

Seeing the Game

The phenomenon I've been outlining – in its varying manifestations – in this book is the privilege afforded universally and unconditionally to women. There is nothing corresponding for men, who have to meet certain criteria even to be given basic consideration. This scenario I've provocatively dubbed 'the woman racket'.

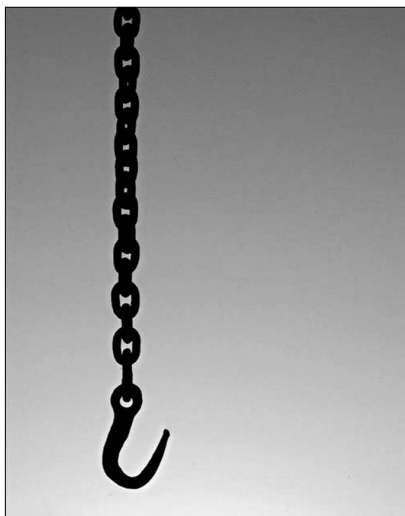
The phrase is not mine. I stole it from the late Norman Mailer, who came out with it on one of those late-night 'talking heads' TV shows you could still catch a decade ago. I clearly recall him quipping:

'The woman racket is the McCarthyism of the 1990s.'

'That's my title!' I immediately knew. (The book has been a decade in gestation and has mutated into a much more hopeful monster after such a protracted labour!)

Viewers knew what he was talking about. He didn't have to spell it out. His tone was gently sardonic. Evidently he thought this racket to be a political obscenity, but one he expected to be merely an interlude, a short blip in time. In the particular manifestation we currently see, it likely is. And a 'racket' benefiting women in the more literal sense of the word, is certainly evident in many aspects of society today. But it was ever thus and always will be, albeit that in our own times it has run away with itself. Particular cultural factors, a changing ideological landscape, philosophical backdrop and changing social and working practices have come together to spin our evolved social psychology off at the tangent we see it travelling along today. But however it fetches up, this prejudice will *always* be with us: the over-privileging of the female along with unwarranted contempt for the male.

Such a counter-intuitive truth is hard to get a handle on, let alone to become conscious of in our own lives, to the degree required to avoid social breakdown, let alone create a truly equitable society. But that's the test we're facing. Although a biological or evolutionary psychology perspective is often accused of failing the naturalistic fallacy by confusing 'ought' with 'is', the truth is very different. A truly 'progressive' political project requires us first of all to acknowledge the evolved psychology of



It would take a skyhook of miraculous power to enable us to transcend our genes.

the human creature, warts and all. And before we can do that we need to demolish one of the prevailing myths of our age—‘patriarchy’—and expose its harmful consequences.

As these biologically-rooted prejudices are so strongly ingrained, can we ever...how can we say...get round, or transcend them? As Daniel Dennett might put it: how big a skyhook¹ would be required? (I would agree with Dennett that this would require a miracle. Or more than a miracle, as philosopher John Gray points out: Dawkins and Dennett still cling to the residue of Christian thought in the idea that there is something within us that is apart from nature, when in fact we don’t and can’t ever transcend it (Gray, 2007). It is absurd to imagine that we can transcend ourselves, but that’s for another book). And if our anti-male/pro-female prejudices are ‘built-in’ rather than optional extras, then individually should we even want to? Politically one thing that the twentieth century has demonstrated conclusively is the tragic folly of utopian attempts to re-engineer societies by ignoring or denying the evolved nature of the creatures that make them up.

Even if, in the end, there’s not much we can do about it, we do at least need to be *aware* of how we ‘do down’ males and ‘big up’ females. There really is no point complaining about, for example, what it is in men that attracts women. That would be like Naomi Wolf pointlessly ranting on about ‘the beauty myth’, as if men are going to start wanting women for some completely different quality dreamed up by a bunch of Women’s Studies lecturers. None of us will ever stop competing with those of our own sex and judging the relative suitability of those of the opposite sex as potential sexual partners. And we will continue to do so essentially

[1] A source of design complexity that does not build on lower, simpler layers—in simple terms, a miracle..

according to the same criteria as always. This is the core of our social lives and our *raison d'être*. Get used to it.

The reason we need to be aware of anti-male prejudice and pro-female privilege, is not so as to change this, or even, necessarily, to significantly ameliorate it. It's to stop compounding what is reality with the *truly* unfair practice of mistakenly identifying men as an 'oppressor' class; and of viewing the majority of men as various kinds of failures for not conforming to artificially-constructed ideals. You can regard this as a corrective to a recent political mistake, or as advance notice of a social paradigm shift. What it is *not* is special pleading – we've had quite enough of that already.

We just need to see life as the game that it is and that we all play – just like at school, the game is compulsory. We need to play by the rules we have inherited. We can better organise our societies to be congruent with this, so that we improve equitability; but we can't just make up the rules as we go along or rewrite the rule-book to suit the fads and intellectual prejudices of the time.