

Is Woman Less Intelligent Than Man?

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We can often read a quotation from Nietzsche that the "enemies of woman" often repeat: "Man, if you are going to see Woman, do not forget your riding whip!" Why then do we not see as often cited another quotation from this same philosopher, infinitely more profound and more apt: "If girls were raised in the same fashion as boys, in 50 years there would be as many feminine geniuses as masculine."

But, today, when theoretically girls have the same opportunities of cultivation and education as boys, is not the fact that there aren't so many "great women" as "great men" a proof to the contrary?

This is quite a mistaken conclusion! It is not enough, in fact, to give woman "an equal opportunity" in the school curriculum. It would be necessary, also, to remove the psychological weight which still bears down on her: her inferiority complex of being "only a woman", therefore a being reputedly inferior. No one saw this better than Alfred Adler, the creator of the school of Individual Psychology. No one knew better than he how to show us how much the more or less unconscious discouragement of woman is a great obstacle, almost impossible to overcome. He has said to us: "We must destroy the *principle of masculinity* which still rules all of our society"! Christianity had helped women enormously to emancipate themselves. But, in our time, no one has done so much toward the same end as this great psychologist.

Adler showed that intelligence and talent were neither the undeserved gift of Nature nor the result of the mysterious game of biological heredity. Our talent, our intelligence, are always the function of our courage. At the end of the century, an English psychologist had already timidly caught a glimpse of the same truth: Joseph Royce. In 1898 he wrote: "Inventions seem to be the results of the encouragement of individuality; talent is somewhat due to a social stimulation which sets their habits varying in different directions." But it was only Adler who knew how to draw all the conclusions from this truth. He inscribed on the frontispiece of one of his first works a quotation from Seneca: "*Omnia ad opinionem suspensa sunt . . . All depends on our opinions*"—we suffer from our opinions. In effect, as long as general opinion continues to believe that woman is intellectually inferior to man, woman herself will continue to submit to this same opinion. She will remain discouraged, just as was Margaret, the daughter of Thomas More. They tell us that: "she wanted to help in the great work of Erasmus, her father's friend. Erasmus was making a new Latin translation of the New Testament, and Margaret, who was, as Erasmus himself said, 'an elegant Latinist', decided she would make the concordance. One day her father found her in tears over the work. He was kind, and said he was proud of her desire to do the task, but to allow her to do it would be a mistake. It would consume

her, he explained, and leave no residue either of emotion or thought, and that would be very sad for her happiness as a woman. 'Women', he taught her, 'must save all their energies for the race'. He turned her imagination gently away from scholarship and directed it toward one whom he called 'that tall stripling', and Margaret, who adored her father, believed him to be right and obeyed him" . . .

Are we very far from the times when such opinions prevailed? It seems not. Let us not be too astonished to hear a contemporary American poet, Stevie Smith, singing

Girls! Although I am a woman
I always try to appear human

It is not enough to know that feminine intelligence is not different from masculine and that it differs only in the sense that education and opinion are different. It is necessary that everyone be convinced of the truth. We find ourselves confronted with a circle very difficult to destroy: the general opinion that woman is less intelligent than man prevents the former from attaining the level of man. She is discouraged, not only by actual prohibitions, but also by the ruling "masculine principle" so vigorously denounced by Alfred Adler. From the actual fact that woman has yet to achieve equality with man, the deduction is made that she can never so achieve. As a matter of fact her inabilities are the result rather than the cause of this general conviction.

The enemies of woman ask us for statistics: "A few isolated cases prove nothing . . . Vigee-Lebrun was a great painter? Sonya Kovalevska a mathematical genius? Marie Curie the discoverer of radium? These are just exceptions. Prove to us the equal intelligence of woman statistically!"

But hasn't Tallyrand already said that statistics "were the most subtle form of error"? A great sociologist friend of mine, Gaston Bonthoul, professor of Statistics on the Faculty of Droit de Paris, says that "the greatest illness of humanity is to believe in statistics." In fact, intelligence is a *qualitative* notion of order and not at all quantitative, and its measurement is always subject to considerable errors (as I have tried to show in my little book, "The Problem of Intelligence").

Thus, the examples, though small in number, of "superior" women, such as Mme. Curie and so many others, have a value quite apart from "statistics". Their value is "symbolic". They are examples of a practically infinite number of possible cases, and, also, examples to follow. There isn't any "masculine" and "feminine" intelligence—there is only intelligence, intelligence of which the possibilities are the same in man and woman, providing one *truly* gives them the same opportunity, and that woman overcomes her "inferiority complex".

Alfred Adler used to say to his pupils: "Today we know what toys one should give to children in order to develop their geometric and mathe-

matical talents. One day, undoubtedly, we will know what toys to give them to make new Goethes, new geniuses."

The statement is bold, certainly, but not at all exaggerated if one ponders it well. There will not be any "new Goethe" or "new Michael-Angelo", for actual sociological conditions prevent them from arising in the fashion they were able to in their time. But nothing will prevent us from believing that by means of an adequate education, woman will be able to achieve the same intellectual rewards as man, and that we will become acquainted with numerous feminine geniuses.

Psychology in Italy

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In his pamphlet "La Psicologia come ricerca autonoma"¹, Professor Alberto Marzi, Director of the Institute for Psychology at the University of Florence, mentions a fact which was characteristic of Psychology in Fascist Italy: In 1937, the "Bureau International d'Education" in Geneva made an inquiry into the importance attributed to the study of psychology by different countries. Of 42 great nations, 41 reported that they had made the study of psychology compulsory for future teachers; one, however, namely Mussolini's Italy, said it had introduced in its place "philosophical and pedagogical readings"—which had, of course, quite a particular character.

Prof. Piaget said, in commenting on this fact, that as nobody denied the necessity of the study of anatomy and of physiology in the preparation of a physician, it cannot be seen how a psychological preparation could be excluded from the curriculum of teachers who have to form the minds of their pupils and should know something about the laws of their functioning and their development. Of course, Professor Piaget is a free Swiss; and the great Maria Montessori left her country for France and taught and wrote freely in French, while the fascist school reform of 1923 banished psychology from all secondary schools. This consequently diminished also the prestige of Italian university psychology.

There is still nowadays in all Italy only one chair for psychology in existence, held by Mario Ponso, successor of Sante De Sanctis. It is true that there is also P. Agostino Gemelli (who collaborated occasionally at our *Internationale Zeitschrift fuer Individualpsychologie*) and who holds a chair for psychology at the Italian Catholic University. However, in 15 universities, courses of psychology are available for students of all faculties, and new text books are being translated and written. Besides, within the "Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche", a "Centro per le applicazioni della psicologia" has been created.