"Women Who Want To Be Women": The Social And Political Antifeminism Of Phyllis Schlafly

Murry Warhank
Carroll College, Helena, MT

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CARROLL COLLEGE

“WOMEN WHO WANT TO BE WOMEN”: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ANTIFEMINISM OF PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY
MURRY WARHANK

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This thesis has been approved for honors recognition for the Department of Political Science.

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Introduction

Women Who Want to be Women

A casual student of the American feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s could easily get the idea that the “Battle of the Sexes” was played out between powerful, courageous women who demanded equal treatment in American society and the laws that govern it, and a cruel, oppressive patriarchy hell-bent on retaining their dominant place in society (and hell-bent on keeping their wives in the kitchen). Whether this battle was fought in the United States Senate or on a tennis court, the interested parties always seemed to be the same.

However, this snap-shot of a powerful movement in American history distorts the reality of the past. Not all feminists were women and not all who opposed the feminist movement were men. The latter is illustrated by the life of Phyllis Schlafly, nicknamed the “Darling of the Silent Majority.” Schlafly, educated at Radford, Harvard, and Washington University is a brilliant woman who had a long and influential career as a political writer and activist, but she made her name battling the very movement that helped her interests the most.

Schlafly gained notoriety with the publication of A Choice, Not an Echo. Released in 1964, it contends that a small entourage of “Eastern-king makers” had denied conservatives the Republican Party’s nomination for president since the end of World War II. This tract gained immediate recognition and was credited with securing Barry Goldwater the Republican nomination in 1964.¹

However, Schlafly’s greatest area of influence was not in insider politics, it was in the battle between Christian fundamentalism and feminism. Schlafly was in the vanguard of a larger-than-you-would-expect segment of the female population of the United States that despised the feminist movement and the principles on which it rested. Her famous *Phyllis Schlafly Reports*, which she published from her home, led to a movement of conservative, Christian women who were against the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Although the ERA was thought to be unstoppable when it was sent to the states in 1972, organizations such as Schlafly’s own STOP-ERA and later Women Who Want to be Women stopped the amendment dead in its tracks with a combination of political argumentation (provided by Schlafly) and unorthodox political tactics which included giving state congressmen fresh baked loaves of bread to which the following note attached:

Women Who Want to be Women  
Have made this bread for you  
Because they love being homemakers  
All the year through  
It’s an honor to be a homemaker,  
And this right we want to remain,  
But the ERA would take away our choice  
And have laws read: Men, Women, Same.  
We cannot be the same as men,  
We’re just not created that way.  
We have a place in life to fulfill [sic]  
And are content to leave it that way.  
So enjoy your bread,  
Appreciate it too,  
Cause unless the ERA is stopped,  
The Homemaker May Be YOU!²

However, while these groups’ political tactics may have been quite amateur, their success showed them to be up to any political challenge.\(^3\)

Today, only one of these groups remains as a political force in the United States; Schlafly’s Eagle Forum (formerly STOP-ERA). Schlafly continues to publish her report once a month, and remains politically influential. Indeed, much of the writing of powerful figures in today’s Religious Right, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, are reliant on Schlafly’s writings. This paper will summarize Schlafly’s antifeminism and present a logical critique of it by examining Schlafly’s metaphysical, social and political thought.

At this point, a fundamental question must be addressed. Many would claim that because of the relative simplicity of her ideas and the format of her texts (they are usually loosely arranged essays of a page or two in length), Schlafly’s thought does not constitute a political, social, or theological theory. However, one cannot gauge the worth of a body of writing based simply on a lack of complexity or voluminous length. After all, Ludwig Wittgenstein, arguably the greatest philosopher of the 20\(^{th}\) century, used plain language and straightforward explanations as well. Additionally, although Schlafly’s writing is far from systematic, it presents ideas that have aided in the construction of a philosophical basis to the Religious Right. This alone makes Schlafly’s work important.

In constructing Schlafly’s often-disjointed writings into a systematic whole, I will begin by describing the metaphysical basis that forms the foundation of her thought. Next, I will elaborate on Schlafly’s social thought, which is necessary to understand Schlafly’s political ideology.

\(^3\) Ibid.
I.

Fundamentalism as the Metaphysical Basis of Schlaflyist Antifeminism

While Schlafly’s writings are conservative in content, they are religious in inspiration. This is especially true of her antifeminist thought. While many conservative thinkers justify American patriarchy on secular grounds, Schlafly’s antifeminism is derived from religion. Although Schlafly uses scripture to support her views on women, one could not say that Biblicism formed the basis for her thought because her interpretations, selections, and application of scripture is in no way representative of a systematic understanding of the Bible. Instead, Schlafly uses the Bible in a very selective way; one that supports both religious and social traditionalism. In a word, the basis of Schlafly’s thought is fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism forms the metaphysical basis from which all members of the Religious Right build. Schlafly is no exception. This chapter will briefly present the historical developments that led to the formation of Christian fundamentalism and examine the fundamentalist theory of “Biblical Inerrancy,” the metaphysical basis of Schlafly’s thought.

A. The Historical Development of Christian Fundamentalism

Christian fundamentalism can be seen as a traditionalist reaction against Christian modernism. This is both appropriate and informative, as most thought of the Christian right is critical, that is, directed against another theory, institution, or policy. Milliard Erickson argues that fundamentalism grew out developments in science, philosophy, and
biblical studies.\(^4\) Beginning in the Renaissance and continuing until today, an avalanche of scientific discovery, which existed in symbiotic relationship with a growing societal secularism, led most Christian denominations to update their views on a host of issues.

In science, Copernican astronomy featured a heliocentric universe that flew in the face of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic geocentrism that was a staple of the Christian understanding of the universe. Additionally, geo-historical studies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries cast serious doubt on Archbishop James Ussher’s famous assertion in 1660 that the earth was created 4004 years before the birth of Christ. However, these scientific advances were nowhere near as damaging to Christian theology as Darwinian evolution. \emph{The Origin of Species}, published in 1859, claimed that all forms of life had come into existence through the process of evolution. Species experience random mutations, some of which allowed them to better handle their surroundings.\(^5\) While this theory did not deny the existence of God, it did seem to make appeals to the divine unnecessary in the field of biology.

Developments in philosophy also became a threat to Christian theology. During the Middle Ages, philosophy was seen as “the handmaiden of theology.” However, during the seventeenth century, that began to change. Philosophers, using reason alone began to create theories of reality and ethics that did not depend on Christian scripture (divine revelation). No longer did philosophers need to attempt to prove the existence of God. Particularly instrumental in this breakdown was David Hume. His empirical philosophy claimed that it was impossible to prove the existence of a God. After Hume, Immanuel Kant dealt a further blow to Christian metaphysics in \emph{A Prolegomena to Any

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\(^4\) Millard Erickson, \emph{The New Evangelical Theology} (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1968), 17.

\(^5\) Ibid.
Future Metaphysics, by asserting that because of the way our minds work, we cannot prove the existence of God.⁶

The final development that led to a split within Christianity was biblical criticism. Historical criticism of literature was developed during the Renaissance, but not until the eighteenth century was it used to analyze the Bible. This was troubling to conservative Christians not only because of what it found (most books in the Old Testament were not authored by those to whom they are traditionally attributed) but also because of the assumption that seemed to be implicit in the method itself. By applying this method to the bible, scholars were treating it as an ordinary work of mythology. Conservative Christians saw the work as the inerrant word of God, or literally true, and thought that any attempt to view it differently was blasphemous.⁷

These developments in science, philosophy, and biblical criticism led to change in all parts of society, and the Christian faith was no exemption. Church teaching shifted significantly on issues such as biblical inerrancy, world history, and miracle working.⁸ However, while these changes were necessary for the Christian faith to retain any credibility, many conservative Christians were angered by the changes, claiming that changes would lead to the downfall of the Church.⁹

It was out of this opposition that the fundamentalist movement was born. Although this trend in thought had been influential for hundreds of years, it was first organized in the late 1890s and the early 1900s during a series of conferences (the 1895

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⁶ Immanuel Kant, A Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid.
Niagra Bible Conference was the best known) and scholarly papers. The most influential written works of this period were a series of articles financed by Lyman and Milton Stewart known as *The Fundamentals*. These works laid out the principles of the fundamentalist movement that remain today.  

Although there is some disagreement over which principles laid forth in these works should be considered central tenets, most authors agree on a list of three, summed up by James Barr:

(a) a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible, the absence from it of any sort of error;  
(b) a strong hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and implications of modern critical study of the Bible;  
(c) an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really ‘true Christians’ at all.

This list does not adequately sum up all of fundamentalist theology, it does provide a clear insight into the primary motivations of fundamentalists and forms the metaphysical basis of Schlafly’s work.

**B. Biblical Inerrancy as the Schlafly’s Primary Metaphysical Assumption**

Biblical inerrancy is the most important of the tenets cited by Barr. Indeed, the text of the Bible forms the basis for Schlafly’s beliefs regarding society and politics. This point becomes abundantly clear when reading Schlafly’s *The Power of the Christian Woman*. In this text, Schlafly expounds on the assumption that drives the rest of her work: the Bible is the inerrant word of God, which ought to be observed in our social

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10 Ibid., 22.  
and political institutions. The first chapter of the *Power of the Christian Woman* even declares that Genesis 1-3 form the ideal model of gender relations.\(^{13}\)

It is important to note here that Schlafly’s belief on the inerrancy of the Bible is not derived from any reasoned position, but rather from the culture in which she lived. Indeed, the culture of Christian fundamentalism is responsible for many of her beliefs. Therefore, to understand Schlafly’s take on Biblical inerrancy, we must understand the fundamentalist attitude on the Bible.

If the Bible is inerrant, then it provides us with a clear criterion for behavior and action. However, this can be misleading. While fundamentalists believe that the Bible is *inerrant*, most do not believe that the Bible is *literally* true. Barr explains this rather murky distinction:

> Even if fundamentalists sometimes say that they take the bible literally, the facts of fundamentalist interpretation show that this is not so. What fundamentalists insist is not that the Bible must be taken literally but that it must be so interpreted as to avoid any admission that it contains any kind of error. In order to avoid imputing error to the Bible, fundamentalists twist and turn back and forth between literal and non-literal interpretation. The dominant fundamentalist interpretation about the Bible, namely that it is divinely inspired and infallible, does not mean that it must be taken literally, and are not so interpreted in conservative evangelical literature; what they mean, and are constantly interpreted as meaning, is that the Bible contains no error of any kind—not only theological error, but error in any sort of historical, geographical or scientific fact, is completely absent from the Bible.\(^{14}\)

Clearly, the biblical hermeneutics of fundamentalism are far from systematic. Instead of approaching the problem of Biblical interpretation with a somewhat objective methodology, fundamentalists assert that everything in the Bible is true without a


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
philosophical basis, and then interpret each passage in a way that legitimizes their original assertion that the Bible is without error.

The logic behind the belief that the Bible is inerrant is equally troubling. Erickson claims that for fundamentalists, the Bible is a form of special revelation. God, in an effort to make clear what he wants from humans, inspired the writers of scripture to write exactly what he wanted written.\(^{15}\) However, this explanation avoids the entire problem that one confronts in the first place, namely, how does one know that God inspired the writing of the scriptures that are compiled into the Bible? Barr notes that most fundamentalists argue that we can know that the Bible is inerrant because Jesus, Paul, and Peter all told us that this is the case. Unfortunately, the only record that fundamentalists cite to prove that these figures did indeed argue that the Bible is inerrant is the Bible itself. Therefore, their argument is circular, because it assumes that the Bible is inerrant (or we could not trust the words of Biblical figures) in an effort to prove that very position.

Schlafly attempts to avoid this problem all together. As previously mentioned, she argues that Genesis 1-3 provides the basis for all of our knowledge of the true nature of femininity and masculinity, a fact from which she derives the values that power her antifeminism.\(^{16}\) However, she gives absolutely no justification for this assertion, instead suggesting that anyone who objects to her position should “take it up with God.”\(^{17}\)

Because of the ambiguity, contradictions, and factual impossibilities that are described in many parts of the Bible, the process of interpretation (deciding which parts

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of scripture to take literally and which parts need to be interpreted) become tremendously important to the fundamentalist, especially when examining the social beliefs of fundamentalist organizations. Barr argues that the only tried-and-true rule when interpreting the Bible is that it should be interpreted so that no factual errors are included in the sacred text. In other words, it must be interpreted to be inerrant.

For example, in the genealogical survey from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5) is not taken literally by most fundamentalists because of the unthinkable ages that would be attributed to the men described. Adam would have been nine hundred and thirty years old, and Methuselah, the oldest of all, would have lived to an incredible nine hundred and sixty-nine years of age. While a first reading suggests that the chapter presents a listing of fathers and sons (regardless of age), fundamentalists well aware of the limitations of human life often suggest that it is not what is in the chapter that makes this genealogy inerrant, but what is left out. This so-called “Gap-Theory” suggests that the Bible leaves out scores of generations between the men of which it speaks. Although this view has its problems (if the Bible leaves out scores of generations while its plain text seems to suggest that each man is directly descended from the man before him, is that not an error?), it allows fundamentalists to credibly maintain that the Bible is not without error.

The method that is used by the interpreters of this text becomes increasingly important as we begin to deal with social matters. After all, the scientific body of knowledge that opposes certain sections of the Bible is more accepted socially, more

verifiable, and in most cases, more acceptable to fundamentalists. In fact, most Americans consider scientific knowledge to be the only concrete form of knowledge that one can attain. Fundamentalists feel free to interpret sections of the Bible that deal with the ages of individuals and passages that deal with natural phenomena because they readily accept the body of knowledge that constitutes modern science. They must either update their understanding of the Bible to keep pace with modern science or delegitimize the foundational notion of Biblical inerrancy.

However, the type of knowledge that we can have about social matters is much less accepted. More importantly, it is not verifiable. Because of this, new trends in social or political thought are almost impossible to incorporate into the fundamentalist understanding of the Bible. Without concrete proof, which cannot be provided, fundamentalists will not incorporate new social tendencies into the metaphysical basis for their experiences. It is this aspect of fundamentalism that allows Schlafly to assert her beliefs about the nature of women without providing any supporting claims.

This, combined with the ancient and therefore traditional nature of the Bible, is what causes the very traditional nature of women’s groups in the religious right. Because the members of these groups make an absolute presupposition that the Bible is inerrant, passages dealing with morality or societal composition are not only correct, they are a divine mandate.

Thus, Schlafly frequently makes reference to “God’s Design” or “God’s Plan” when arguing against feminism, homosexuality, and even equal legal rights primarily because the foundation of her metaphysical, axiological, and epistemological system, the

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20 Ibid., p. 37.
Bible contains passages that endorse so-called “traditional values.” For example, "And a man will choose . . . any wickedness, but the wickedness of a woman . . . Sin began with a woman and thanks to her we all must die." This clearly illustrates the inferior, even evil, place to which women are assigned in the Bible. Additionally, fundamentalists interpret the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to condemn homosexuality. For instance, Lev. 18:22 reads “and with a male you shall not lay lyings of a woman.”

However, the Bible alone cannot explain the thought of Schlafly. Instead, one should understand her thought as a defense of patriarchic, traditionalist fundamentalist culture and mindset using the methodology and Biblical passages traditionally cited by fundamentalist leaders. Schlafly’s thought follows the fundamentalist culture’s Biblical interpretation nearly to the letter. Therefore, while she claims that her arguments are based on the Bible, and therefore God’s word, they are more directly related to the fundamentalist mindset, and its corresponding conception of the Bible. Because of this, it is not surprising that her social thought conforms to traditional parameters.

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21 Ecclesiasticus, 25:18, 19 & 33

22 “Leviticus 18:22 and Homosexuality; All Views” Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance at: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibh.htm
II.

The Antifeminist Social Philosophy of Phyllis Schlafly

While the worldview of Phyllis Schlafly is tied to several fundamentalist metaphysical assumptions, that alone is not enough to fully understand their political theory. This is because the politics of the religious right are very rarely based upon their particular denomination. Instead, they are based on the social order that they believe the Christian faith endorses. Therefore, it is necessary to examine Schlafly's social thought in order to fully grasp her politics.

A. Schlafly's Society

The correct social order, as Phyllis Schlafly views it, is derived from two separate sources: the Bible (she often refers to this source as "God's Plan") and her belief about what type of society would promote social stability and the good of the individual (or "the social good"). The most powerful influence on the social thought of Phyllis Schlafly was what she often referred to as "God's Plan."23 This divine blueprint for society, contained both in scripture and Western Christian history, developed through the Christian tradition is a powerful and well-accepted truth in the United States.24

"God's Plan," not surprisingly, dictates the stereotypical role for women. Its dictums suggest that the woman is to submit to her husband: "Wives submit yourself unto your husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is

head of the church.”25 Additionally, a woman’s place in society is laid out in First Corinthians 14:34: “Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience.”26 There are scores of quotations that would illustrate the same point. The Bible, as interpreted by most fundamentalists, supports so-called “traditional family values,” which entail a subordinate role for the wife both in the family and in society in general.

Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that Schlafly used this argument because it appealed to lower-middle class female homemakers who felt that their traditional role within the family was under attack from a new breed of professional women and feminist theorists:

The success of [Schlafly’s] crusade depended on the politicization of a disaffected constituency—middle- and lower-middle-class housewives who felt that their traditional roles were being denigrated by the rise of professional women—by raising the specter of radical changes in gender roles that would supposedly be brought about by the passage of the ERA.27

However, Schlafly herself never insinuated anything to let on that she used this argument for strictly political reasons. In fact, the revision of her famous work The Power of the Positive Woman as The Power of the Christian Woman (which contains the same logic, only supported with scripture) suggests that Schlafly believes that one can arrive at her conclusions using either secular or theological study, although she clearly supports a theological approach in both works.

Schlafly argues that women should be assigned traditional roles because of their nature, which was carefully crafted by God. True to her fundamentalist roots, Schlafly

26 Ibid.
argues that Genesis 1-3 shows the nature of women. She claims that this passage shows that the primary responsibility of women is to care for their family:

God said to be ‘fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth’ (Genesis 1:28) to both man and woman, and He created them so that they could fulfill that responsibility together. However, woman’s nature makes it obvious that she was made especially to bear and nurture children.

Additionally, Schlafly’s most famous piece, What’s Wrong With Equal Rights for Women, claims that women belong in the home because they have babies. She suggests that anyone that has a problem with this system should “take it up with God because He created us this way.” Schlafly also believes that women are physically and emotionally weaker than men, a trait which suggests that they should not be in the work force. She backs this assertion with a myriad of sports metaphors, claiming that women are unable to compete with men in any sport because they are physically and emotionally incapable.

Intricately connected to the belief that God’s Design is the best social situation, are Schlafly’s arguments pertaining to the social good. She believes that the good of the society is served by traditional family situations, which allow the mother to stay at home and care for the children. While Schlafly does cite some sociological surveys to back up this contention, much evidence is ignored. Additionally, most of her assertions completely dismiss the justice questions that arise from designating gender roles, especially if a woman wishes to leave the home.

29 Ibid., p. 12.
30 Phyllis Schlafly, Feminist Fantasies (Dallas: Spense Publishing Company, 2003), 89.
Schlafly's social theories are based heavily on sources that extol the virtues of the traditional family. Not surprisingly, she advocates for the family and firm gender distinctions. For Schlafly, the ideal society would be constructed in a very Aristotelian fashion (which is not surprising, considering fundamentalist theology retains many of the Aristotelian notions that were central in early Christianity). In this schema, the family is the most important social entity.

She seeks a family that is both stable and true to God's design. She believes that a family can only be stable if a mother is at home to take care of her children and her home. The woman's primary goal, however, should be to ensure that children are raised properly:

More and more research is piling up to indicate that a young child's place is in the home and there is no adequate substitute for the bonding and attachment that take place between a child and his mother. A secure attachment in infancy provides that basis for self-reliance, self-regulation, and ultimately the capacity for independence combined with the ability to develop mature adult relationships.\(^32\)

However, Schlafly argues that this crucial bonding between a mother and her child cannot come about if the mother is unable to care for the child during the day:

Recent research by other scholars confirms that the greatest risks in non-maternal care come from the failure of mother-infant attachment, which results from frequent and prolonged separations. Daycare infants are more likely to cry, more likely to be troublemakers, more likely to withdraw and be loners, more easily influenced by their peers, less cooperative with adults, and less likely to pursue tasks to completion.\(^33\)

While the study that she cites does not confirm any of Schlafly's arguments regarding the danger of day care because they do not show that these traits continue into adulthood, it

\(^{32}\) Ibid, p. 227.
illustrates Schlafly’s notions about the need for mothers to be in the home caring for their children.\(^{34}\)

Schlafly also argues that women who do not stay in the home harm their marriages and, therefore, themselves. Schlafly claims that all men naturally desire a wife that will tend to their house, cook them meals, bear them children, and tend to their emotional needs.\(^{35}\) However, women that choose to work outside the home are unable to fulfill all of these needs. Therefore, she claims, men whose wives work outside the home are not truly happy with their marriage. Schlafly explains the results:

The U.S. census bureau reported this year that 7,500,00 fathers have vanished. That’s a disaster far in excess of all the [U. S.] battle deaths in World War II (292,131), in the Korean War (33,629), and in the Vietnam War combined. One-fourth of American families with children are horribly disadvantaged because they have not father in the home. No amount of taxpayers’ money can ever compensate for this personal and societal tragedy; did a foreign enemy steal into our cities at night and slaughter the fathers? No, women’s liberation and sexual liberation stole into the minds and hearts of a generation and “liberated” millions of men and women from marriage and its responsibilities.\(^{36}\)

However, while this view is extreme and fallacious (the death of a parent in war is certainly not logically equivalent to the separation of a child’s parents), Schlafly has steadfastly stood by it over the years.

The damage that a woman in the workforce does to marriage does not end at the family. Schlafly also contends that it is tremendously damaging to the woman herself. She claims that women naturally desire a man who will protect and provide for her, a mindset that she terms the “Cinderella Complex” (To illustrate this point, Schlafly even

\(^{34}\) One should not construe Schlafly’s use of studies here as a tool to legitimize the social message that she contends that the Bible presents. As previously noted, fundamentalists are highly critical of any attempts to use sociological studies to legitimize or disprove the passages of the Bible on which they focus. Instead, Schlafly is using this study proof that women caring for their children has social benefits in addition to remaining consistent with the Biblical teachings that she supports.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 211.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.
entitled the first chapter to her latest book, *Feminist Fantasies*, “All I Want is a Husband.”

Entering into the workforce effectively dashes this dream by driving prospective husbands away. Any amount of success that a woman may find by way of success in the workforce cannot compensate for the lack of a benevolent husband and a happy family.

The family, being the most important societal institution, should be free from government interference. The family should be free to pursue its own way and free to use its own methods to raise their children (presumably by methods that Schlafly herself would agree with, no doubt). Any interference in the business of the family represents unjust societal coercion.

**B. Schlafly’s Critique of Social Feminism**

With this conception of the societal value of the traditional family, it is not surprising that Schlafly is virulently antifeminist. However, because Schlafly often exaggerates the goals of the feminist movement, it is valuable to understand her views on the danger that this powerful, eclectic movement presents to her social formulations.

As I have previously mentioned, the religious right’s virulent opposition to even the most reasonable pieces of the eclectic and often radical feminist movement can be understood as a legitimation crisis. If one’s metaphysical, axiological, and epistemological basis were the Bible, the feminist movement’s growing acceptance and influence in society could have a tremendously powerful affect on one’s worldview. If you accept that a woman could successfully and safely occupy a number of positions in

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38 Ibid, p. 41.
society, not just wife and homemaker, then you would be forced to accept, if even at a subconscious level, that the Bible is not inerrant in its social teachings. Additionally, the increasing alignment of feminism with homosexual activism clearly puts it at odds with the teachings of nearly all Christian denominations (certainly all fundamentalist teachings are against homosexuality). Therefore, one is forced to oppose the feminist movement on principle if one is to retain their fundamentalist understanding of the world around them.

However, there are a number of widely held feminist positions that clearly contradict the social and metaphysical beliefs that Schlafly espouses. The most important deal with social order. Schlafly most strongly objects to feminism’s disregard for the institution of marriage. She argues that feminists have successfully lobbied to have college and high school textbooks amended to indoctrinate students with the view that marriage is bad for women:

These textbooks are inordinately preoccupied with domestic violence and divorce, and view marriage as archaic and oppressive, not just occasionally, but inherently. Some textbooks are larded with anti-family rhetoric. Changing Families, by Judy Aulette focuses on battering, marital rap and divorce, with no mention of any benefits of marriage. The textbooks give the impression that children don’t need two parents and aren’t harmed by divorce. They omit all the evidence that children in single parent homes are far more at risk than children in two-parent homes.40

Schlafly also objects to feminists’ attempts to portray homemakers as oppressed and unhappy.41

She also criticizes feminists for teaching women that the only meaningful work that one can find is outside of the home. She criticizes the National Organization of Women (NOW) for pushing women who desired a family into jobs in a “man’s world”

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where they are unable to compete with male co-workers and miss out on the joys of the traditional family.\textsuperscript{42} She suggests that this behavior is irresponsible because it is inimical to the true desires of the woman.

Schlafly also accuses feminists of trying to force a Nietzschean transvaluation that would dictate gender equality or “neuterize society.” She claims that in their zeal to make the United States fair to women, they forced several changes in the values that the country held dear. The most notable of the values that she discusses is the value of life. She claims that feminists use the politically effective phrase “reproductive freedom” in an attempt to sway society on the acceptability of what she calls “abortion on demand.” “Reproductive freedom,” she claims, “means abortion on demand throughout nine months of pregnancy for any reason whatsoever.”\textsuperscript{43}

Additionally, Schlafly criticizes feminism for its support of homosexuality. Throughout much of her writing, Schlafly even associates the term “feminist” with the term “lesbian.” She argues that homosexuals already enjoy equal protection under the law:

Gays can already get marriage licenses on exactly the same terms as anyone else. Everyone is equally barred from marrying another person who is under a certain age, or too closely related, or of the same gender, or already married to another. Sound reasons underlie all these requirements . . .\textsuperscript{44}

As one might by Schlafly’s political and religious opinions (or her relation of homosexuality to polygamy, incest, and cradle robbing), she believes that homosexuality is against God’s design and should not be legalized in anyway.

\textsuperscript{44} Phyllis Schlafly, \textit{Phyllis Schlafly Report}. December 2003. at: www.eagleforum.org
Feminism also poses a threat to Schlafly’s economic beliefs. Being a staunch free-market capitalist. Schlafly objects to feminist calls for affirmative action programs and equal pay laws:

The Glass Ceiling initiative is a good example of how busybodies and crybabies work in tandem. The crybabies are the feminists who think they should, at the very least, be vice-president of a Fortune 500 company, and the busybodies are their pals in media and government who want to use affirmative action to place them there. The feminists are forever crying about how ‘artificial barriers’ interfere with their success in the labor force. But the chief barrier is not artificial, but the result of women’s choices. The Yankelovitch survey found that a majority of women (56 percent) would quit their job if money were not a factor...45

This quotation is indicative of Schlafly’s overall belief that the free market alone should decide wages and hiring practices. Any attempt to interfere with its workings is unfair to men who are either applying for jobs, vying for promotions, or seeking a raise.

45 Phyllis Schlafly, Feminist Fantasies (Dallas: Spense Publishing Company, 2003), 27.
III.

Phyllis Schlafly’s Political Objectives

Phyllis Schlafly’s political antifeminism is derived directly from her view of the appropriate ordering of society. Therefore, her primary political aims are to see government support the traditional Christian family, which necessarily entails rejecting the political aims of the feminist movement. However, whereas most of her social writings are directed solely against the feminist platform, many of her political aims are directed towards the protection and enhancement of traditional family life and her traditional value system.

The political battle that surrounded the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), first proposed to the United States Congress in 1928 and sent to the states for ratification in 1972,\(^{46}\) remains Schlafly’s most important political fight. The amendment reads:

\begin{quote}
Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.\(^{47}\)
\end{quote}

Despite its benign appearance, Phyllis Schlafly has remained against this amendment from its passage by Congress. In fact, her essay entitled, *What’s Wrong With Equal Rights for Women* is credited with sparking the formation of several women’s groups, such as Women Who Want to be Women and her own STOP-ERA (which was the

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
forerunner of today’s Eagle Forum), that would eventually muster the opposition to defeat the ERA that was once thought to be invincible. Her arguments against the ERA form the core of her political ideology.

*What’s Wrong With Equal Rights for Women* argues that women should not be given equal political rights in the United States. True to form, it is based heavily on Schlafly’s social thought about the nature and responsibilities that accompany having a family:

Our Judeo-Christian civilization has developed the law and custom that, since women bear the physical consequence of the sex act, men must be required to pay in other ways. These law and customs decree that a man must carry his share by physical protection and financial support of his children and of the woman who bears his children, and also by a code of behavior that benefits and protects both the woman and the children. This is accomplished by the institution of the family. Our respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is the greatest single achievement in the history of women’s rights. It assumes a woman the most precious and important right of all—the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow.

Schlafly felt that if the ERA were passed, a female’s traditional place in the home would be threatened by compulsory military service, the repeal of laws that required husbands to support their family, and even non-gendered locker rooms in public schools. Additionally, Schlafly opposed the ERA because she felt that it would mandate affirmative action programs which would require that a certain number of women were hired (quotas), which she felt were unnecessary and unfair.

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After the ERA was defeated in the states, Schlafly turned her political focus towards the family, which she felt was under attack from feminists.\textsuperscript{52} Her primary efforts to this end have focused on economic support of the traditional family arrangement, governmental non-intervention, and the defeat of a national day care policy.

In \textit{What’s Wrong With Equal Rights for Women?}, Schlafly notes that American housewives are tremendously lucky in that United States law is supportive of the traditional family through real estate and tax policy. She cites Alexis de Toqueville, by noting, “There is certainly no country in the world where the tie of marriage is more respected than in America, or where conjugal happiness is more highly or worthily appreciated.”\textsuperscript{53} She argues that this is largely because of a tax structure that is friendly towards traditional family arrangements. Currently, if a man earns the family income while his wife works inside the home, for federal tax purposes, that couple is considered 1.67 people. Since the income tax structure in the United States is progressive, this means that man would pay less taxes as a percentage of his income if he had a stay at home wife than if he were single. However, from Schlafly’s perspective, this also means that if a two-income family made exactly the same amount as a traditional family, the traditional family would be taxed at a higher rate because they only have one income.\textsuperscript{54} Schlafly argues that this issue is not only about dollars and cents; it is also about ideology. She claims that this tax structure represents the feminist notion that a family is better off if men and women both work outside of the home.

\textsuperscript{54}Phyllis Schlafly, \textit{Feminist Fantasies} (Dallas: Spense Publishing Company, 2003), 239.
Therefore, Schlafly argues that the government should end the “marriage penalty” from federal income tax code. This would not only help financially strapped single-income families, but also send a powerful ideological message in support of the traditional family: “the role of a ‘non-working’ wife and mother is [not] less socially beneficial (or less worthy) than paid employment.”\(^5\)

Schlafly also reacts against treaties and laws, many of which are supported by feminist organizations, that would attempt to regulate or state a preference about how families are structured or how parents discipline or raise their children. This reflects Schlafly’s believe that governmental agencies should not intervene in family matters. Schlafly’s most famous political action in this field was her opposition to the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child. She objects to this treaty on the grounds that it:

...would be a massive interference with U.S. laws and with out federal-state balance of powers, as well as as an unlimited capacity for legal mischief. It purports to abolish discrimination against women ‘in the political economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field,’ which means that the UN would govern private relationships, ‘customs and practices.’ This treaty would require us to ‘modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women’ and to give assurance that we are following UN dictates about ‘family education.’\(^6\)

Schlafly also argues against the Children’s Defense Fund, which pushed for laws that would remove a child from the purview of his or her parents if the parent were to spank the child or raise their children in a way that Schlafly terms “traditional.”\(^7\) She objects to these bills on the grounds that they attempt to regulate family interactions in a way that

is offensive to her social ideology. Namely, they attempt to place an emphasis on the federal government’s right to protect the well being of children, not the parents’.

Schlaflly is also strongly against any attempt to set up federal day care programs for children because she feels that it is not in the best interest of the child and it furthers the feminist desire to see women in the work force. Interestingly, Schlafly seemed to increase her objections to a national day care policy as soon as Hillary Rodham Clinton became involved with groups that supported the policy.

Schlaflly bases her arguments on her understanding of the well being of the child. She cites a study completed by Dr. Jay Belsky which shows that children who spent significant time in day care were much more likely to exhibit aggression, defiance, disobedience, cruelty, and meanness, as well as talking too much, bullying, and “making demands that must be immediately met.”\(^58\) Additionally, Schlafly worries that children are exposed to far too many diseases and bacteria when they attend day care programs that would inevitably be crowded.\(^59\)

However, her largest objection to a national day care program is that it would use taxpayer money to finance a program that would advance the supposed anti-family designs of the feminist movement. She notes:

The reason the daycare issue arouses such bitter antagonism is not only that it challenges the liberals who want to expand government social services by having the ‘village’ take over raising children. The daycare issue also strikes at the heart of feminist ideology that it is oppressive of women for society to expect mothers to care for their own children.\(^60\)

\(^59\) Ibid.
Schlafly argues that if the government is expected to monetarily support a family lifestyle that is damaging to children and society at large, it should be through tax credits that would allow parents to take their children to private or church-based daycare centers that would lead to better health and development of children.  

Schlafly has also written a great deal about the need to change the way that we educate children (she speaks primarily of elementary and middle school programs). She even claims that schooling ought to be our first priority. Most members of the religious right contend that the education system in the United States has been hijacked by “radical liberals,” “feminists,” or worse yet “secular humanists.” Schlafly is no exception.

The National Education Association (NEA) is particularly objectionable to Schlafly. She proclaims that their “ultra-left” political ideology will be tremendously damaging to America’s values and morality. She believes that the NEA’s Gay Lesbian and Straight Teacher’s network (GLSTN) is attempting to indoctrinate children with the message that so-called “alternative lifestyles” are socially acceptable. She points to the NEA-GLSTN’s Human and Civil Rights Action Sheet to qualify this assertion. It calls for schools to work with parents and the community to foster understanding of homosexual health needs, training of teachers to be advocates for homosexual students, and encourages school districts to form support groups for homosexual students.

Schlafly argues that this trend in public schools has lead to a curriculum that embraces the feminist mentality, and thereby hurts young students. The first area of

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61 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
concern is an educational shift away from textbooks or lectures that include condemnation of particular behaviors:

Teaching students that anything is ‘wrong’ is so anathema to public school curriculum writers that they simply ignore the law’s mandate. Under prevailing public school methodology, all teaching (especially about sex and drugs) is ‘non-directive.’ For example, a GAO report describes a drug education course called ‘Me-ology.’ It calls for sixth grade students to spend 17 hours of class time ‘choosing actions that conform to personal beliefs after considering alternative choices.’ The course does not teach that it would be wrong to choose cocaine as the ‘alternative’ that conforms to their personal beliefs.65

Schlafly argues that if schools do not provide a strong education in traditional morality, children’s drug use and teen pregnancy rates will continue to spiral out of control.66 For the same reason, Schlafly is also strongly against sex education classes in schools. The graphic imagery and frank discussion of sexuality, she argues, only drives young girls to the feminist ethics that lead to pre-marital sex, unwed mothers, and even homosexuality.67

Schlafly believes that two things should be done to better education: increase local control and include morality in the curriculum. She contends that since the NEA and the Department of Education have been hijacked by political leftism and feminism, the only way to improve the quality of education is to give more control to local school districts, some which would implement her traditional values would lead to better education.68

She also calls for values to be taught in public schools curriculum. The first among these is gender distinctions. She argues that God’s Plan, vindicated by biology,

66 Ibid.
shows that differences exists between genders. However, this fact is not distinct from its corresponding value: women and men have separate places in society. Schlafly argues that textbooks should teach these roles for the good of all.69 Additionally, students should be taught to engage in abstinence until marriage, avoid drug use at all cost, and study Christian scriptures as a way of teaching them the best way to live their lives. Basically, adhere to Schlafly’s traditionalist values.

Conclusion

While Schlafy has exerted a tremendous influence over political and religious events the latter part of the twentieth century, it does contain serious errors. This chapter will briefly examine the shortcomings in Schlafly’s metaphysical, social, and political thought. In an effort to avoid a paradigm clash, I will address only logical inconsistency and contradiction in these pages.

The fundamental problem with Schlafly’s thought is her most important metaphysical assumption: the notion that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. As I have already noted, this idea is nothing more than a metaphysical assumption. One cannot know that the Bible is the unfailing word of God without specific knowledge of the divinity that one cannot come to conclusively by any method investigation. The most powerful argument to this end is presented in Kant’s Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. He argues that the metaphysical knowledge (that is necessary to correctly conclude that the Bible is inerrant) cannot be arrived at without empirical facts that must come from our senses. Unfortunately, it is impossible to empirically experience.

However, the logic of a religious matter is often unimportant. In this case, as well as the assertion that a God exists, believing that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and scores of other beliefs, the reason for believing a given assertion boils down to the metaphysical assumption that we call faith. However, while there is certainly nothing wrong with having faith in a divinity, without proof that the divinity gave humanity a social doctrine (contained in the Bible), Schlafly cannot claim that the place that she proscribes to women is justified by a divine plan.
However, even if Schlafly were able to justify her belief that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, her position still would not be defensible. While Schlafly focuses on narrow passages that seemed to call for a subordinate role for women, there are a plethora of strong women in the Bible that break with the traditional roles that Schlafly advocates. For example, Jesus (to whom all true fundamentalists claim to have a devotion), treated women in a way that would suggest that he saw them as the equal to men in all respects. Jesus is even cited as referring to Mary as a “Daughter of Abraham” a highly controversial term that implies that women should be the equals of men.70 Additionally, women were very important and active in preaching the thought of Jesus; a position that Schlafly argues should be left to men.71

Therefore, it is certain that the Biblical passages that Schlafly invokes to support her position are in no way conclusive, even if they were rationally defensible in the first place. This suggests that the real basis of her position is not the Bible, but rather fundamentalist culture. This is tremendously important. Without a divine mandate for her antifeminism, Schlafly is left to try to support her thought socially, which is something that she also struggles doing.

Schlafly claims that women are fundamentally different from men, and should act according to their differences. However, many of her assumptions about what women can and cannot do have proven to be seriously inaccurate. As previously mentioned, one of the primary metaphors Schlafly uses to show the inferiority of women is sports. Indeed, sports language is very common in all of the religious right.72 Schlafly claims

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71 Ibid.
72 Carol Flake, Redemptorama (New York: Penguin, 1984), 90.
that women’s tennis is vastly inferior to men’s and that women would be unable to even play golf without special tees.\footnote{Phyllis Schlafly, The Power of the Positive Woman (New York: Arlington, 1977), 13.} However, the last five years have seen women’s tennis become much more popular than men’s, and a Michelle Wie, a fourteen year old, beat nearly sixty PGA professionals in the Sony Open.

While these examples provide only anecdotal evidence to contradict Schlafly’s notions about the inferiority of women, other, more important trends can certainly be cited. In politics, Hillary Rodham Clinton appears to be a strong contender for the White House in 2008 and Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) is the House minority leader. In business, women continue to make progress in gaining wage and position equality. All of these trends point to the idea that the gender differences that Schlafly describes may be little more than self-fulfilling prophecies, perpetuating themselves by their very existence.

Perhaps the best argument about Schlafly’s formulations can be illustrated by events in her own life. Despite her sermonizing on the proper place of a woman in society, Schlafly herself held many positions of power and prestige. She was appointed to the Administrative Conference of the United States by Ronald Reagan in 1983, served five terms on the Illinois Commission on the Status of Women, argued in front of the Supreme Court, and ran for Congress twice all while raising six children.\footnote{Eagle Forum, Phyllis Schlafly, at: www.eagleforum.org} Additionally, despite all her teachings how proper education of children would avoid homosexuality, her own son John is admittedly gay.\footnote{“The Gay Vice Squad,” The National Review, 19 Oct 1992. at: www.infotrac.com.}

The contradiction between Schlafly’s thought and the truths of her own life cannot be ignored. They represent something far more meaningful that just hypocrisy;
they represent the desires felt by most to achieve something in their own lives. While many women may be satisfied to simply raise their children and tend to the affairs of their home (which is, admittedly, often a noble pursuit), more are drawn to careers outside of the home, just as Schlafly was.

Schlafly fails to grasp the question of justice that is inherent in the War of the Sexes. If a man is free to pursue something that he is drawn to do, why can't a woman do the same thing? "God's Design" is not a suitable response to this question. Nor is recourse to studies about societal good.

The antifeminism of Phyllis Schlafly is defective because it restraints women from careers and experiences that every human should at least have the opportunity to pursue in the name of the family. Schlafly herself argues that the value of the individual is paramount (at least when extolling the virtues of free-market capitalism), which suggests that she recognizes that women are as valuable as men.

In the end, perhaps, Schlafly's philosophical insights are not convincing because they talk past one of the schools of thought that Schlafly despised the most: value relativism. The human life should be lived in a manner that is enjoyable and beneficial to the individual. However, the desires of the individual will never conform to the rigid traditionalism that Schlafly espouses. Instead, people will always desire a rich array of experiences and challenges. Some women will want to be housewives and some will want to be cutthroat businesswomen. Any acceptable social or political theory will have to account for this plurality and allow for leeway in social and gender roles.
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