

Radical Ideas from a Fearless Culture Critic

Everyman interview with Ilana Mercer

By David
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Everyman: Please introduce yourself to our readers: what do you do, and why?

Ilana Mercer: I am a libertarian columnist, and the author of *Broad Sides: One Woman's Clash With A Corrupt Culture* (reviewed in *Everyman* #67 and available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Borders-online and in stores, and from www.IlanaMercer.com). I was born in South-Africa, grew up in Israel, and settled in the U.S. after living in Canada for a good number of years. My perspective has certainly benefited from this cosmopolitan background.

I've written widely for Canadian and American publication - newspapers, magazines, as well as for libertarian and freedom-oriented Web sites. (My website has all the tedious bio information). For the past few years (until October 2004) I wrote a popular weekly column covering politics, Economy and culture for WorldNetDaily.com, a leading independent news site. I now write a regular column for the libertarian Antiwar.com.

I do what I do because:

- 1) Unfortunately, this is what I'm best at. Would that I had a more marketable skill.
- 2) Fortunately, I believe I have something valuable to impart.

Everyman is primarily focussed on how gender politics is affecting society, and in particular the lives of men. What is your take on this?

In an essay entitled "Feminist Totems And Taboos" (excerpted on page 32 of *Everyman* #67) in my book, I touch on some of what feminism, in its various waves, has inflicted on men, and on society - one can't divorce the plight of half the population from society. There's the 'smaller' stuff - the deconstruction of the text and art. They learn that Shakespeare, Tolstoy and T. S. Eliot were chauvinist pigs, and they analyse great works of art through a grim and distorting prism, a cultural Marxism of sorts. There's the feminization of men which runs from annoying (all those soft-spoken "girlie-boys" forever venting about their Inner Child) to child abuse. Examples of the latter abound in the schools, where male biopsychology has been demonized. Boys are naturally predisposed to competition. But a progressive public-school system, populated by female feminists, forces boys to conform to the feminist consensus about appropriate male behaviour. One consequence of the last is that instead of challenging, disciplining, and harnessing their energies, boys are often medicated with Ritalin (boys are more likely to be on the drug than girls). As I said, child abuse!

Most egregious is the phony narrative of endemic female oppression. Most narratives of group oppression in contemporary America are at odds with reality. As I point out in my book, five times as many young men as women commit suicide. Men are twice as likely to be unemployed, find it twice as hard to get another job, and are infinitely more likely to suffer industrial accidents

and diseases which may destroy their lives. When a faux conservative like Lora Bush declares that boys are in trouble, you know how far feminist fury has gone.

Where I depart from pro-male feminists - individualist feminists, I think they call themselves - is that they still work within a framework that claims the sexes are equal in ability (although perhaps different). I don't.

In a recent essay entitled "The Silly Sex?" (Readers can find it on my website), I point to Charles Murray's book *Human Accomplishment* to make the point I am making here: Of the 4,002 greatest contributors to civilization - people who "dragged their fellow men out of wattle-and-daub hovels and pushed them into space rockets" - only two percent were women.

That's not fair, you'll protest: the legal emancipation of women only began in earnest in the 19th century, But where, I ask, have women been since 1950? For some decades now, society has privileged women through coercive legislation. Yet over the last five decades women, who make up roughly 50 percent of the world's population, have claimed only two percent of the Nobel Prizes in the sciences. In literature, women have claimed only eight percent. No woman has won a Nobel in economics.

There is only so much of the variance in achievement between the sexes that can be chalked up to child rearing choices or alleged discrimination. There is, however, solid but suppressed evidence (such as that offered by Professor Richard Lynn), that men enjoy advantage in average IQ - their median may be as much as five points above that of women. This means that there are many more high IQ men than women. Why on earth would you want to suppress the corollaries of such difference.

Yet the "gender-equity crowd" is doing just that, witness their frenetic attempts to stack engineering schools with skirts. To overcome the advantage men have on the crucial mathematical reasoning sections of the admission tests, and to artificially inflate the number of women in the math-intensive professions, 'pedagogues' are drastically de-emphasizing the math portion of the SAT during selection. Let us hope and pray that the ladies' aggregate lesser facility with math doesn't affect calculations in the construction of, say, bridges. Again, the effects on society of this feminization and dumbing down are incalculable.

Last but not least, feminism has aimed to make man over in the image of woman (a caricature of woman) and woman in the image of man. By deconstructing what it means to be a woman and a man respectively, feminism has helped immeasurably to coarsen the culture. Few things are uglier than the "Girls Gone Wild" of North America - promiscuous, sexually aggressive (but never sensuous), loud and Nietzschean in their unjustified self-adulation. Feminism has helped sunder softness, femininity, romance, and has thus been an uncivilizing force.

How do you think we got to this point, where feminists are so powerful, under a banner of powerless victimhood?

I look at much wider social and cultural changes to explain the process you ask about. This unhealthy trend doesn't pertain only to gender relations and their politics. All phony victims

have been empowered in the *Zietgeist*. Misplaced compassion is The Truth and The Way. In my book I point out that “the great and singular achievements of the West - from ancient Greece, through the Enlightenment, to the industrial and scientific revolution of modern times - were products of a historically unprecedented union of rationality, morality, objectivity, and passion.” But we’ve expunged reason, objectivity, individualism, self-responsibility from our institutions. In their place we’ve elevated irrationalism, subjectivity, collectivism, self-indulgence, statism. The consequences of this cultural corruption are that to be creative, strong, and self-sufficient is a liability. Someone is considered creative and strong not when she builds an empire and employs hundreds of people, but once she has conformed by gaining therapeutic ‘self-knowledge’ and whimpering on *Oprah*. (In fact, the therapeutic creed, you will notice, is often used to coerce people into conformity.)

We don’t like strong, self contained and well-behaved people. We label such people as arrogant and aloof. Martha Stewart’s brilliance, pride, and patrician demeanor were to her detriment, a liability.

Let me check what you mean here. Martha Stewart was imprisoned for insider trading, not for her success or brilliance or pride. Are you suggesting that the insider trading charge was a way to ‘get ‘someone who troubled us, like Al Capone being imprisoned for tax evasion because that was the only way we could make a charge stick and lock him up? If so, what other examples can you point to to make your case.

No, that’s not what I meant! But first let’s correct an error you make. Martha was not “imprisoned for insider trading.” Although, as I explain in my book, if one cares about natural law, insider trading laws, which I call information socialism, violate natural rights. Nevertheless, that you believe she was “imprisoned for insider trading,” and that the jury thought so, only emphasizes the degree of confusion about her case and the violation of due process she suffered. The government *didn’t* charge Ms. Stewart with insider trading, although it was not for lack of trying, but, rather, for lack of evidence. While the state’s case began with an insider trading investigation, it failed to prove that Ms. Stewart received - or Mr. Bacanovic imparted - insider information. The crucial fact is that Ms. Stewart was never, in any legal sense, an ImClone “insider.” Hers was a private sale- she sold the shares of a company to whose share holders she had no fiduciary duty. When it became apparent to U.S. Attorney David N. Kelley that he could not charge Ms. Stewart with insider trading, he used the unrehearsed interviews she had given law enforcement officers - interviews not subject to Fifth Amendment protections - to charge her with conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and lying to investigators about a matter that was *never* a crime in the first place. This entrapment was easily facilitated under the unconstitutional Section 1001 of Title 18 in the United States Code. The state had the support of the masses - liberals and conservatives - and the jury, all of whom were animated more by the spirit of Madame Defarge than Lady Justice. Every commentator and every juror (aside not understanding the case they sat in judgement of) wanted to get Martha because of her demeanor and the person they thought she was. They all said so openly.

Moreover, it is sufficient now for a person to be cruel, callous, lewd, act out, even kill, to gain a kind of perverse societal imprimatur. Since the mental health managers, the people who shape personality in our culture, have decided (with no proper scientific evidence) that individuals who

do terrible things are often victims of society or their past (traumatic toilet training is destiny), we have arrived at a place where being plain evil can confer victim status. (In this context, I urge your readers to read my “Coddling Killers: The liberal Root-Causes Racket.” It’s on my website.) It used to be that people gained that approval through hard, redemptive work - through upstanding deeds and probity of character. Now to receive cultural reinforcement, it is sufficient to be a so-called victim.

Thus, in order to understand how whining women have become so tyrannical, one has to examine infinitely broader and corrosively pervasive trends. One has to examine them and endeavor to change them. If you want to, then, improve the plight of men, you have to recoil not only when a woman who did not make CEO is described as a member of a besieged political class, fighting patriarchal privilege, but also when a woman who butchers her baby is described as a victim of biology (depression), or when white Americans are blamed for the plight of black Americans. The only way you can set men free is by reclaiming the moral, intellectual and empirical standards by which we censured, judged and praised human beings before we entered the post-modern era and deconstructed these eternal verities.

How do you see men? What is your notion of gender equality?

I don’t see men qua men; I see individuals. But I certainly do like men for certain qualities I associate with manhood. To the extent a man embodies the things I find inspiring, to that extent I like him. To the extent a woman embodies those qualities, to that extent I like her. The qualities I associate with Man qua Man, however, I seldom find in women (with some rare exceptions, of course). And to be fair, it’s hard to find men who embody such qualities. Courage, a singular professional drive, rationality, lack of pettiness, kindness and chivalry, nobility of character, and intellectual honesty, are some of these generic man traits. Intellectual honesty is another virtue: a man who can traverse disagreement and be cordial and respectful of my abilities despite deep disagreement is a treasure - a rare one. Because of their greater affinity for rationality and analysis, most of my readers are men, so I appreciate them for their support, of course.

Gender equality. In the sense that feminists or bureaucrats in government and in university admissions offices mean it, “gender equality” will have been achieved when women accomplish similar feats (and as frequently) as men do and have. No doubt, certain unique individual women will indeed manage this. But since gender is a group designation, and you’ve asked for my prognosis about a group, women on average will always lag behind men in achievement, despite the unjust and coercive methods deployed by central planners to fight nature and disempower men.

So the only equality I want to see is equality under the law. If women ever make up 50% of physics and engineering departments, I’ll know that the artificial - and coercive, because it deploys state power - notion of gender equality has triumphed completely.

So, I reject gender equality in the sense you mean it. Gender justice (that’s a better term) will come about when a natural aristocracy is allowed to rise to the top - individuals who constitute the best of man and woman alike. For this to occur, government must stay out of hiring, firing

and legislating admissions into institutes of learning.

But over and above that, for gender justice to be achieved, we must excise and expunge the corrosive dogmas that permeate our institutions, cultural and other, That includes loosening the clutches on culture of a feminized world view (one which is based on caricatures of woman and man alike), stopping the demonization of the male nature, and accepting certain natural, immutable - albeit aggregate - differences between sexes.

*I, and most of the men's movement have interpreted "gender equality" along the lines you indicate: obviously the feminist notion that equality means identical outcomes - the same numbers of female and male CEOs and MPs, for example - is ridiculously simplistic. A question where we may differ, however, is how do we work for change in the world. How does one do effective battle with the powerful dogmas of the feminized world view? In your book *Broad Sides*, you seem to simply be appealing to people's intellects, to their rationality, their intellectual honesty. However, the problem seems to be less intellectual and more emotional : the victim stance taken by feminists seems to appeal to people at an irrational or pre-rational level that is more about feeling , about the emotional comfort and security that comes from women feeling protected and morally innocent, and men feeling protective and retributive. If this is the case, do you think that an intellectual challenge alone can turn us around? What will turn us around? If what we need is better moral character; where do you think that comes from?*

Ilana Mercer: In well functioning people, the intellect is not separated from the affect (i.e. the emotional). They are integrated. When people are rational, they observe reality as it is, and are more likely to be concerned with justice and avoid misplacing compassion. So the starting point is, unavoidably, a return to reason. We have to restore the precepts I emphasize in my work, in my book, and about which I've spoken so far (see question 2). I certainly understand your concern and agree with you that the arguments we've made in favour of justice for men are less intuitive and less visceral than the arguments feminists make. But since we know our more complex arguments are the right ones, we have the answer: to make people fairer, kinder and more compassionate, one has to first make them able to think and reason. In the introduction to F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, economist Milton Friedman underscores this point: "The argument for collectivism is simple if false; it is an immediate emotional argument. The argument for individualism is subtle and sophisticated; it is an indirect rational argument.

Sure, making people just isn't easy. But it certainly won't work if you aim for the gut instead of the gray matter. As usual, Oscar Wilde said it best in one of his plays: "She thought that because he was stupid he would be kindly, when of course, kindness requires imagination and *intellect*."

You seem in your book and in this interview. To be holding modern liberalism to account for most of the problems that you describe. Do you see no social contribution at all flowing from leftist or liberal thinking? Do you see our salvation coming only from the right (the right as it should be, I mean)?

Not true, I'm a classical liberal, and I really doubt that the true classical liberals share much with

today's Right. I certainly do not believe any salvation will come from the people who pose as the Right today, although they do behave like missionaries, with a difference: they have a nasty habit of threatening to slay - not save - those who don't accept their faith (the God of Democracy).

I believe the question is based on a misconception of my thinking. If anything I'm usually accused of not falling neatly into the Right/Left camps and thus failing to offer up solutions which would be easily digestible by these fractious factions. Beside, the "Right" in the US has more or less adopted all the erroneous categories of thinking we've discussed so far. Okay, so they are not wild about affirmative action, but their pitiful representatives in the media fully share the Left's belief that, for example, poverty and lack of democracy cause terrorism and crime. They have no qualms about diseasing and pathologizing every aspect of immoral behaviour. They are no different from the Left in terms of sundering free will and personal responsibility.

As to the contributions of the Left, you will have to be more specific. Perhaps it is more accurate to say I am a Hebrew, as opposed to a Christian. Perhaps this is what you are detecting in my thinking. In the Hebrew Testament, justice is a prerequisite for and precedes mercy and forgiveness. Mercy without justice is meaningless. Perhaps our differences stem from my Hebraic thinking. But again, for me to be able to comment, you would have to specify the Leftist contributions you value.

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"Feminist Totems and Taboos," an essay from Ms. Mercer's book, appeared on page 32 of Everyman #67. The same issue contained a review of her book on page 62.