

WOMANHOOD IN PRUDENCE ALLEN GENDER PHILOSOPHY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE METAPHYSICS

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in gender philosophy. It could be said to be a consequence of gender equality campaign that has become a contemporary socio-political topical issue. Interestingly, philosophers since the early years till this contemporary era have contended with the issues of gender; all in the attempt to justify or repudiate the polarity tussle between the male and the female. Hence, there are philosophical foundations for the dominant notion that man is superior to woman; and this is the background to the denigration of womanhood in many cultures and societies. There are historical perspectives and attempts at ethical analysis of the man and woman dichotomy. However, Prudence Allen, a contemporary philosopher in her own perspective has attempted to reconcile the age long disparity not just from a historical perspective but rather, on a metaphysical standpoint. According to her, the ontological understanding of woman in relation to man within the framework of *Integral Gender Complementarity* is the answer to the gender questions which have engaged philosophers from ages. To what extent does this metaphysical solution resolve the issues? Does it mean that the Aristotelian idea and the medieval thoughts on women are standing on a faulty foundation? If the argument is metaphysically resolved as Allen taught, what is its correlation to socio political gender issues? For Allen, a woman is a whole being, ontologically equal to the man.

Introduction

Who is a woman? The attempts to give intellectual answer to this question have led to different opinions about womanhood. In these opinions, there are comparative analysis of woman and man, leading to discuss on gender. Interestingly, gender philosophy has gained renewed momentum at the moment, arousing contemporary philosophical debate on the subject-matter. Prudence Allen, a contemporary philosopher has taken time to offer a detailed research work that got translated into a three copious volumes. By her highly researched work anchored on a detailed historical survey on womanhood, one could compare her contribution to the subject to Thomas Aquinas medieval 'summa theologiae'. In her view, the issue of gender and sex, male and female have been there in all philosophic epoch. It is in works of Ionians through Aristotle and Scholastics to the present. In each epoch, there is either a dominant understanding of both gender either in terms of 'unity' or 'polarity' or 'complementarity' of any kind.

But why would issue of gender bother the philosopher? Protagoras had said 'Man is the measure of all things'. The studies on personhood of the central being of universe are key in understanding and interpreting the world. Admittedly, Protagoras seem to have used the concept of 'man' as a genre, synonymous to human person; but the classification of male and female, have always necessitated further hermeneutics of the broad concept. The interpretation has often been a comparative of female in relation to male. Is a woman less a being in comparison to man? Are there ontological differences between 'male' and 'female'? What is it that makes a woman, woman?

What practical relevance does this portend? The ageless philosophical dictum 'ideas rule the world' remains incontrovertible. In this age of crusade for gender equality and rise in new concepts like 'transgender personality' the true understanding of the metaphysics of womanhood offers a theoretical framework for a proper analysis, which could translate to legislative agenda. This realisation makes the

work of Allen a more authoritative guide in the present as the debate on gender, the concept of womanhood and its ancillary topics continues.

History of Gender Philosophy in Allen

Prudence Allen had in her three volumes copious work on 'Concept of Woman' gave a historically researched and detailed excursion into the understanding of womanhood across all epochs. The diverse notions began with the pre Socratics, through the Early Greek Philosophic era, the medieval, the modern and finally the contemporary periods. Sofia Madden, in her review of Allen's work titled: "Nun Explores Philosophy of Gender," opines that Sr. Mary Prudence Allen addressed the dignity of the human gender by carving out the historical analyses of gender constructions throughout time, from the ancient Greek philosophy down to the theories of gender in the 20th and 21st centuries.¹ In Allen, there is a systematic effort to crystallize various notions on gender into a 'continuous developemnet of thoughts. It is on that note that Arredondo held that Allen recognized that many people have made artificial distinctions between sex and gender, but that did not entail that those with more traditional views should drop theirs for the new language. "In many ways," Arredondo talks of Allen's Vol. III, "this book is an elaboration on how the current debates about gender and sex are rooted in historical views that go back as far as Aristotle, but which have developed in new and sometimes unexpected directions."² The systematic historical survey of Allen was influenced by her background as a nun. True to Hans George Gadamer's idea of 'no one speaks from nowhere', Allen incorporated some classified theological opinions in her research. Thus in his review of *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. - A. D. 1250*, M. E Irwin, states that Allen sought to address questions such as what we mean when we say that 'male' is the opposite of 'female,' how philosophers have described the differences between the sexes and the effect of philosophy concerning views about sex differences in the general population. And this she did through a survey of the pre-Socratic philosophers and their works, up to the theologians of the thirteenth century.³ It is interesting to note that even theologians of today, like Pope John Paul II was also in her litany of studied scholars.

The importance of studies in Allen philosophy of womanhood is better captured in the view of Beatrice H. Zedler. Zedler pronounced the work of Allen in this regard as the first systematic study about the emergence of the concept of woman, its development and influence in western philosophy.⁴ The work, Zedler confirms, travelled from the view of Hesiod on the relationship between man and woman, shifted to the philosophical studies of Aristotle and his precursors, diverting to the Aristotelian and Platonic concepts, the adoption of the former in Islamic, Jewish and Christian philosophy, then arrived in the institutionalization of Aristotelianism by the middle of the thirteenth century. Allen's reference to the opinions of more than seventy philosophers of both ancient and medieval eras, according to Zedler, affirms that the first two thousand years of Western philosophy were engrossed in the relationship between man and woman. In addition to Zedler glowing tribute to Allen comprehensive study of womanhood, Shanker and Menzer argued that exempt from the inputs of Prudence Allen, the 20th – 21st century have suffered a tremendous void in their accounts of gender philosophy of the human person, which according to them is explicitly metaphysical, rigorous, and comprehensive, bringing into relation the physical, social, historical, cultural, volitional, and rational aspects of a person's identity.⁵

The focus of this work is to further introduce the gender philosophy of Allen to the academia space, with particular reference to her idea of Metaphysics of womanhood. What is it that makes a woman, woman in Allen? Who is a woman in relation to man, and what nature is their relationship? How does Allen metaphysics of womanhood correspond to other cultural notions of womanhood especially, Igbo society? An attempt to offer a critical response to the issues will be premised on a historical analysis of womanhood as seen in Allens' three volumes on womanhood and ancillary interviews.

The Early Stage

In the volume one of his book, *Philosophy of Womanhood*, Allen began her inquiry with the earliest but less classical philosophers. Included in the early stage are the expressions of the following: the philosopher poets, the Ionians, the Pythagoreans and Permanides, the Pluralists, the Sophists and the Socratic philosophers and the Hippocratic writings. In this early stage, there is admixture of systematic

philosophy as seen in the works of the Pluralists and Sophists, and a dosage of ‘crude’ philosophy as seen in the works of the poets that Allen referenced too. In this early stage there is dichotomy of voices. While some echo sex polarity and consequent devaluation of women, others tended towards sex unity. For instance among the Poets there is a devaluation of woman as seen in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* where a Zeus orders Hephaestus to carve Pandora (a woman with a shameless and deceitful nature) as a planned sorrow and mischief against men. The image of this first woman (Pandora) also carried as responsible for evil in the world. Hesiod alleged that any man who trusted womankind trusted deceivers.⁶ Contrarily, research shows that the Ionians, there is reference to sex unity theory. Hence, Heraclitus only sees the differentiation between male and female from a biological perspective. Like Anaximander, there is no data to infer to a superior valuation among the sexes in Heraclitus. They are equal in their relationship.⁷ These same discordant views are seen among the Pluralist, as against the Sophists, both *ad intra and ad inter*. For Democritus, whose view on sex identity was influenced by his fundamental philosophy that the world was filled with atoms colliding with one another; the male was significantly differentiated and superior to the female which automatically leads to preference of male child against the female, by the parents.⁸ On the other hand, Protagoras the Sophist view that values were conventional and relative, and that humans emerged from equal elements served as backdrop for his argument for the equality of all persons. Concerning Protagoras’ theory of language, Aristotle claims Protagoras was the first to classify Greek words into: masculine, feminine and neuter, thus raising the philosophical question of the relation among sex, sex identity and language.⁹

The early stage is concluded by Allen with reference to Socrates (470-399 BC). Socrates left no writings, thus his views are dependent on the records of two of his prominent disciples: Xenophon and Plato. They however, formulated different theories, the former tilting towards sex polarity, with the latter, towards sex unity. From all of these, we deduce that Xenophon and Plato used Socrates to consolidate their theories of sex polarity and sex unity, respectively.¹⁰

Plato and the Sex Unity Theory

According to Allen, Plato was the first to formulate a systematic evaluation of the concept of woman in relation to man that encompasses the four categories of: opposites, generation, wisdom and virtue. He is also recognized as the founder of sex unity theory in gender philosophy. However, Allen observed also that Plato’s views were not always consistent, but sometimes contradictory. Hence, one finds Plato embracing sex polarity theory of male and female in the cosmic level, but sex unity of the sexes in the world.¹¹ Plato suggested the theory of sex polarity in his *Timaeus*, but sex unity in his *Republic*. He made a major shift from the vibrant, dynamic cosmic Earth of Hesiod to an abstract cosmic female principle. While the former generated the elements of sky, air and fire by herself, the latter only received them, thus defending the passivity of the female cosmic principle to the metaphysical concept of the Prime Matter. Nevertheless, in his *Republic*, Plato tilted to sex unity by stating that the identity of the sexes was dependent on the mind (soul), and not the body; with the soul being immaterial, and thus non-sexual. Consequently the man and woman being no different when considered from the prism of their real nature.¹² Plato believed the male and female had the same goal: to be free from all bodily aspects of their identity, sexual differentiation inclusive, that is, the separation of the soul from the body. Furthermore, Plato did not venture into the question of the production of seeds by the male and/or female. He only posited that the act of sexual intercourse was the dominance of the lower instinct over the higher capacity of reason. He also argued that sexual intercourse must be regulated; only carried out as a requisite for procreation.¹³

On the cosmic level, Plato shifted the source of wisdom away from the Muses to the activity of the mind (reason) of philosophers. In relation of wisdom to men and women, though some philosophers as Philo alleged that Plato associated the female with the lower instincts and the male with the higher faculty of reason, Plato, in fact, argued that male and female had similar capacities of the soul in the *Republic*. For Plato who had earlier entangled the woman with the inferior body, he explained that this in no way excluded the woman from wisdom, but only made the journey to its attainment a longer one (thirty years for men versus forty years for women). Placing education to a prominent sphere, in the same *Republic*, Plato also allowed men and women to partake in it. He became the first philosopher in the

West to proffer a comprehensive argument defending the participation of men and women in the same education. This offered the background to Plato's sex unity in the category of wisdom.

Plato held that men and women required similar virtues to accomplish their work since virtue is birthed from the soul that directed the person's actions (wisdom, the virtue of reason; courage, of the will; temperance, of desire; and justice, the virtue of the harmony of the three parts of the soul). He made position or class in the society, together with the quality of the soul major determinants to virtue, and not the sex of the person. Hence, women could also be philosopher-guardians and rule. His sex unity theory also rejected any form of private possession and severe familiar attachment, though in the *Laws*, he made a little modification by allowing private homes.¹⁴

Aristotle and Sex Polarity

Aristotle was the first philosopher to offer sufficiently comprehensive answers to the puzzles on sex identity discussed by previous philosophers. He formulated a critical background for sex polarity. He stated that men were philosophically different from women; as well as naturally superior to them. Aristotle's theory of sex polarity covered all four categories, unlike any philosopher had done. His description of women as the privation of man in the category of opposite served as metaphysical foundation for the devaluation of men in the category of generation, which in turn offered basis for the devaluation of women in the categories of wisdom and virtue. Thus, his consistency provided the first systematic defence for sex polarity theory. It was also his theory of sex polarity that provoked a revolution in the philosophy of sex identity. That was what Allen called the "The Aristotelian Revolution." He ridiculed Plato's double-seed theory of generation which is based on his dualism, stating that women did not contribute seed to production. Aristotle countered this claim by proposing the hylomorphic concept of matter and form, in that neither could exist separately from the other, as against Plato. Also, that the human person being a specific kind of substance was hence, always an embodiment of the body and soul. By this, Aristotle pushed aside reincarnation as impossible and constructed a basis for the philosophical significance of the difference between men and women.¹⁵

He argued that the sex unity theory would only culminate to the destruction of the entire society and that reincarnation was a lie, since the soul could never be separated from the body.¹⁶ Aristotle also tackled Democritus' theory of the quantity of seed of the mother or father being the determinant for the sex of a child. He argued that if the case was true, then it would entail that all female children must resemble their mother, while the male ones, their father, which is not actually the case.¹⁷ Aristotle directly referred to the female as inferior, with association to the properties of matter: passivity, and with the lowest elements. Then the male as superior, attached to the properties of form: activity, and with the higher elements. Aristotle also introduced mutual hostility to the concept of contraries; subsequently, male and female were opposite in a hostile way.

In the realm of virtue, Aristotle speculated that the mother contributed only the material to generation, which is the basis of the human body. Hence, the physical part (the body) is offered by the female, while the male accounts for the soul. For the contribution of the father, Aristotle explained that the semen of the father contained the soul only potentially, which would then actualize into the soul (form) of the child when it met with the proper matter as provided by the mother. With this, the father became consequently, the primary cause of the child.¹⁸ This hostile interaction between the sexes was majorly seen in the determination of the sex of a child and its resemblance – a battle that ensues when the seed of the male meets the material of the female. Emphasizing his point, Aristotle alleged that females were birthed by youthful parents owing to the absence of sufficient heat in them for the production of a male.¹⁹ Aristotle argued that whereas women had similar kind of reason as men, they cannot be wise as men and hence, cannot be philosophers. He associated the female with the lower reasoning capacities and the male, with the higher. Thus, directly linking the concept of women to irrational thought; the first of its kind in Western philosophy.²⁰ Finally, a virtuous woman became for Aristotle, one who had good opinions, obeyed a good man and abstained from any public speech or activity. While the man who developed practical wisdom, ruled himself and others, and engaged in public debate and action was acknowledged virtuous.²¹

The Humanist View

Allen identified many philosophers view under this category in the volume two of her work: *Philosophy of Womanhood*. It is an excursion from the medieval to modern periods, noting the early humanists and later humanists. In her classic 1977 article "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Joan Kelly-Gadol asked for the first time whether the periods into which historians had traditionally divided the past adequately described women's experiences as well as men's. Concluding that they did not, Kelly-Gadol argued that the Renaissance, often defined as a glorious rise in men's fortunes, in fact marked a decline in women's position in European society.²² Kelly-Gadol's article generated extensive scholarship addressing the question of the transition from the medieval to the early modern and its impact on women. Prudence Allen extends this examination to the realm of philosophy, by tracing the history of the concept of woman between 1250, the date at which Aristotelian philosophy came to dominate the European university curriculum, and 1500, through the introduction of humanism, and concluding before the development of Cartesian thought. Like Kelly-Gadol, Allen re-evaluates historical turning points and their significance for women, but reaches a very different conclusion, presenting a highly optimistic view of the impact of the Renaissance on the concept of woman. By surveying and synthesizing the works of a truly astonishing range of medieval and Renaissance authors, Allen has produced a valuable contribution to the history of ideas and raises provocative questions about the impact of historical change on women.

To achieve the feat, Allen considers self-contained communities of discourse about women between 1250 and 1500, of which she identifies four: religious women writers, academic writings from the universities, satirical texts about women, and writers at the early transition from scholasticism to humanism. Women's religious communities, she argues, provided a counterpoint to the Aristotelian view of gender polarity. Drawing on writings by cloistered religious women and Beguines such as Beatrice of Nazareth and Mechtild of Magdeburg, she demonstrates that they portrayed women as capable of self-consciousness, self-knowledge, and self-governance, and as the model for humankind. Conversely, academic communities, represented by writers such as William of Ockham, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, appealed directly to Aristotelian views of gender polarity. Finally, Allen closes her first section by turning to early humanists such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Through their extensive use of imaginary dialogues between men and women, such as those between Dante and Beatrice and Petrarch and Laura, Allen argues that these authors began to move from gender polarity to gender complementarity, by presenting both men and women as discussing their respective identities.

Contributions of Humanists Women Philosophers: According to Allen, some female authors like Cassandra Fedele, Isotta Nogarola and Laura Cereta left considerable legacy of their works. Through their lives and writings, they countered the Aristotelian model of gender polarity, the Epicurean model of relating to women for pleasure and the Alberti model of relation for utility. By contrast, these women humanists proposed the higher ideal of relation for the sake of virtue in all circumstances, for the good of the other and the good of self. Early renaissance humanism presented women's responsibilities in the household as having primarily utilitarian value for man. Laura Cereta challenges the ascribed roles by dedicating her life to various forms of domestic service and extending it into the public realm. Through the influence of Neo-Platonism, early Renaissance Humanists including Laura came to accept a principle of the natural equality of men and women. This equality extended to the capacities to learn, to develop the virtue of self-governance, and to participate in the building of the common good. She, however, did not adopt a gender unity position as she noted there are significant differences between a man and a woman. She rejected both the traditional and reversed gender polarity theories of one gender being higher than other. But in adopting an integral gender complementarity alternative, she distinguished between types of women occasioned by the moral choices made to determine the quality of her character, in accounting for the significant differences between different women and between men and women.²³

In summary, the early humanists and Renaissance brought a new dimension into the history of the concept of women. They had a dosage of theological influence. So argues noted that the Christian belief that Christ is the new Adam and Mary is the new Eve operates in the background of early humanist reform in the concept of woman. This religious inspiration of Mary as the new Eve, actively reversing

the bonds of gender entanglement and the humanist inspiration of persons engaged in serious dialogue about fundamental aspects of personal gender identity, inspired the early women humanists to offer a first articulation in western history of a uniquely feminine way of fostering the dignity of the whole person in every circumstance. The contributions of such women like Christine de Pizan, Isotta Nogarola and Laura Cereta who are humanists introduced new principles of equal dignity for men and women without losing significant differentiation of the two sexes or the integrated intellectual/material identity of woman and man. By this fact, they can be characterized as builders of integral gender complementarity.²⁴ However, this foundation for integral complementarities established by the humanist philosophers, was overturned by the infusion of Cartesian arguments in support of gender unity. With the Cartesian revolution halting the new theory of Integral complementarity, the history of the concept of woman continued its dramatic progress into the rationalism of the eighteenth century and upwards till the present day.

The Cartesian Revolt

What preceded the cartesian revolution, was an influx of ideologies and fundamentally differing positions with regard to the identity of woman in relation to man which emanated directly from the literary texts of Jean Jacque Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. The position and manner of approach of these two philosophers with respect to examining the concept of a woman is indeed very similar. Both adopted a fractional sex complementarity theory, which has polarity sex bend, leading to devaluation of womanhood.

In Rousseau's book: *Emile* he propounded thus; "Consult the women's opinions in bodily matters, in all that concerns the senses; consult the men in matters of morality and all that concerns the understanding."²⁵ He was of the belief that women's cognisance was centred primarily on the emotions, on practical decisions in the present, and on the general categories of taste, sentiments, and the senses; while the minds of men revolved round ideas and arguments, abstract judgements, and planning for the future. Also, Immanuel Kant in his pre critical text titled *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, propounded an epistemological explanation that fractionally distinguishes a woman's way of thinking and being from that of a man. According to him, "It is not to be understood by this that woman lacks noble qualities, or that the male sex must do without beauty completely. On the contrary, one expects that a person of either sex brings both together in such a way that all the other merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful, which is the proper reference point; and on the other hand, among the masculine qualities, the sublime clearly stands out as the criterion of his kind. All judgements of the two sexes must refer to these criteria...."²⁶ The underlying distinction in Kant's perception of a woman's understanding and that of a man was that one is being controlled by beauty and the other by nobility. He was of the belief that a man has a noble understanding, which focuses on the deep and sublime while a woman's understanding on the other hand, is centred round beauty and focuses on feelings of taste. In his own words; "Women would avoid the wicked not because it is wrong, buy because it is ugly..."²⁷ Although Kant through his own rendering of fractional complementarity within an embedded traditional gender polarity, directly asserts the superiority of man to the woman by nature, he still maintains a middle-ground in its application to matrimonial life. Here, the married couple should in fact merge into one moral person while still retaining their distinct approach to being. That is, the newly created person being governed by both the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife.²⁸ In the latter part of the 17th century, Kant adopted a critical and transcendental approach to his philosophy which on the surface, appeared to forego the gender differences between men and women and purport that both were equally capable of exercising their reason. However, in the second entry to his book; Critique of practical reason, Kant deviates from his aforementioned position on gender equality by highlighting in a rather derogatory manner, two weaknesses in women which rendered them unfit for exercising reason. The first was what he saw as women's inability to engage in cognitive and purpose driven conversations without tainting them with jesting, storytelling and arguing.²⁹ The other flaw in women's capability to exercise reason that was stipulated by Kant was, to the knowledge of Allen, more influenced by the fact that the majority of Kant's audiences were men.

Post Cartesian Revolt as Background to Allen Understanding of the Concept of Woman

The philosophical views of John Stuart Mill, Jacque and Raissa Maritain, Edith Stein, Emmanuel Mounier and Karol Wojtyla were major direct influences on Allen concept of womanhood. These philosophers' views on womanhood were according to Allen, a necessary check on the existentialist polarity understanding of women as seen in the works of Jean Paul Satre and Simone De Bouvoure. According to Allen, John Stuart Mill was one of the early advocates of equal rights and fair treatment between both genders. He was a firm believer of the idea that women should be accorded the same privileges and allowed the same level of involvement as men in political matters. Armed with his philosophy of integral complementarity, he introduced the first official bill for women's suffrage into the British parliament. "The legal subordination of one sex to the other-is wrong in itself..."³⁰ Mill said. Although Mill's perception of a man and woman's understanding was centred on the integral complementarity of both sexes, he had a tendency to deviate to a fractional complementarity with a major example being his classic text: *The subjection of woman*. Here, Mill attempted to attribute the ability of physical discernment and practical reasoning solely to women while asserting that men only capable of theoretical thinking. In his text he purported that; "With equality of experience and of general faculties, a woman usually sees much more than a man of what is immediately before her."³¹ Eventually, this deviation of Mill was corrected by the realisation that indeed every human being, be it man or woman, possesses the potential for both practical and theoretical reasoning and it is in fact each individual's unique personalities that birth the greater development of one or the other. Again, regardless of Jacque Maritain undeniable Thomistic influence, he purported that the philosophy of integral gender complementarity had its foundation deeply rooted in the early accounts of creation in the bible. He was of the belief that Eve was created by God to work hand in hand with Adam in realising the complete ontological fullness of human nature which equally entailed moving the human species towards its goal(procreating), and not just to be a 'helping hand'. To further support this claim, he indicated an already known fact of scripture that "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them."³² Putting this discovery into proper perspective, one can construe that Jacques in fact originated the spiritual background to the integral complementarity of the respective identities of man and woman.

Allen introduces Edith Stein who during her early years, drew upon her knowledge of phenomenology and psychology interpreted the ways in which men and women reveal themselves as significantly distinct but equal in dignity. She did not use the word 'complementarity' but had the belief that there are certain character distinctions peculiar to the two genders that could be categorised as being either positive or negative. For instance, Stein purported that women have a stronger affinity for companionship and relationships but on the negative side, are often liable to lose themselves in another human being; while men on the other hand are more consistent with detachment but from the negative angle, could be authoritarian over others especially women. Furthermore, Allen noted that Stein established in her book: *Ethos of women's professions*, that women should not only be allowed to express their versatility and intellectual capabilities by delving into diverse professions, but should in fact be prodded into doing so. This freedom she believed, was exponentially beneficial to the entire society.³³

In addition to the above, the contribution of Emmanuel Mounier is worth emphasising. Together with Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel and Nicholae Berdyaev, Mounier wrote a personalist manifesto in the early 19th century which analysed the principles of a new catholic personalism in light of distortions about the human person brought on by communism, capitalism and the political nuances of the Europeans and Americans. With his publication in the *Espiritin* 1936, Mounier began to sway the majority towards the philosophy of the integral complementarity of man and woman through his assertion that "a woman is equally a person";³⁴ thus marrying successfully the principle of personalism with a woman's identity. This personalist approach to the gender equality debate which had long been in existence, created a solid foundation upon which the Principles of equal dignity and worth for men and women could thrive. Allen noted that Mounier in reaction to denigrations of the women over years, held a similar position with Kant as regard to the impossibility of truly defining a woman or pinpointing what her true nature is. Apart from her common physical attribute which includes the biological

differences, any other attempt to psychoanalyze the nature of woman can indeed only be a concoction and is born out of masculine egoism and sentimentality. Indeed both men and women have their secondary sexual characteristics which are deemed by all as distinguishing features of their person. However, these should not be mistaken for the essential attributes of their nature for they are but mere aspects of the biological individuality of the genders.³⁵ Mounier, together with the French personalist movement set the ball rolling for an anthropological, ethical and political development of an integral sex and gender complementarity theory. Interestingly, Karol Wojtyla became aware of Mounier's Personalist manifesto when it was being secretly distributed in Cracow during World War II.

Karol Wojtyla (later to be known as Pope John Paul II) is the pioneer of modern integral sex and gender complementarity. Right from the onset, the pope was always a strong advocate for the equal dignity and worth of males and females created equally and simultaneously in the image and likeness of God, evidenced by when the solitary human being Adam fell asleep and woke up as male and female. In his 1988 text: *Mulieris Dignitatem* he stated; "The biblical text provides sufficient bases for recognising the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity. From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them."³⁶ This later formulated the 'first premise' of integral gender complementarity - the fundamental equality of dignity and worth of the two complement beings, woman and man. The pope however, never strayed from the confines of the significant differentiation in integral sex and gender complementarity by attributing femininity to man or masculinity to a woman. In his text: *Theology of the body*, the pope acknowledged that a human being is embodied 'normally' for the most part as a male or female and relying on the rendition of woman's emergence from man contained in Genesis 2:23 of the holy bible, he insists that masculinity and femininity are two incarnations of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world and two reciprocally completing ways of 'being a body'.³⁷ A recent argument made by Todd Salzman and Michael Lawler in: *The Sexual Person* (2009), looked to invalidate the pope's ideology on integral gender complementarity in marriage. This argument proposed the idea of homosexual complementarity with the premise being that personal complementarity could be achieved as a holistic complementarity between two homosexuals who would not have biological complementarity.³⁸ In this sense, there is attempt to invert the basis of the real meaning of personal complementarity from the call to union of two complementary beings, to states of consciousness with desires and pleasures. In response to this, the congregation for the doctrine of faith maintained the pope's position by stating that "Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life."³⁹ The pope believed that by reason of equal dignity, a woman cannot accept the parameters, cultural or otherwise, imposed on her by and through men within her family as well as her professional life. He stated; "A woman has the right to choose between: having a profession, being simultaneously a mother and carrying on a profession, and being a mother and dedicating all her activity to the home."⁴⁰ He believed that these particular decisions that relate center round work within and outside the home and thus affect the entire family would be worked out together by the man and woman in the form of a 'husband-wife dialogue'.

Prudence Allen's Concept of Womanhood: A Metaphysical Approach

The three volume great work of Prudence Allen ends with her adoption of JohnPaul II philosophy of gender complementarity. Her understanding is built upon the thoughts of Aristotle and Augustine; and her categorization of gender discussion and experience in history under: gender polarity, gender unity and finally gender complementarity. As already espoused, in gender polarity, man is traditionally seen as a superior sex and some time, in reverse order, where women are seen as superior. The Aristotle hermeneutic error in his hylemorphism, wherein he opined that women contributed no fertile seed in generation is the source of gender polarity. This error according to Allen, *led him to conclude that the female was a defective male and that man was naturally superior to woman in the basic categories of metaphysical contraries, naturally generating beings, developing of wisdom, and moral actions and virtues.*⁴¹ It is important to admit that the perpetual error in understanding the woman as weaker sex over history takes its root from this Aristotelian misconception, and such has been traced in this work. Allen therefore concludes that, Aristotle since he is an empiricist would readily agree today by scientifically verifiable indices that '*a woman, from puberty to menopause, ovulates and provides fertile*

*seed of equal value to a man's fertile seed. Women's equal contributions are significantly differentiated by way of delivery in their sexual relations and by content of the xx and xy chromosomes. The synergetic relation that generates something more than the separate ovum and sperm is the third principle of the integral gender relation of woman and man; their intergenerational fruition that may follow from their synergetic relation is the fourth principle of their integral gender complementarity.*⁴² Allen submits that this is the gender reality. For Allen, gender unity holds that there are no significant differences between men and women, while Gender complementarity has two forms: Fractional Complementarity and Integral Complementarity. According to Allen, Fractional complementarity is understood as a case where men and women form two halves of a whole. They are incomplete until they unite to form a complete whole. Whereas, Integral complementarity according to Allen is an understanding that a man and a woman is a whole being on his or her own. He or she is a person. Their coming together therefore, generates something greater than the two 'wholes'. It is this Integral Gender Complementarity philosophy which JohnPaul II holds, that Allen upholds too as the fulcrum towards the proper understanding of womanhood.

John Paul II in her Holy See proposed letter for Beijing United Nations Fourth World Meeting on Women in 1995 argued that 'womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological'. The ontological complementarity of man and woman can be analysed under four categories: biological, individual, personal and spiritual complementarity'. This shows that man and woman are two concrete human beings in relation and not as fractional parts of a man and a woman who in relation make up only a 'single human being'. Again, in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), JohnPaul II introduced a synonymous term to Integral Complementarity, which he called 'New Feminism'. New Feminism is for him a call and duty of Catholic women to transform culture. The new feminism of JohnPaul II shares with older feminism the goal of overcoming all discrimination, violence and exploitation of women, but differs from them in two important respects. First, a negative precept: the method of new feminism should not imitate what he called 'models of male domination' to achieve its goals. Second, the positive precept: the method of new feminism should tap into women's genius with its root of being predisposed to pay attention to the person in all circumstances. For him, this is a fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women'.⁴³

It is on the above thesis that Prudence Allen considers herself as a 'new feminist' philosopher in line of John Paul II. Her response to the inquirer is captured thus: 'By this I mean that I am concerned to help remove obstacles for women's full development in areas of discrimination, exploitation and violence—a desire that is shared with feminists in other traditions. She also agrees that new feminism takes an ontological departure from other forms of old feminism on the question of the 'pseudo right to abortion'.⁴⁴ For Allen, new feminism understands the killing of innocent developing human being as inherently wrong. Therefore, a woman under the philosophy of new feminism is called to defend innocent life, to protect it, to provide for its growth and nourishment both physically and spiritually; the same would apply to a man.

Allen substantiates her choice of Integral complementarity with the claim of fidelity to test of true development according to Newman. Newman had developed seven criteria which he called 'notes' or 'tests' for assessing whether an idea is a true development. Allen recognized the fact that Newman scope was theological, but she still understands philosophy as *ancillia theologiae*; and the fact that Newman included philosophy as a category that can be tested. Newman seven criteria are outlined thus:

1. Preservation of the identity of the original type through all its apparent changes and vicissitudes from first to last.
2. Continuity of the principles in the type remains entire from first to last, in spite of process of development. Changes do not destroy the type.
3. Assimilative power for dogmatic truth.
4. Logical sequence in fidelity of development.
5. Anticipation of its future in favour of fidelity of development, ethical or political.
6. Conservative action of its original type on its past with corruption tending to its destruction.

7. Chronic vigor of a true development of an idea distinguished from its corruptions, perversions and decay.⁴⁵

According to Allen, the Newman seven criteria fit the criteria for a true development of the understanding of human being as having a soul/body composite identity and for true development of the integral gender complementarity of a woman and a man. All seven tests for true development in her view show a preponderance of the living ideas of soul/body composite and integral complementarity. The Aristotelian hylemorphism of soul and body composite is a necessary prerequisite for understanding integral complementarity. It is a constant when analysed under Newman's criteria; and whenever, any other metaphysical framework replaces it, Integral gender complementarity collapses into polarity or destruction of a human being as a hierarchically ordered living integral woman or man. The equal dignity, significant difference, synergetic relation, and intergenerational fruition of a woman and a man are each an essential sign of the human person's living reality; a gender reality either as a male or female.

In all, Allen through her three volumes work on *The Concept of Woman* remains an intensely researched work tracing the gender equality from early philosophical epoch to the present. It is a corpus of intellectual proof for equality of gender with right understanding of the theme: Integral Gender Complimentarity.

Conclusion

The detailed study of womanhood in the Philosophy of Prudence Allen has shown evidently that there has been a dialectical approach in the attempts to understand the philosophical concept of womanhood. Varied epochs have had a dominant notion of womanhood: from Gender polarity, to unisex notion and to Integral complementarity.

Regardless of the earlier efforts, the *Concept of Womanhood* according to Prudence Allen is a contemporary classic contribution to the growing branch of Philosophy: Gender Philosophy. It is a detailed constructive study that incorporated all the different epochs of philosophy and offers both the intellectual and practical basis in dealing with issues of womanhood. To the question of who is a woman? Allen response is that a woman is a person, like a man, equal in dignity with significant (biological) differentiations. The conclusion of Allen is based on a thorough review of the concept across every epoch and philosophical periods. Also, Allen posits that Woman in relation to Man is best understood as an integral complementary being. There is equality of being and significant difference, which is a natural physical endowment. This position is seen as ensuring that woman is not ontologically different or inferior to man as taught by Aristotle; a position which has influenced many other scholars till date.

The ontological arguments for existence of God, either according to Anselm or Descartes are based on the nature of God as a necessary being. According to Allen, both male and female person are created in 'Imago Dei', with body and soul. There is no fundamental ontological difference in their being. Therefore, Allen by her detailed story has answered a peculiar question: Is a woman, a human person? Does she have a soul and a body? If the answer is yes, and in the affirmative as already proven by her, one then wonders the intellectual source for gender bias against women. The ontology of a 'being' of a woman is settled by Allen.

Finally, Allen by his work has offered a theoretical framework for all active agitation and criticism against any form of discrimination against women based on sex, especially under a patriarchal disguise. The equal dignity of man and woman established in Allen is a metaphysical foundation for equality of being, regardless of sex differences.

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