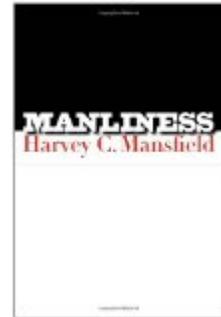


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Harvey C. Mansfield. *Manliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. ix + 289 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-10664-0.

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Undermanned

Harvey C. Mansfield's controversial book on "manliness" is not specifically about women in war and in the military. But the book is relevant to the issue of women's roles in war since Mansfield avers that "manliness" is a quality primarily found in men and is "best shown" in the arena of battle (p. 75). In addition, in a 1997 *Wall Street Journal* editorial on the feminization of the workforce, Mansfield remarked that "[n]owhere is feminization more obvious than in the military ... no one is allowed to laugh at the ridiculous, much less state the obvious—that women are not cut out for war." [1] The current book evidently aims at substantiating the idea that women are not suited for certain activities including war and, correlatively, rule, the claim to which is connected with the ability to fight (pp. 75-77). Contrary to his intention, however, this book, I will show, seems to demonstrate that women are well suited for the military and do well to actively participate in self-governance.

Mansfield first sets out to define "manliness." He opens his exposition by adducing scientific studies that affirm what, he claims, common sense already recognizes: there are natural differences between men and women. Most significantly men are more aggressive than women. It turns out, however, that Mansfield is not satisfied with what he regards as the scientific consensus on the issue of the natural differences between men and women. Modern science is deeply flawed because it deals with averages; it cannot elucidate the exceptional—and manliness is an exceptional quality in his view. Scientific studies of sex differences, then, are only the starting point for delineating manliness. Mansfield moves on to

consider manliness as it is presented in poetry, literature, movies, and philosophy—media through which manliness is supposed to become more adequately visible.

For Mansfield, manliness comprises an assortment of traits including assertiveness on behalf of an abstract ideal, confidence, a take-charge attitude, protectiveness of what is one's own, desire for preeminence, boastfulness, and so on. He encapsulates the various attributes associated with manliness in the formulation: "confidence in the face of risk" (p. 23). There can be manly women, Mansfield concedes—he names Margaret Thatcher—but manliness is found mainly in men.

Mansfield contrasts his view of natural gender differences with what he regards as the prevailing feminist view. Feminists are characterized as Nietzschean nihilists who endeavor to eradicate gender distinctions (and also apparently want unrestrained sex [p. 140]). His misunderstanding of the last thirty years of feminist scholarship has been superbly criticized by other commentators and I will not dwell on it here except to say that, according to Mansfield, there apparently are no feminists who employ liberal, equal rights arguments nor are there prominent feminists who recognize gender differences. [2] This will surely come as a surprise to those interested in women and war, a subject often enmeshed in the equal rights/difference debate.

Though Mansfield trots out many of the usual clichés about the differences between men and women, there are some familiar canards about women to which Mansfield does not resort. Interestingly, he does not rep-

resent women as overly emotional and irrational (though women, he claims, are more contextual and less able to think abstractly). Rather manly men are more prone to erratic, self-dramatizing behavior. Women tend to be more cool-headed, professional, and cooperative, qualities that apparently help them control erratic, manly men. But are not these qualities, allegedly possessed by women, ideal for members of the military services? Indeed Mansfield avers that “a team player or an organization man” are “hardly roles for a manly man” (p. 95). But what is a soldier if not a “team player” devoted to an organization?

Contrary to proving that women are ill suited to the field of battle, then, Mansfield reveals that women are well suited for inclusion in an organization that relies on professionalism, composure, and steadiness as well as “obedience to command” (p. 88). One literary figure adduced by Mansfield as the “manly hero par excellence” is Achilles, as portrayed in the *Iliad* (p. 55). But the *Iliad* presents Achilles precisely as a deficient warrior, who petulantly refused to fight with his comrades when they were being thrashed by their enemy.

One looks in vain for convincing arguments that women are “not cut out for war.” A few morsels are served up such as women “shun risk,” (p. 76, see p. 165) while men welcome it. And “[w]ar is hell but men like it” (p. 76). It is true that some men like war, but it is also true that some women like war; the World War I nurse-turned-soldier, Flora Sandes, is a case in point. More importantly, the experience soldiers most often report cherishing in war is comradeship: a gratifying sense of affinity, cooperation, and connectedness. Comradeship is clearly congenial to women’s nature as Mansfield understands it.

Manliness “seems to be about fifty-fifty good and bad” (p. x) in Mansfield’s view. But manliness is purported to be especially pernicious when not tempered by women’s moderation, modesty, and morality. The “gender-neutral society,” aimed at by feminists, risks loosing an uninhibited, erratic, nihilistic manliness (or extinguishing manly greatness resulting in a dreary “end of history”) (pp. 184, 189). Mansfield’s dire warning about the former possibility seems to be a variation on the “protection racket” ruse.^[3] If women do not elicit men’s protection through submissiveness, they risk being attacked by their protectors. Indeed at one point, Mansfield avers that in order to resist rape a woman needs more than “martial arts and more than the police; she needs a certain ladylike mod-

esty” (p. 144, cf. pp. 140, 155).

One can infer, then, that the main reason women should be excluded from war is not because they are unsuited for military service. Women are properly excluded from war because they become vulnerable to a dangerous manliness, not made gentle by women acting properly subservient, if they advance an equal claim to participate in the exercise of legitimate force.

Mansfield’s recommendation that women cede “formal sovereignty to the stronger sex” (p. 156) and tempt, manipulate, and cajole, in order to control manly men, would make women subject to an individual man’s unpredictable and arbitrary will. Still, he rather unchivalrously prefers this more perilous posture to women’s aspiration to be governed by “laws rather than men,” laws that they equally participate in making, enforcing, and defending. Mansfield is certainly aware that liberal democracy provides means for limiting the domineering spirit he is apparently so alarmed about. However, it is not clear why he deems the principles and mechanisms of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, insufficient for restraining the potential tyranny of “manly” assertiveness, while eliciting the spiritedness necessary to resist arbitrary rule.

Whatever differences there may or may not be between men and women, the fact is that women have been “manly” enough to accept the risks of citizenship. Women soldiers have exposed themselves to considerable danger and hardships in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in America’s past wars. These women have vindicated the right of women to be free from the arbitrary will of their erstwhile, unreliable protectors and to participate in the practices of self-government as equal citizens.

Notes

[1]. Harvey C. Mansfield, “Why a Woman Can’t Be More Like a Man,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1997, A22.

[2]. See Martha C. Nussbaum, “Man Overboard,” review of *Manliness*, by Harvey Mansfield, *The New Republic*, June 28, 2006.

[3]. In this connection see Judith Hicks Stiehm, “Women, Men, and Military Science: Is Protection Necessarily a Racket?” in *Women, Power, and Policy: Toward the Year 2000*, ed. E. Boneparth (New York: Pergamon, 1982).

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