

## The Eternal and ... Non-Eternal Woman – Review\* –

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*Women's* roles and even the patterns and “ideals” of femininity have changed enormously – in certain respects even essentially – in the course of the past hundred years. Especially so in the western societies, cultures and civilizations, which now promote in their official policies the equality of women and men, and often also the idea of their positive discrimination. For, if one starts to think about it, a hundred years ago in these very countries women had no right to vote, or access to universities...

The changes we speak about have not occurred “out of nothing” – that is, as results of an evolution without convulsions – while at the same time they still not reach to all levels of life, and especially daily life. They are the results of an ongoing struggle, fought primarily by the women themselves, but – let us not forget – also the results of global conflagrations called “world wars”, when women had to take upon themselves duties and roles traditionally belonging to men. Which they could face, then again, with remarkable and incontestable dignity.

Despite this, the feminist movement and ideology have not lost their “object” or objectives, but are still valid today both in the public and private space. The problematics of feminist philosophy, ideology and research is closely linked today with those of “gender studies”, concentrating – beyond the problems and ideologies of discrimination – on the emphasis of differences in perceiving the world and its problems depending on gender characteristics. Which only enrich of course our specific human possibilities of being.

The book of Ancuța-Lăcrămioara Chiș exemplarily illustrates all these, all the more profoundly as her research is in fact, with regard to its essence and genre, an authentic investigation of **applied philosophy**. However, since the term of “applied philosophy” tends to become these days a commonplace even in the “specialized” literature, and with it, a sort of usual and yet unproblematic intention, it would do no harm to dwell a little on it with more emphasis and outline.

In my concept and experience, such an investigation of applied philosophy<sup>1</sup> must generally satisfy certain fundamental and organic “conditions”, not at all easy

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\* Ancuța-Lăcrămioara Chiș, *O critică a conceptului de discriminare din perspectiva feminismului* (A critique of the concept of discrimination from a feminist perspective) (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2012), 247 p. ISBN 978-973-109-363-5

<sup>1</sup> For details, see also István Király V., *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului – Încercare de filosofie aplicată* (The existential phenomenology of the secret – an attempt of applied philosophy) (Pitești–București–Cluj-Napoca: Editura Paralela '45, 2001), mainly 9–75.

to meet. Which, consequently, are also not at all “formal” or external! Therefore their apparent “enumeration” in what follows also aims at their organic co-pertinence.

Firstly, any research of applied philosophy “must” properly and explicitly be a **thematic** one. Not any research that has a “subject” is automatically also “thematic” on this account! Only that which conquers and **acquires its own theme!** Explicitly and by efforts, and also by implication and the **explicit existential acceptance of its own theme.** This theme is then always also **thematized** – again explicitly and articulately – from the perspective of, and with regard to, both its **problematicness** and its **emancipatory meanings** or horizons of possibilities, just as explicitly undertaken. These emancipatory horizons and possibilities, once undertaken, must be opened and outlined by the **research itself** to a certain extent.

Secondly, any such study “must” be in fact – as it is natural for a serious enterprise – **inter- or even multi-disciplinary.** That is to say, the research must bring to surface and outline-articulate its theme and challenges precisely in the multiplicity and diversity of disciplines and in the current and historical complexity of its aspects and connections.

Thirdly and lastly, an **applied philosophy** research must by all means – and again, as it is just natural for a serious study – gain, acquire and represent, explicitly and analytically, *sui generis* **philosophical** points of views and interrogations! By which the investigation ensures meditative possibilities and means with the help of which it achieves the understanding, interpretation and application of its theme that we, humans, can only grasp with the help of, and through the exercise of **philosophizing** in such a way and on such a level of insight which would **indeed** respond and correspond to current, historical and existential **challenges** by which the theme under discussion “affects” and burdens us. Both ontologically and existentially-historically.

Therefore these will be the considerations that will guide my presentation and analysis of the most decisive aspects of the book under scrutiny.

**Thematically** speaking, the research discusses or more precisely explicitly **thematizes** the phenomenon (“concept”) of **discrimination**, in the first place through a particularly feminist perspective, which is followed and analyzed in a systematic way. And also critical and constructive, let me add, on the basis of a clearly formulated, thematically organic, inherent **hypothesis.** This hypothesis “... starts from the premise that philosophical and social approaches are sexist, masking discrimination as gender norms which prove to be biased, one-sided and limited in what regards the perception of the woman, the feminine, and the female. The plurality of forms of discrimination is known too little or at all, and it is denied through the lens of patriarchy which considers that the discrimination of women is only a past form of prejudice”.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, the research focuses precisely on the problem of the discrimination of **women.** That is, a problem which is ancient and extremely contemporary as well. It covers and even dominates (in varied and specific forms

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<sup>1</sup> Ancuța-Lăcrimioara Chiș, *O critică a conceptului de discriminare din perspectiva feminismului*, 12.

over different ages) the entire history of mankind, from the passage of its global organization from gynocracy to androcracy. That is, from the beginnings of the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy. But which, in a certain, particular and significant way, “reaches” even to this day. For, as stated in the book, “Despite numerous changes of mentality and remodelling of the concepts regarding the role and status of women in the family and society in the last two hundred years, the discrimination of women persists, and its forms evolve in parallel with social and cultural changes”.<sup>1</sup>

The research exposes and analyzes the historical and current situation at its main and decisive periods, moments, tendencies and elements, both from historical and historiographic perspectives, as well as sociological, economical, political, juridical, anthropological (e.g. feminine death), psychological, psycho-social ones, etc. But also from mental, cultural and even “spiritual” perspectives. So, in an emphatically and explicitly **multi- and interdisciplinary** approach.

These analyses finally lead – at a *sui generis* **philosophical** level – to the following fundamental thesis: “...there are no ontological or axiological foundations for the discrimination of women, the patriarchy is an artificial historical construct, which accordingly has a beginning and an end.”<sup>2</sup> Since serious *Introductions* are written in fact when the work is finished, this fundamental thesis is formulated already at the **beginning** of the book.

The textual analyses are based on a constant endeavour for critical examination and clarification of the concepts used. In addition, they are also done so that these analyses and clarifications do not appear as simple external methodological “manners” or “exigencies”, but participate organically and inherently in the unfolding and articulation of the investigation. Nothing illustrates or argues more for this claim than the very fact that, although the meditation is claimed with explicit clarity to be run “from a feminist perspective”, it does not simply or mechanically line up with, or get inserted into, one of the already “given” “types” of feminism, but, on the contrary, it feels the need of an interior reflection of its own and an explicit critical analysis of feminism itself.

And this reflexive and critical-constructive consciousness – the consciousness that I consider, with Lucian Blaga’s expression, a *sui generis* “philosophical consciousness” as it drives towards the articulation and opening of everything that Blaga calls “the horizon of problems” – gives birth, in the work analyzed here, to an extremely detailed and sophisticated insight into the (historical, ideological, methodological, etc.) variations of feminism as an ideology, a philosophy and even as politics, attitude and mentality. This insight, based on criteria general at the start, but getting more sophisticated and detailed as the analysis unfolds, results in an essential and personal **typology** of feminisms.

With a similarly explicit and *sui generis* philosophical approach, the work also presents the decisive periods of the **history of philosophy**. This illustrates with clarity and argumentation that philosophy – so precisely that which has called and understood itself as the “love and friendship of wisdom” for thousands of years –

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.

was, throughout its entire history, one of the forms and modalities of imposing, and also justifying and legitimating the historical and existential discriminations against women.

The textual analyses do not avoid the ancient mythological forms and modalities of discriminations which penetrated into written culture and perpetuated by the works of Hesiod and Homer, nor those which were later systematized and fixed by religions and theologies which, becoming official, dominated (for millennia!) not only as justifications for the discriminatory practices against women, but even as initiators of such practices, diversifying and deepening them.

Therefore I consider it a mental, philosophical and existential merit of the book that the author undertakes, perhaps somewhat even “against” her education and personal background, a lucid, critical and responsible analysis of the history of the Christian West which we still inhabit today.

This aspect also belongs, essentially and authentically, to the *sui generis* philosophical nature of the research. In the first place, I think of the process of **emancipation** and a properly emancipatory result which – most certainly – **happened** to the researcher herself in the course of her work. At the same time, I wish to underline that philosophy is always, authentically, not only a cognitive or epistemological etc. advancement and insight into a certain subject that we repeatedly confront in its present and current existential challenges, but also **the philosopher’s work over his/her own existence**. Which thus opens up new horizons and possibilities of being.

Of course, this is not merely about new possibilities of being “only” for women, but for our entire mankind. Which, as a species, is characterized by an ontological difference of gender. That is, “female/feminine” and “male/masculine”. But it is a specifically “human” possibility and characteristic to turn this inherent difference into discrimination. It is therefore the particular possibility of us humans to restrict the authenticity of our possibilities! Through prejudices, false and ignorant judgments, myths and traditions. Traditions that we are rarely willing to deconstruct and reconstruct in an overtly hermeneutical, existential and ontological way.

The book that we are now speaking about invites to this, or rather does precisely this. It is therefore an excellent source and exercise of meditation for any of us, becoming day by day ever more inevitable. For, indeed: “The philosophical discussion of the concept of discrimination is necessary by comparison with the classic [patriarchal] categories in order to underline the specificity of this concept from the perspective of feminism, its status of abstract entity, as well as its relation to social-political realities.”<sup>1</sup> This does not only mean the critique and deconstruction of the patriarchal system, but also the critique of various types of feminist theories and intentions, emphasizing their exaggerations and ideological deficiencies, concentrating on the critical analysis of the concept of “discrimination”. Wherefrom derives the fundamental truth that: “discrimination is not an empirical notion, but a system of items, produced or imposed in specific social, cultural, political and economical situations; the concept of discrimination is the result of autonomous empirical data; discrimination has an extensive side (used

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 7.

in public) and an individual one (connected to personal attitudes and experiences); the concept of discrimination can exist even if it is not formulated scientifically, by the simple observation of the differences between the sexes, transformed into deficiencies or qualities based on subjective criteria of eligibility; the notion of discrimination had an evolutionary character, as women's subordination had been understood differently in various times."<sup>1</sup> And which, instead of being some kind of stupid war between the sexes, should rather be an attempt to a responsible acceptance of a difficult, but inevitable and intelligent fight against the discrimination of women.

Therefore, the author's analyses reach to the detailed investigation of various types of feminisms – resulting, as I have said, in a personal, comprehensive and critical typology of these – made up on the basis of the extremely strong criterion of the type of discrimination revealed by various orientations or trends.

To conclude, all these qualities make the reading of the volume now reviewed a true and authentic philosophical experience: not only of “thinking” and “meditation”, but an emancipatory existential experience for each and every one of us. Regardless of “sex” or “gender”.

Translated by Emese Czintos

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 20.