir is not interested in common humanity, male or female, but in gifted woman kept from full expression by man-made limitations. The remedy, not a new one, she tells us, is to do away with the ties that bind, marriage which "kills love" and "mutilates woman," the family, whose intimate relationships are harmful and whose younger members are better off "under the direction of adults whose bonds with [them] would be impersonal and pure." Sex relations between equals rather than between dominating and dominated will be encouraged, however, since "in sexuality will always be materialized the tension, the anguish, the joy, the frustration, and the triumph of existence." This sexuality may take various forms. It is, for the most part, in the relations between woman and woman or mother and child rather than between woman and man that the natural warmth of human affections as distinguished from sexual needs are recognized. But Lesbianism (though not male homosexuality) is found to be natural and, as an attitude "at once motivated and freely adopted," quite defensible.

In spite of all this, many young women in America will assert that, having attained most of that economic and political freedom for which the early feminists struggled, they are now freely choosing to become wives and mothers. In fact, able and often continuing to hold outside jobs after marriage, they are marrying earlier and producing larger families than a generation ago. Are they then to be denied the freedom to act in this way? The conclusions of the sociologist that, however limiting to freedom, it is only through the intimate relations of the family that full humanity develops, may give a rational support to such impulses. Simone de Beauvoir herself at one point recognizes the potentialities of family living for human happiness when she confesses, for French culture at least:

There have been times . . . when such felicity [of the family] was also man's ideal, when he was attached above all to his home, to his family, and when even the children chose to be characterized by their parents, their traditions, and their past. At such times she who ruled the home, who pre-

sided at the dinner table, was recognized as supreme; and she still plays this resplendent role among certain landed proprietors and wealthy peasants who here and there perpetuate the patriarchal civilization.

Contrary to statements made elsewhere, the lines just quoted imply that woman's position in society relative to man's cannot be measured by any externally developed scale of freedom, but only by the actual relation of power and responsibility she holds toward the institutions and values important to the culture in which she functions. Thus, we may add, in so far as the role of wife and mother was in the past neither minor nor petty, as in traditional China, for example, women confined to the home, physically and economically dependent, nevertheless often developed into wise, mature, and able individuals. The same thing may, we believe, be seen in women of India today.

Women, like men, respond to the real as contrasted with the theoretical expectations of those about them. In America, women have ideally always had a high position. In recent years they have attained a large degree of personal freedom, the opportunity to compete with men on something like equal terms outside the home and within it, perhaps more than their share of dominance. Yet in a very real sense women are still excluded from full participation in the important affairs of men. At the same time, modern industrial civilization, which demands not variety but interchangeable parts, has tended to break down the structure of woman's kingdom, the private world of family. As a result, we have a situation in which many women have attained every independence but the most important one of all, that of the mind. Under such conditions, not only individual women are debased, but the whole society.

Today the turning back to the home by both men and women and its revaluation as a retreat from a painfully impersonal outside world may help to restore women's confidence in themselves as women, a confidence to some degree undermined by the feminist dogma itself. Yet the extravagances of feminism have their place in working against complacency and a helpless acceptance of time-honored limitations. At best, the family circle can offer only a partial refuge in a collapsing and chaotic world. To preserve and

constantly to re-create that reasonable pattern of life in which human values flourish, all, first or second sex, must emerge, all struggle, all "transcend."

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An Introduction to Social Science. By ARTHUR NAFTALIN, BENJAMIN N. NELSON, MULFORD Q. SIBLEY, and DONALD C. CALHOUN, with the assistance of ANDREAS G. PAPAN-DREOU. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1953. Pp. xvii+372+xxx.

Collections of readings seem recently to have become part of the standard equipment for teaching in the social sciences. In this book of readings the editors present a volume for the introductory social science course in a general education program, developed from their teaching experience at the University of Minnesota. It stands as an editorial accomplishment that will not easily be surpassed.

The volume is divided into three books, representing three integrating themes. Book I is "Personality: The Human Individual and the Patterns of Culture"; Book II is "Work: Division of Labor, Co-operation, and Conflict in Modern Society"; and Book III is "Community: Group and Person in the Modern World." Each book is introduced by an excellent essay written by the editors.

The more than 130 selections are remarkably well chosen. Consistent with the editors' belief that "the social sciences are most fruitfully pursued when their close connection not only with one another, but also with the humanities, is recognized" (p. vi), a judiciously selected group of readings from the latter are inserted among the larger group of selections from social science. These are integrated in such a way as to add considerably to the volume. Though the majority of contributions are from contemporary social science, the giants of the recent past are well represented: Marx, Freud, Henry George, Toennies, Cooley, William James, Michaels, Weber, Mosca, Veblen, and others.

Furthermore, the selections are drawn substantially from the basic literature. There is no attempt here to make extensive use of timely (but soon dated), popularly written articles from mass-circulation magazines. The

student is introduced to the best that social science has to offer.

The problem of values has been handled commendably. The editors distinguish between current social *issues* (housing, race, employment) and *integrating themes or problems*; they attempt to deal with the latter, thus limiting their selections to those they regard as relevant to the "basic, enduring, and recurring" problems. At the same time, explicit emphasis is placed on the analysis of values as an integral part of general education. The volume opens with a selection by Paul Tillich on "The Crisis of Personality" and concludes with Max Weber on "The Morality of Politics and the Politics of Morality." In between, one finds, among many others, Marx on ideology, the "authoritarian personality," David Lynch on monopoly, Burnham on the managerial revolution, and a discussion of contrasting economic systems in Great Britain, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and the United States. The editors seek to clarify for the student the major value issues of industrial society.

A minor criticism from this reviewer is that the varied issues now grouped under the label of "mass communication" are given too slight a treatment. But this is not to detract from the excellent work of the editors, whose sensitive and discriminating judgment has produced a superior book of readings.

Two thorough indexes (name and subject) and nineteen excellent selected and annotated bibliographies, placed after relevant parts of the three books, add considerably to the merit of the volume.

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The Scope and Method of Sociology: A Meta-sociological Treatise. By PAUL HANLY FURFEY. New York: Harper & Bros., 1953. Pp. xii+556. \$5.00.

This seems to me to be an excellent book, though it may be too difficult for some students who ought to include in their training a course such as might be based on it. It presupposes a grounding in formal logic, mathematics, and cognate subjects, which even graduate students in sociology frequently lack.

"Metasociology," indicated by Furfey as the essential subject of the book, is defined by him as follows: