

## TWO CHEERS FOR EQUALITY

Rarely does one have the luck to speak to a group in the guise of a natural, *bona fide* authority. Today this is possible for me, despite the fact that my subject is not within the usual area of my professional interests. By the mere fact that I am female, I am become an expert—for this conference is symbolically and institutionally prepared to recognize (for three days) that women are people, and that they have ambitions, abilities, and something called “potential.”

On the curious belief that a member of a class is the best person to analyze the properties of his class (a Christian to give you the truth about Christianity, or a Communist about Communism, or on the same logic Moby Dick about white whales; and per chance a bigot about bigotry?) I have been summoned from the ivory tower nestling under the shadows of great laboratories in Berkeley to give you the low-down on whether women are equal to men.

It is no secret that the document from which this nation dates its independence proclaimed, for the first time in a public paper, the fundamental proposition that “all men are created equal” and joined to this basic value the inherent rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. But what of women? Were they *intended* to be included in the generic term “men,” or was the author of the Declaration and his other learned and emancipated associates confining the term to its reference to one sex alone? On this matter one is free to speculate. For while it is clear that no one then thought of making women equal in political, legal, social and educational rights with men, *immediately*, there *was* a consciousness of a new spirit, a dynamic moral principle that was expected to lead to unexpected consequences of further growth. For it was an era when confidence in human capacities and pride in human reasonableness had its passionate advocates. Jefferson was one; his good friend Benjamin Rush another; and Benjamin Franklin at that time and in the tolerance of his age and wisdom was a likely third—not to mention a veritable army of less illustrious but far-seeing men.

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That this daring thought was being voiced explicitly, and by women, is also fact—for we have many proofs, among them a remarkable letter which Abigail Adams wrote to her not so liberal husband in the Continental Congress on the eve of independence. Pleading for her dependent sex, Abigail Adams wrote:

“. . . in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors! Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

She concluded this appeal by recommending the substitution of the title of “friend” for the harsh title of “master,” and ended with the question: “Why not put it out of the power of the vicious and lawless to use us with cruelty. . . ?”

To this fetching appeal, John Adams wrote a heavily bantering reply.

“As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh! We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere—children and apprentices . . . schools and colleges . . . Indians, Negroes grow insolent. But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. . . . Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power in its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and softly, and in practices you know we are the subjects.”

To this affectionate evasion his loving “friend” responded in kind: “I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies, for whilst you are . . . emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over your wives.” Then gracefully accepting the implied role, she quoted the couplet:

“Charm by accepting, by submitting sway,  
Yet have our humor most when we obey.”

This good-humored dialog could take place only in a pervasively dominant “man’s world.” When issues of human rights more insistent and tragic than Mrs. Adams contemplated were before the nation, the full

moral and intellectual argument was formulated in terms so compelling that they live still.

This second case for women's rights was formulated early in the 1830's by two remarkable women abolitionists, the sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké of Charleston, South Carolina, who had been drawn north to work for the emancipation of the slaves. It is to Sarah Grimké that America owes its first effective moral justification of women's human rights and their place in society. Her pamphlet, *The Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* antedates by six years Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and had been well studied in England in the 1840's when abolitionist leaders visited there. The argument leaves no aspect of the condition of women in America unexplored—"Cannot all at last see," she wrote, "the simple truth, that God has made no distinction between men and women as moral beings. . . . To me it is perfectly clear that whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do." Before the powerful essay concluded, Sarah Grimké really established her case against double standards and divided worlds for male and female. We will state what she tried to prove in her own words:

*"That intellect is not sexed; that strength of mind is not sexed; and that our views about the duties of man . . . and the duties of women, the spheres of man and the sphere of woman are merely arbitrary opinions, differing in different ages and countries, and dependent solely on the will and judgment of erring mortals."*

This was the fundamental truth: that intellect is not sexed!

In effect, then, Sarah Grimké perceives that the real issue concerns social and educational equality as much as it does the narrower sphere of equal legal and political rights. She herself is much indebted to her fond brother, Thomas S. Grimké, whose liberal views on female education she cites with approval. "Give me," he said, "a host of educated mothers and sisters and I will do more to revolutionize a country, in moral and religious taste, in manners and in social virtues and intellectual cultivation than I can possibly do in double or treble the time with a similar host of educated men. I cannot but think that the miserable condition of the great body of the people in all ancient communities is to be ascribed in a very great degree to the degradation of women."

Sarah Grimké saw the point, and in her final argument, the justification for full moral equality for women lies in its consequences, for men and for the society in which men, women and children ceaselessly interact. If only men could see beyond the cake of custom and con-

ventional pride, they would be able to share the heavy responsibilities of lifelong work, of self-respect, as they would benefit by the increased sympathy from women who were their equals. They would see in truth that "woman, as their equal, was unspeakably more valuable than woman as their inferior."

Sarah Grimké's tract on equality, written a century and a quarter ago, provided the rationale for a movement that did not come to full political culmination until the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920.

In some ways, the story of this ultimate trial and costly struggle that consumed a century of human effort has never been fully told, nor has it been properly estimated in American history. Sad to say, it is a story which is peculiarly muted and callously misunderstood especially in our own times. The skill, the fortitude, the imagination and the moral tenacity of these feminists tends to be taken for granted or quite overlooked; while the caricatures, the vulgar jokes and jibes, and the bloomers are vividly relished and remembered. No, the "suffragist" has not had a good press, and her image is barnacled: we see her as a strident and sexless female, her hatchet face rising above a mannish collar, sour, dour, shoving her angular frame into places and corners where healthy bullyboy males retreat for convivial moments.

She is known to us as more shrew than sibyl, the zealot whose envy and hatred of male power is a pre-Freudian rampage, unchecked by visits to the therapeutic couch. As always, some of the image, part of the caricature is related to actuality. The movement for woman's rights was a most complex and long-lived affair, and it certainly had its full share of bigots, its fanatics, its absurdities and its mistakes. Reformers are trouble-makers by any definition and by anyone's lights. To reform is to take trouble and to make trouble—even if the larger purpose is to make things better after the trouble subsides. To reform is to decide to resist drift; it is to unsettle fixities and challenge "normal" (some mistakenly think "natural") habits and ways. The stunning irreducible fact about the feminist movement in America, however, is the proven intelligence and good sense, the gaiety and yet commitment which the best of the women leaders effectively maintained. Much like the American colonial woman, or her later sister on the moving frontier, these women reformers possessed resourcefulness and inventiveness, to put salt in their stew.

Think of women who could become, overnight in some cases, editors of newspapers—like Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton when the wealthy eccentric, George Francis Train, suddenly decided to establish *The Revolution* for them to edit—and handed them,

with his check, a motto which they kept while the newspaper ran: "*Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less!*" Or think of women like Margaret Fuller who could count as friends and supporters the circle of writers and philosophers to which Emerson, Thoreau, Channing and Alcott belonged.

Women who became educators of under-privileged white children and freed Negroes, in the North and eventually in the South; women who survived the isolation-cell welcome of medical school until they passed their exams, and then knocked on hospital doors begging fruitlessly the chance to practice medicine. And reflect for a moment on the *feelings* of all the women workers in this cause, who had to walk a daily line between hostile men and spiteful women.

But having reviewed these moments of America's past, we must ask to what purpose? Biographically, I am tempted to say that part of my purpose has been to confess—*peccavi*. For like so many so-called "emancipated" modern women, I had accepted the view that the abstract issue of "equal rights" for women was old hat—the battle had been won, long ago and far away, by crusaders who were too single-minded to be interesting, too righteous to be admired, and too graceless to be accepted into my private family of ideal types. My academic journey began in the crude and innocent belief that the life of the mind and the republic of humanistic scholarship was wide open to work and wroth, regardless of race, creed, color or previous condition of sexual servitude. I am now an older and (if not wiser) at least a less ebullient believer in equality, as she is practised in this advanced and democratic world. It has occurred to me, with respect to the Grimké and other courageous women who served this cause, that possibly most Americans as well as myself might say with T. S. Eliot, "*We had the experience but missed the meaning.*"

Why so? As we look about us in the 1960's, only mop-up operations remain to complete the victory of full legal rights for women, to match the suffrage for which so much was expended, and from which so much was hoped. This era of the 60's is distinctively the post World War II complex; for in that war women served in the armed forces, on every industrial production line, and they now continue to participate in the labor force in increasing numbers. In 1960, the U.S. Census reported that 35 percent of all women over fourteen were in the nation's labor force; and that a marked increase in participation rates for married women and middle-aged women was an established trend.

In higher education, it is now the case that universities and colleges are by and large open to women on an equal basis with men (except of course in traditionally non-coeducational institutions), and

it was true by 1958 that women made up 35 percent of the total opening enrollment of degree-credit students in all institutions. Meanwhile, even graduate education reflects the growing participation of women. In 1957-58, eleven plus percent of all doctor's degrees in the country were awarded to women—despite the warning statement in the National Manpower Council report on Womanpower, that only one woman out of every 300 capable of earning a Ph.D. does so. To be sure, in scholarships and fellowships women do not have as many or equal opportunities with men; and in salary rewards there remains, in most cases, a gap.

No one in his right mind (or even in *her* right mind) can question this very real progress in the past twenty years in the position of women, both in the labor force in general, and in the educational world as students and faculty. And yet there is an ineradicable sense of unhealthy confusion which echoes the past: Are women inferior, should they retire once again to the sanctity of their pre-destined roles as wives, mothers, homemakers; should they withdraw from the "competition" with men and express their unused energies in a variety of voluntary organization tasks?

The revived "second sex" approach often flows from moral values that are themselves undeniably good. For example, Lynn White, Jr., in a stimulating book called *Educating Our Daughters*, some years ago entered a plea that women's education should recognize an "equality of differences as well as equality of identities." He felt that a better preparation would be provided by colleges for "our daughters" if the so-called minor arts were emphasized in the college curriculum for them. On this kind of proposal, I myself find the Barnard report on the liberal arts curriculum an effective rejoinder. It says: "Men and women differ, but the liberal arts college addresses itself to them as human beings. . . . A curriculum intelligently devised to develop the intelligence, artistic and social potentialities of the students would, in general, serve men and women equally well."

Harder to meet is a position which maintains that the "feminist movement with its emphasis upon competition with men for place and power was a 'false-lead'"; and overlooked and minimized the woman's role as the guardian of life, morality, and human compassion. This position is wrong insofar as it is prescriptive and universal. No moral value and no human right is absolute.

Women are people some say, but people who cannot think like men, cannot administer, solve practical public problems or master the same type of subject matter that comes more naturally to the masculine intelligence and to male character. Women are gifted in intuitive,

artistic matters. Their talent and role is that of great feeling heart—they are the peacemakers, the civilizers par excellence. Not so—however subtly flattering, or subtly degrading one considers the description.

Women, alas! are people: some good, some bad (relatively), some intelligent, some not so; often as men, quarrelsome (who sits for the portrait of the termigant and shrew?) and often the bane of moralists in their compliance with every type of vice. The only thing we can be sure of in terms of intellectual and moral traits is that there should be no prior restraint on seeing what, with proper training, women actually make themselves competent to.

In this century, the philosophical and logical powers of analysis of Susan Stebbing in England were never questioned on grounds of sex; nor, for that matter, has anyone found Simone de Beauvoir (whatever one thinks of Existentialism as a philosophy) an intelligence inferior to her male associates. Incidentally, it is Miss Beauvoir's use of Thomas Jefferson's strategy of piecemeal moral advance that accurately disposes of the argument of ineradicably different intellectual and moral roles for women. She paraphrases the Jeffersonian strategy as: "Let us come into existence before being asked to justify our existence." In short, let us be, before you define what we are. The female adoption of the position I have called "female chauvinism" is rife with ironies, making one think of the statement in Ecclesiastes: "A man who wishes you ill is better than a woman who wishes you well."

In appraising the situation of women today who seek professional standing and a policy of unhampered scope for work and for the realities of economic and prestige reward for merit, I must say that the ideal of equal rights is heavily compromised. If there is any courage left in the class of professional American women who fear the stereotype of the female reformer more than they love justice, their work is cut out for them. For in truth, with all our scrupulous efforts to set the house of democracy in order in a world in which we anxiously work on the "image of America," sending peace corps abroad and informational and cultural programs in quantity to fortify the technological and financial assistance our policy wisely sustains, professional talent and creativity in this nation, regardless of sex, cannot afford to be discouraged. This is a practical argument, in the first instance, but essentially a moral and social argument in the long run. It implies that in the context of the academy, as in every learned profession, the basic American ideal of equality of opportunity must not be permitted to become a jest. What women face, for example, as they try to carry out their professional tasks is what R. H. Tawney once described as "the impertinent courtesy of an invitation offered to un-

welcome guests, in the certainty that circumstances will prevent them from accepting it."

That is why I have called my paper "Two Cheers for Equality." I am reserving three cheers not for the jest but for the cheerful acceptance of full human rights in some indistinct future. For the peculiar half-world of limited tolerance in which professional women work is democratic in pose only. "Treat another as inferior," remarked the philosopher Ralph Barton Perry, "and you place him in a dilemma. He must either suffer humiliation or show resentment. You either break his will or antagonize it." Employers who will not train women for executive tasks; department chairmen who will not consider hiring a woman for professional openings; administrators who will not concern themselves with equal (perhaps even greater) opportunities for graduate fellowship and scholarship programs for women students, and promotion up the ladder for faculty members of proven merit—these are only the most visible tokens of the discrimination which in fact exists against women today.

A thousand subterranean attitudes and devices in effect make up a systematic pattern of discrimination, which even to identify and name is to invite the charge of female "aggression" and troublemaking. Sensitive women have consequently learned to see, to be silent, and to convert a measure of hope to either cynicism or despair. Another way to describe this attitude in terms of its latent irony is to recommend a policy of a Leibnizian type of optimism which holds that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that everything in it is a necessary evil!

The most corrosive effect of the discrimination against women is the psychological effect it has in reducing a sense of personal competence, in encouraging women to disqualify themselves before the male managerial world has a chance to rebuff them. The *Radcliffe Report on Graduate Education for Women* discusses the varieties of discrimination which women are subject to, in staying out of fields which are traditionally thought to be "men's," in having to compete for jobs on a curious ration which one Radcliffe-trained faculty woman reported as "a woman has to be twice as good and work twice as hard as a man." The bargaining power of women is invariably less than that of men, and the so-called "nepotism" rule in effect on many campuses further reduces the chance for academic employment when women move to a campus where their husbands are employed. Administrative positions, chairmanships of faculty committees, real power, in short, in the academic decision-making process is, as one might expect, even more scarce for women than the professional employment ratio suggests.



In line with this is the fact discussed in the Civil Service Commission Survey that in government agencies 94 percent of the requests they received for top management jobs specified men for positions. The assurance that the new policy of the Civil Service Commission will be to compel agencies to specify reasons for requesting men (in short the principle of introducing the difference of sex only where it is relevant to the performance of the job) is encouraging. It is limited, however, by what limits all compulsory and legal advances—namely, that with sufficient motivation and ingenious reason to aid and abet it, respectable reasons can be devised for circumventing many laws.

Again, the Radcliffe Ph.D. comes to mind who reported of her professional progress: "I think I am more acceptable in my present work if I do not attempt to press forward as strenuously as a man would, but such matters are subtle, and it is hard to separate trying to keep my head in general from trying not to be a strident female." Part of the program of reformation which lies ahead must alas reduce such hypersensitivity to the "strident female" tag. How to do this without becoming reduced in human and civilized terms is indeed a request for the wisdom of the serpent.

Surprisingly enough, the Radcliffe report which I have cited comes to an unexpected decision in its advice on how to solve the discrimination against professional women. It proposed that women should do work of such high quality that no question of "competition" should arise. It says: "It would take a very prejudiced anti-feminist to refuse to employ, on the ground of sex, a woman who has demonstrated ability and achievement *clearly superior* to that of the men available. To take an example outside the academic field, the only woman member of a famous symphony orchestra was engaged as a flutist because she far excelled the male applicants for the post. Her superiority demanded acceptance, and without question. I hereby propose that this solution be known in American history as the "magic flute" position on female underprivilege. For if women must become magic flutists, playing tunes no male in the country can perform, out of a background which has already discouraged women to believe they can or should play at all, then "equality" for women has come to mean achieved mastery, unquestionable superiority, or genius—even before the hiring begins!

My solution is different. It takes the guise of the advice given by my old friend Thomas Jefferson to Mme. de Stael, when he wrote: "Where wrongs are pressed, because it is believed they will be borne, resistance becomes morality." The indispensable and uncompromising meaning of equality is the principle of the intrinsic dignity of the

human person—a postulate which is the presupposition of civilization and moral behavior. Equality is not mathematical equivalence, but as a mathematical logician suggested, a mathematical metaphysics of the incommensurable, in which each person speaks for himself and demands consideration on his own behalf. No person in a democratic society should be forced by social inequality to live his life on different moral terms than others, for this is the maiming of a caste distinction. It degrades the person and forces him to lower the moral level of his life.

I should like to conclude with three specific implications for the sixties of the two cardinal policies I have advocated: that women should be treated as persons, and that "intellect is not sexed."

First, the policy of certain superior colleges in refusing admittance to girls who have proven ability and motivation is antiquated. This suggestion may create the customary amusement. But I submit that any serious concern for equality of persons and for the requirements of economic growth in this critical decade necessitates the education and advancement of all our youth in skills and intelligence. I would even suspect that the decreasing share of the vote by women should make everyone alive to the need for having an informed and intelligent comprehensive citizenry.

Second, there will be increasing demands for professionally qualified teachers to meet the accelerated enrollment in colleges. Here clearly there should be no discrimination against properly qualified academic women. But there is one problem that must be dealt with forthrightly. Women, even academic women, want and have the potential to give birth to children. This potential is usually recognized but normally reenforces prejudice and discrimination against giving real positions to women in the academy. I propose that we meet this double problem of the increased demand for qualified teachers and the stated potential of woman by providing leaves of absence while assuring that the position is held open.

Third, the 60's may provide conditions for increased discrimination against women in the labor force, including professional women. The labor force is growing at the rate of almost two million every year. At the same time, increased productivity and automation are displacing workers in many major industries, such as transportation, construction, as well as clerical occupations. If the demand for labor does not grow with the increasing labor supply, high rates of unemployment may persist. If so, women will find that men feel they are unduly competing for their jobs, and therefore increasingly expendable. This possible discrimination must be guarded against if we are concerned

with equality and economic growth. Other means must be found than discrimination against women to meet the issues of full employment so as to provide for the fuller employment of all human resources.

This conclusion is dictated out of concern for the multifarious riches and the diverse varieties of self-development inherent in the equality and liberty at the core of American ideals. Above all, it is not in any sense a fight with men. Of all the absurdities to be imagined in this turmoiled world, the quarrel of one-half of the human race with the other half is not even material for science fiction. On the contrary, like poor Thoreau on his deathbed, who was asked by a bubbling friend whether he had made his peace with God? he replied: "I did not know that we had ever quarreled."

Finally, if I may return to my point of origin in this talk, I must acknowledge that my title "Two Cheers for Equality" is borrowed from a book by E. M. Forster called *Two Cheers for Democracy*. In it he explains: "Two Cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough; there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that." I, too, after my fashion, have been keeping in mind love the beloved republic, and asking only that the gates of the city be not inscribed: "For men only."