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**THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE.** By Dr. Jessie Bernard. New York: World Publishing Times Mirror. 1972. Pp. xvi, 367. \$10.00.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE.** By Dr. Jessie Bernard.  
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Harvey L. Zuckman

This is a dangerous book. Though perhaps not quite as threatening to conventional thought as Marx' *Das Kapital* or Darwin's *Origin of the Species* were in their time, Dr. Bernard's book draws together empirical sociological data to support the onslaught of the Women's Liberation Movement against one of western civilization's most venerable institutions: Marriage for life between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

After documenting her premise that the exclusive and permanent commitment we know as marriage causes unhappiness in most women because of the resulting isolation from the commercial and professional world, the loss of status as a homemaker or the "dwindling into a wife," the submergence of the wife's personality, and the great pressures and tensions inherent in child bearing and child rearing, Dr. Bernard concludes that women are paying too high a price for the apparent security that the present permanent and exclusive commitment is supposed to provide.

Though she does not emphasize the point, it is implicit in her thinking that this quid pro quo of security has become illusory. At one time the combination of social and religious pressures and our legal institutions virtually assured the woman marital status and economic security at least for the life of her husband. But with the advent of liberalized divorce grounds the routine uncontested divorce and finally even "no fault" divorce, the commitment to permanence of the marriage has disappeared.

What the average wife is left with is a very bad bargain, indeed, and one that modern young women, whose consciousness is being raised by the Women's Liberation Movement, will soon no longer accept.

But Dr. Bernard, who writes in a very direct and spritely style with liberal use of the colloquial, does believe that marriage, in the sense of personal commitment between men and women, not necessarily bolstered by social, religious or legal institutions, does have a future. Instead of the permanent and exclusive form of marriage having a monopoly, it will represent but one available option. Other possibilities for unions between the sexes mentioned by Dr. Bernard are such permanent but non-exclusive ones as the *menage a trois*, group marriages and even polygyny for the geriatric set (because of the vastly greater abundance of female senior citizens than superannuated males), the non-exclusive non-permanent household group of ten or so consenting adults of varying ages coming together to share household chores, sexual relations, and child rearing for a given period of time and the exclusive but not permanent marriage under contract for a given period of time.

Of special interest to lawyers is the last mentioned short term contract which would require the spouses to pick up each other's option at the end of say a five-year period. Official recognition of such a contract would put an end to the monopoly of the standard lifetime contract and erode the idea that marriage is a status entered into through contract. Dr. Bernard professes to see such recognition on the horizon. She points to the fact that a serious bill to recognize the option marriage contract was introduced in the 1971 session of the Maryland legislature.<sup>1</sup>

From the author's perspective, the main thrust of the changing form of marriage is to provide women with a greater chance for personal happiness and satisfaction—the present form being reasonably congenial to men, because of their breadwinner or “hero” role. Thus, cutting across all of the new options is the requirement that roles be shared. Men will have to spend substantial periods of their time as child rearers and homemakers, giving the women the opportunity to experience breadwinning and the personal growth supposedly associated with commercial and professional life. Dr. Bernard has no illusions that achieving this fundamental restructuring of the way a whole society thinks and acts will be easy. She is all too familiar with such male dodges as tokenism and counterfeit sharing. She quotes one woman's analysis of her husband's counterfeiting:

“I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at.” MEANING: Unfortunately I'm no good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What

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1. (1971) H.B. No. 633 (Dels. Lee and Boswell. The Bill died in committee but has been revised and prefiled for the 1973 legislative session. (1972) H.B. No. 3 (Del. Lee). As it stands now the bill permits but does not require option marriage contracts for a term of three years and renewable every three years thereafter.

I do best is a little light carpentry, changing light bulbs, moving furniture (how often do *you* move furniture?) ALSO MEANING: Historically the lower classes (black men and us [wives]) have had hundreds of years experience doing menial jobs. It would be a waste of manpower to train someone else to do them now. ALSO MEANING: I don't like the dull stupid boring jobs, so you should do them.<sup>2</sup>

All in all this woman isolated eleven such husbandly dodges for Dr. Bernard. Some male readers may be amused by this passage but I for one found it hitting uncomfortably close to home—my home.

Though the radical restructuring of our industrial society necessary to free women will not come easily (the prospective twenty-seventh amendment considered), Dr. Bernard is optimistic. She points to such changing work patterns as the four-day forty hour week and projections that a twenty-four hour, four day week could, by 1990, produce a gross national product equal to that now produced by the forty-hour five-day week. It is just possible that long before 1990, we may witness the five-day forty-hour week being shared by husband and wife and child rearing, too. Such is right now the official policy of Sweden, and, Dr. Bernard implies, there is no good reason why it should not be our policy as well.

It is safe to say that her chapter on the "shared-role pattern" is the essence of this provocative work and is must reading for anyone with a serious interest in marriage as an institution and the unrest it generates.

While my own unscientific observations lead me to the same basic conclusion that women are presently shortchanged in marriage, the book leaves me, a male, with a sense of unease if the future will be as Dr. Bernard projects it. For as she herself tells us in the first three chapters, in every conventional marriage there are in reality *two* marriages, the marriage perceived by the wife and the marriage perceived by the husband. Until now, the husband generally has had the better marriage because of his "hero" role. Dr. Bernard tells us very little of how the new order will affect the male personality. She says simply that by changing our educational patterns and industrial system, we can condition the male to this new mode of living. She may be right. Certainly, justice, to the women would dictate the direction of marriage perceived by her. But she fails to make a convincing case that male partners will share in the greater happiness of their mates. As I said, this is a dangerous book, especially for men who presently "enlarge into husbands."

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2. p. 251.

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