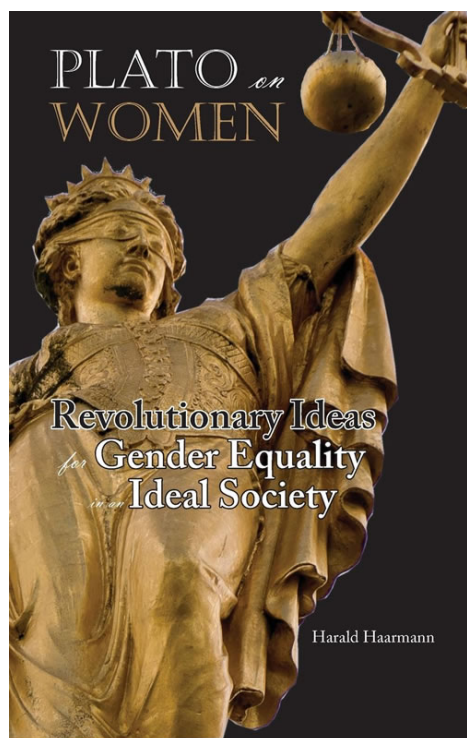


BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT



Plato on Women

Revolutionary Ideas for Gender Equality in an Ideal Society

Harald Haarmann

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Format	Price	ISBN
6 x 9 in Hardcover	\$114.99 / £72.99 / €85.99	978-1-60497-918-3
EBSCHost WebPDF	\$114.99 / NA / NA	978-1-62499-911-6
EBSCHost ePub	\$114.99 / NA / NA	978-1-62499-912-3

Description

Plato (ca. 427 - ca. 347 BCE) has been referred to as a "patriarchal" writer by some feminists (e.g., Barbara Freeman 1988) while others characterize the philosopher's approach to gender issues as "unambiguously feminist" (Gregory Vlastos 1994). In this book, renowned cultural scientist Harald Haarmann argues that Plato was neither the one nor the other. The motivation and the goal of his scheme of gender roles in an ideal society have to be sought outside the frame of traditional feminist analysis.

In the present study, a new approach to Plato's philosophical endeavor is presented, one which calls upon an internal reconstruction of historical realities and of cultural conditions during Plato's lifetime, and of its zeitgeist, at the same time avoiding judgmental stereotyping and the forceful projection of modern biased positions into antiquity. Therefore, there is no intention to force Plato into "existentialist", "Marxist", "feminist", "psycho-analytical", "mysterious" or whatever other straightjackets but to refer to modern positions only in their capacity to outline contrasts of worldview, between antiquity and the modern age. In other words, Plato's work will not be (mis)used as a quarry to extract ideas, forms and concepts, for them to become the target of modern biased criticism, and pronouncements will not be treated as isolated constructs in a cultural vacuum.

In this study, priority lies with the reconstruction of Plato's ideas on women's roles viewed against the zeitgeist of gender issues in Greek society of classical antiquity. This poses the challenge to reliably reconstruct the social conditions of women in Greek society of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, that is to reconstruct the living-conditions under the Athenian democracy. That was

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Plato on Women

Description (continued)

the environment in which Plato worked and lived, with which he interacted - physically and mentally - and from where he received vital impulses.

The various facets of women's role in private and public life, in reality and in the mythical tradition, offer an overall picture that defies the stereotyping notion of a "patriarchal" society. Women had various roles even in public life, and yet, such realities were not readily acknowledged by intellectuals and were marginalized in antique sources. Plato, as an exception to common attitudinal positions, was an attentive observer of contemporary Greek society in Athens under the democracy, and the multifaceted picture of women's roles and status certainly influenced his reasoning about gender issues. This is an important book for students and scholars in anthropology, women's studies, and philosophy.

About the Author

Harald Haarmann, PhD, is a German linguist and cultural scientist. He has taught and conducted research at a number of German and Japanese universities. Since 2003 he has been vice president of the Institute of Archaeomythology and director of its European Branch. Dr. Haarmann is the author of more than fifty books in German, English, Spanish, Hungarian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and other languages, among them three world histories (of writing, languages, and numbers). His fields of study are cultural history, ancient civilizations, archaeomythology, history of religion, writing history, language evolution, and research on identity. For his work, he received the Prix logos awarded by the Association européenne des linguistes et des professeurs de langues (Paris) and the Premio Jean Monnet for essay writing. His latest book is *Ancient knowledge, Ancient know-how, Ancient reasoning: Cultural Memory in Transition from Prehistory to Classical Antiquity and Beyond*.

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