

Beneton, however, has set his sights well beyond academia, on scientism's larger societal consequences. He is particularly strong in showing how scientism works on society in tandem with the modern democratic creed in a mutually reinforcing manner. For example, Beneton shows that scientism, even though it is not relativistic itself, functions as an "accomplice" to the dogmatic relativism fostered by the modern conception of equality. When a modern "default" man hears someone say that an action of his is wrong, he responds by saying: "To me it is good, and I determine what is true for me." Whereas the scientific expert refuses to endorse his second statement, he backs him up on the key point by insisting that no one can know anything about values. Another societal consequence of scientism is its impact on language. Words and phrases like "self-expression," "group," "deviance," and "structure" migrate from psychology, sociology, and deterministic history into our common usage, becoming a mental filter through which we perceive the world. We become progressively unable to think thoughts that accurately perceive the interior, the contingent, the cultural, the unquantifiable, and—in a word—the substantial.

A central claim of the book is that as "substantive reason withdraws," it is replaced by "practical reason cut off from being, a reason reduced to a procedural or instrumental function" (84). An "irrational rationalization of the world" is taking place, in which two forms of rationalization, the procedural and the instrumental, tendentiously order everything. *Procedural rationalization* consists of the procedures that autonomous individuals must agree on if they are to "live together in disagreement"; it preserves their autonomy while allowing pressing collective decisions to be made. But, practically speaking, it requires an expanding judicial regime to manage conflicts between the increasing number of rights, and it tends to "legally neutralize" natural and substantial differences, such as those between the sexes and, most alarmingly, those between adults and children. In such an individualistic and legally segmented social landscape, contractual relations tend to replace customary ones. Outside of one's immediate family, responsibilities for others that were once taken for granted are abandoned, unless they are narrowly defined as part of a job and legally insulated from onerous rights claims. Institutions become soulless, ruled not by persons but by procedures, and collective life becomes more and more careerist and commercialized.

*Instrumental rationalization* works from the assumption that rationality is purely instrumental—without substantive

knowledge, all we can really know is that certain techniques obtain certain ends, although we have no way of judging the ends. This brings us under the sway of what is economically valued as a "good." The quest for more of such goods and more techniques is the only end that instrumental rationalization understands. Any new technique might conceivably help to produce something valued in the future, and, in the meantime, each technical discovery counts as career-friendly evidence of scientific acumen. Armed with the excuse that another researcher, firm, or nation will pursue whatever leads they do not, specialists wash their hands of responsibility. Knowledge of technique, quite deliberately agnostic about the ends, winds up running the world. The result, as Charles Péguy put it, is a world "universally prostituted because universally interchangeable" (64).

Our social world and our physical world are thus both rationalized in a manner that makes all things and all persons essentially homogeneous, as material to shape in whatever way sought by the market, that is, by the aggregation of our value-assigning wills. As long as such shaping occurs in a manner that procedurally respects the prerogatives of will-bearing individuals, anything is possible. It is even possible, as recent U.S. politics has shown, for the purported enemies of heartless capitalism to lend aid to the commoditization of unborn humans. The unseemly phenomenon of leftist support for embryo-destroying stem-cell research is, in fact, a perfect example of the dynamic Beneton describes—the coming together of antifoundational egalitarianism with market-oriented scientism to produce profoundly inhuman results.

Given my summary of it here, Beneton's analysis of our contemporary situation might appear forbiddingly theoretical, but in fact it reveals its depth with a remarkable immediacy. The work is studded with illuminating examples from daily life that always hit close to home, in a manner that reminds one of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Its use in undergraduate theory courses, and particularly in ones trying to provide an understanding of the true principles and unexpected impacts of liberalism, is recommended.

Finally, another similarity to Tocqueville must be stressed. Beneton is not an enemy of liberal democracy, but a "friendly critic" seeking to protect it from its own worst tendencies. Although *Equality by Default* ends by encouraging each of us to escape our epistemological confinement by modernity, and to rediscover the broader horizons of substantive reason, it also sounds a more collective note, by warning that liberal democracy

can only be securely grounded on the truths of substantial equality. Moreover, Beneton says such grounding can only be undertaken by a "realist" politics that recognizes, despite what the axiomatic language of classic liberalism suggests, that "there is no pure solution." That is, substantive liberal democracy must perpetually "search out points of equilibrium: between authority and liberty, rights and moral customs, . . . public and private, communitarian and contractual bonds, procedures and substance" (107–8). Beneton causes us to discern contemporary modernity as a largely realized democratic dystopia; but he also gives us genuine hope that there is a way to hold the liberal truths without transforming them into insatiable idols.

CARL ERIC SCOTT  
Fordham University

Copyright © 2006 Heldref Publications

Mansfield, Harvey C.

**Manliness**

New York: Yale University Press  
289 pp., \$27.50, ISBN 0-3001-0664-5  
Publication Date: February 2006

In the fifth book of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates famously suggests to his youthful interlocutor Glaucon that men and women should perform the same jobs and receive the same education because the differences between them are as mildly substantial as those between bald men and men with hair. However, over the course of this exchange, natural differences reveal themselves to be both more significant than at first consideration and are recalcitrant to easy revision, prompting Socrates to question whether the consequences of such a radically gender-neutral society would be "ridiculous" (452a). As Socrates points out, "different natures must follow different ways of life and men and women are different" (453e). In his new book, *Manliness*, Harvey Mansfield argues that this ancient theater of philosophical comedy has been projected onto the stage of modern reality, but without any of the irony and with a host of baleful consequences. The worst casualty of this misguided attempt to ignore, suppress, or simply deny the differences between men and women—an effort advocated by feminism but nurtured by the excesses and infirmities of liberalism—is manliness. Mansfield's book is a philosophical and historical examination of manliness and its most ardent opponents, which comprise an unlikely alliance: social and political science, social psycholo-

gy, evolutionary biology, Marxism, Nietzschean nihilism, and Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism, just to name a few.

Mansfield defines manliness as "confidence in the face of risk" (23), or that peculiar disposition that undergirds the manly man's "ability to command" (16). This confidence inspires an "independence from others" (16) that makes the manly man slow to request "help or directions or instructions" from others (16). This domineering and reckless spirit seeks risk versus security: "The manly man is in control when control is difficult or contested" (16). If manliness is an independence that implies the assumption of leadership, then it is the demand for recognition of one's worthiness: "Manliness is an assertion of man's worth because his worth does not go without saying" (253).

Although manliness typically characterizes men ("manliness at one level might be universal to males"), it also serves to hierarchically distinguish men from each other ("at another level common to only the few most manly males") (xii). Moreover, it is not the privileged reserve of men alone, as women too can exhibit manliness, although this is certainly more rare. Margaret Thatcher is manlier than many, if not most, men, but still her expression of manliness has the stamp of an imitation of masculinity; even the exceptionally manly woman seems to reaffirm the fundamentally male dispensation of manliness.

Mansfield traces the origins of manliness to the ancient conception of *thumos*, a certain "quality of spiritedness" (xi), the "bristling snappishness of a dog" (206), that all human beings possess (and that animals partake of) but that the "manly have in excess" (85). This warlike combativeness, akin to anger but not reducible to it, "defends the body and its environs or territory" (220). The territoriality of manliness, which serves to "connect aggression to defense of whatever is one's own" (64), is the essential ingredient in honor, understood as a "claim to protect one's person, family, and property—and the beliefs embodied in them" (65). Honor is more than merely an attachment to one's "turf"; honor is the vehicle by virtue of which *thumos* becomes a distinctly political principle allowing manly men to "surpass mindless aggression not devoted to a cause" (65). Thus, there is a genealogical line that runs from *thumos* through honor to a particular claim on governance: "manliness leads to patriarchy, a form of rule in which the rulers behave as if they were protective fathers" (66). Manliness, therefore, not only articulates a natural difference between the sexes but asserts the natural-

ness of an order of rank with political ramifications less than egalitarian: "Manliness prevents men from giving equal honor to women" (13).

For all its assertiveness, however, manliness has suffered from the less-than-hospitable welcome it has received from modern liberal society. Stripped of its natural character, manliness has been reduced to a chauvinistic "stereotype" or thoughtless prejudice; now merely an "unreflective self-generalization" (24), it can be dismissed as the stubborn detritus of less enlightened times. Manliness, according to Mansfield, is the clearest indication of sexual difference and inequality and therefore conflicts with the new goal of "gender neutrality," which "regards sex as an irrational hindrance because it subordinates women to men" (ix). The ambitious project of refashioning society into a gender-neutral paradise free of inequality, a "society of independent men and women, in which the sexes are converging and surrendering their sense of difference" (4), rests on the rational control of a nature supplanted by wholesale "social construction."

Problematically, proponents of the gender-neutral society must confront the embarrassing fact that "manliness is still around and we still find it attractive" (16). Natural differences are not so easily subdued, so an attack on them must be vigorously waged on multiple fronts. Mansfield devotes a significant portion of the book to a discussion of feminism, one of the most obstinate adversaries of manliness. Early versions of feminism, exemplified by the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft, were focused on trying to increase equality between the sexes without ignoring the salient natural divisions between men and women. Thus, Wollstonecraft could acquiesce to the notion that the sexes have their "proper places," that modesty was a genuine "feminine virtue" (124), and that "nature has made the mother the guardian of the child" (125). Rather than proffer a transvaluation of all values, "early feminism had the high moral purpose of creating equality of the sexes by raising men to the moral level of women" (125), or for "making men more modest" (124). The object, then, of early feminism is not the extirpation of manliness but its moderation.

Radical feminism, however, aspires not to equality but rather "independence or autonomy" (123). The goal is not a reinterpretation of morality for sake of social equity, but the subversion of morality in the interests of unfettered freedom from social restraints. In turn, this requires liberation from the apparently oppressive tutelage of nature itself, which, "giving them wombs, compelling them to be

mothers" (123), ensnares them in the "trap nature sets for unwary women" to keep them "subordinate to men" (123). Early versions of feminism failed to achieve independence because their conception of it was "compromised by respect for women's nature as previously known" (132). Correcting this defect, radical feminism designates "transcendence" over the brute givenness of nature, its "immanence," as the consummation of creative liberty (133). Thus, following Beauvoir, there is no "Platonic essence" or "eternal feminine" that demands acceptance and resignation: "One is not born, but becomes, a woman" (133).

According to Mansfield, radical feminism is a form of "womanly nihilism," or a version of Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, but newly emasculated to accommodate the feminist agenda. Instead of adopting a more circumspect approach that calls for "an adjustment in favor of women to the new circumstances of life" (153), they teach that the "duty of women is to advance nothingness as a cause" (147). Nature is unseated by convention, and a respect for one's natural limitations is replaced by the will to power. When combined with the Marxist rejection of sexual roles (based on the alienating character of any division of labor) (138) and Freud's account of "polymorphous perversity" (or our original, primordial promiscuity and bisexuality) (146), radical feminism has no positive program to recommend after the rejection of all societal strictures; it can only aim at "power and transcendence with no stated goal" (147).

Feminism, however, is not solely responsible for the denigration of manliness, nor could it be. Feminism may have "accomplished" (238) the gender-neutral society, but the fertile ground out of which its success has sprung was tilled by modern liberalism. Mansfield boldly asserts: "The entire enterprise of modernity, however, could be understood as a project to keep manliness unemployed" (230). Although feminists have largely excoriated liberalism for forwarding a formal, abstract equality versus a more substantive, result-oriented conception ("the unlovely formal practices of liberalism cancel out its unpublished principles") (163), that very formality gave credence to the demand for equality in the first place because natural rights are themselves gender neutral. Liberal society, therefore, conduces to an interpretation of its members as individual abstractions facilitating a suppression of all the natural differences that provide principles of distinction, such as manliness. Natural rights may be evenly distributed, but the presence of manliness entails that

they will not be exercised with equal vigor.

Just as problematically, liberalism is grounded on the "love of liberty and the desire for security" (165). Although these two are necessarily interdependent within liberalism, from the perspective of manliness they "necessarily conflict" (165). The manly man does not prioritize self-preservation; in fact, part of the paradox of his thumotic assertiveness is that he is more than willing to risk his body for the sake of its defense. Mansfield declares: "Manliness favors war, likes risk, and prefers heroes to role models" (233). Conversely, a liberal society that seeks "rational control" meekly hankers for peace, "discounts risk," and "prefers role models to heroes" (233). A reckless love of danger is traded for a more reasonable "comfort and convenience" (94). Hence, the modern preoccupation with security, ushered in by Machiavelli and Hobbes, must "replace the manly man with the bourgeois" (232) so that the liberal state becomes a "proud creation with the function of taming the proud" (171). In effect, liberalism in general and Hobbes in particular can be credited with having created the "sensitive male" (173).

The danger of such a society is not only a woeful dearth of manliness but also an excess of it, because the same women who might criticize manliness have surrendered the traditional roles they assumed in relation to men that allowed them to effectively moderate its exercise. Couples have been reinterpreted by radical feminism as pairs of "autonomous individuals" (135) no longer bound together by a natural sociability or articulated by a well-defined division of social labor. If women are free from moral restraint to freely construct their own identity, then surely men can follow suit and unshackle themselves from the tethers that have constrained their exercise of manliness. However, Mansfield cautions the reader that manliness unbound may be even more pernicious than manliness repressed, because it has a dark, nihilistic side: "When we plumb the depths of human malice we find a version of manliness in its company and at its service" (119). Mansfield seems to discern a kinship between women and classical political philosophy in that both have traditionally borne the responsibility of tempering manliness without resorting to a precipitous rejection of it; Aristotle and his ilk "show their responsibility as philosophers and also as manly men by setting limits to the responsibility of active men, reminding them as if with the attitude of women that peace is better than war" (218).

Despite all that liberalism has contributed to the besieging of manliness, it

contains the seeds of its own rehabilitation. The liberal conception of individualism can be rendered compatible with the manly assertion of the importance of the individual. Furthermore, Locke's ideas of constitutional bounds on the encroachment of power, the resistance of unjust conquest and tyranny, and the defense of rights against despotism all presuppose a vigorous manliness at their disposal (180). In this way, Mansfield interprets Locke's interest in security as still dependant on a "manly air of assurance" that functions as "a fence . . . to virtue" (179).

Liberalism also supplies the key to squaring the formal equality of men and women with the assertiveness of manliness on account of the centrality accorded to the distinction between the public and private. Mansfield observes: "Our gender-neutral society is, thankfully, much stronger formally in public than it is in private" (243). Feminists have tended to see themselves as "confined and repressed by the liberal distinction between the personal or private and political or public" (164) and have responded by "politicizing the personal" (164). In other words, they have attempted to construct the gender-neutral society by "following an illiberal impulse" (243) that satisfies its purposes by "trying to impose the liberal state upon liberal society" (243). Mansfield assures us that we cannot return to a "society in which women are kept in the home and men are free to leave it" (237), but we can vindicate sex roles in private while maintaining a kind of gender neutrality in public. Liberalism can accommodate both "a neutral equality of sexes in our formal and public laws" and a "weaving together of the sexes in our private lives" (242).

Apparently, this requires an appeal to women more than men; Mansfield's book is addressed primarily to "educated women" (ix). A central theme of the work, therefore, must be that not only is the feminist underappreciation of manliness hurtful to men but counterproductive to women as well. Feminism "deprives women of their self-awareness" (130), "has no understanding of womanhood" (240), and "leaves women without a guide" (240). Mansfield even suggests that embracing some of the more radical proposals of feminism might make it difficult for a woman to attract a man (229). In this sense, Mansfield's work is, by his own account, less than gentlemanly because it is so openly critical; the gentleman "conceals his superiority with chivalric irony" (14), but Mansfield has pointed out that "women are weaker than men" considerably "more often than a gentleman would have preferred" (239). However, if women are truly equal to

men, "they should be able to be told that they aren't, quite" (155). One great contradiction at the heart of feminism, as well as the project for a gender-neutral society, is that despite all attempts at transcending womanhood, women generally want to be treated as women. Just as manliness always exerts itself because it is fundamentally natural, womanliness proves to be similarly venerable. Mansfield wrote, "Gentlemanliness would not be needed if there were no weaker sex" (155). An appeal to women to take seriously their womanhood is simultaneously an appeal to a restoration of gentlemanliness. *Manliness* is an ungentlemanly defense of the gentleman.

Given the current state of the debate regarding sex roles in the academy, it is not at all clear that Mansfield is justified in holding out hope that a never-ending "battle of the sexes" can be replaced with a "transcendental" (198) compromise in which both men and women, in coming to understand each other, also learn something about themselves. Also, the liberal distinction between the public and the private has become so similarly degraded in contemporary discourse that an appeal to it is likely to be thoroughly misunderstood, if not quickly dismissed. The great virtue of *Manliness* is its attempt to rescue the debate from two sources of obfuscation: radical feminism and social science. In an attempt to foreclose genuine philosophical dialogue, feminism has adopted a peremptory, passive-aggressive "consciousness-raising" over active deliberation. Likewise, Mansfield is critical of the "strangely obtuse analysis of social science" (80), which reduces its subjects to "non-descript, commodified human beings" (80). Instead, Mansfield recommends that we reject the philosophical timorousness of feminism and depart the "gray, flat, featureless domain of science" (50) for a "different, more ambitious method of political science, duly cautious but unafraid of the big questions" (xiii). This means that to "understand manliness we must have constant recourse to Greek poetry and philosophy" (84), that we must follow the "logic of a speech even though it endangers your body (your opinions and your self-esteem) and subjects you to ridicule" (222), and that we must be steadfast enough to "be able to bear the greatest studies" (219). To do this is to exercise what Aristotle and Plato identify as "philosophical courage." If philosophical courage is manly even when it proffers a critique of manliness, then Mansfield has provided us with a manly book indeed.

IVAN KENNEALLY  
SUNY Geneseo

Copyright © 2006 Heldref Publications