

Book Review: We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women's Lives by Manon Garcia

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Garcia, Manon. *We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women's Lives*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021. 234 pages. Hardcover, \$27.47.

In *We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women's Lives*, Manon Garcia explores the reality of women living within patriarchy. While social scientists generally agree that social structures are best understood as human creations, patriarchy's pervasiveness and the seeming collusion of some women "with their own subordination" (p. xii) leads some to believe patriarchy is an expression of essentialist differences between women and men rather than the result of social construction. In this short work, Garcia provides a nuanced rebuttal to the essentialist argument which draws heavily from philosophical works.

Garcia begins the work with by exploring submission as a philosophical taboo. What is the essence of humanity but agency? And if one forgoes agency, is one engagement with life morally corrupt? But if submission is a voluntary response to an oppressive order, how do we evaluate the submission? And could one gain pleasure while submitting and if so, what does this mean? Garcia argues that we must explore submission from the point of view of those who submit rather than those who oppress. This book is such an exploration of Western societies where female submission takes on "its most morally complex forms" (p. 14).

While Garcia engages the work of numerous others including Freud, Machiavelli, MacKinnon, Rousseau and Sartre, is primarily structured by a detailed analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir states that women must be understood as "individuals that are in a certain situation" (p. 42). While submission oft appears as destiny, it is best understood as an expression of "historical power relations" (p. 42). Garcia portrays de Beauvoir's work at "truly existentialist...It is the way humans live their life that determines who they are..." (p. 49). In her perspective women's essence is shaped by how they exist in world with rules they are given at birth.

Garcia suggests the study of submission has been neglected by male philosophers in part because they write from a position of privilege and because it's inherent difficult to distancing oneself from the mundane and/or normal aspects of life in order to study them. The taken-for-granted rarely invites scrutiny. An analysis of submission also requires an examination of power relations. Traditionally such examinations have been undertaken from the point of view of the privileged. "...(I)t is very hard to study the experience of submissive people because it is silenced by domination" (p. 78).

Garcia tells us that de Beauvoir's phenomenological approach to the study of women and their submission, allows insights into aspects of women's lives "...that male philosophers cannot see or do not want to see" (p. 90). Since "perception has a social dimension" (p. 91) a phenomenological study of women via the lived experiences of "multiple first persons" allows de Beauvoir to reveal "the generalized and almost universal character of female submission" (p. 95) lived in a world "already structured by a norm of femininity, that is, a norm of submission" (p. 96). Her exploration suggests that submission is experienced as destiny for most women, though, "[t]his destiny does not appear as a source of joy" (p. 105).

One of the great challenges of understanding the oppression of women is the deep contrast this form of oppression has in relation to other oppressed groups. The enslaved regardless of place, Jews in Nazi Germany, the Untouchables within the Indian caste system, were clearly differentiated as Others within their societies. Separation was clear, often codified by law. But women, also an Other, live with their oppressors in an intimacy not shared by most marginalized groups. The hope of rebellion is lost to them. Their entire world is structured to limit their reach. They are objects, inferiors, Others, whose lives are clearly circumscribed into tiny places of minimal significance particularly in the public realm.

That some women may find joy in their submission (e.g., take pleasure in being appreciated as beautiful in a world that applauds their objectification) may suggest to some that their ability to experience pleasure is proof that they are not oppressed. The investigation into this seeming paradox is one of the most interesting features of Garcia's work.

While reading this book and while writing this review, my wife Carol Moczygema is engaged in an end-of-life battle with Parkinson's. She cannot walk. She cannot talk. She cannot feed herself or control her bladder or bowels. Yet in this diminished space she can find joy. Her smile can be as broad as in her pre-diseased life. But she did not choose this life. Carol received this disease and its diminishment in the same way that women receive patriarchy and its diminishment. While women may "consent" to their condition and find joy within it, consent is not a choice and joy is not an endorsement of their circumstance.

This review does not do justice to the sophistication of the arguments put forth by Garcia. From her critical review of Freud's claim that masochism and feminism are essentialist features of the female condition, her detailed exploration of MacKinnon's belief that establishment of gender difference is "the velvet glove of domination" (p. 31) and her review of the role of religious texts in propping up patriarchal structures, this work enriches our understanding of patriarchy and women's experience within it. The book needs to be read more than once, not because the work lacks clarity, but because there is so much to be learned by reading it that it is difficult to absorb in a single pass.

This book is appropriate for upper division undergraduate and graduate classes that deal with minority groups, power, social justice, social stratification, and women's studies. It is a must read for all students of philosophy and social science and should be included in the libraries

of all colleges and universities. It is a rare text, a classic at the time of its publication. Manon Garcia should be thanked for providing us with such a revelatory work.

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