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The Death of True Feminism — Harvey Mansfield Calls for a Recovery

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Harvey C. Mansfield, William R. Kenan Professor of Government at Harvard University, and author of the recent book, Manliness, delivered an important commencement address at Hillsdale College in Michigan. In “A New Feminism” [published in Imprimis, the college's newsletter], Mansfield offers some very important analysis. He is no stranger to controversy, and his presence in the academy is a genuine encouragement to all who value the “permanent things.”

From his lecture:

Thus feminism, in its eagerness to claim manliness for women, destroyed femininity. We began to see gangster movies with lovely actresses playing the role of hit men. Some feminists denounced the manly passion for competition and war, but in doing so they had to be careful not to imply that women are unsuited for business or for the military. Since the Sixties, we have become used to seeing women in men's occupations. Yet the gender-neutral society created by today's feminism is not in fact as neutral as it claims. Despite its dislike of the word manliness, it is on the whole friendly to the quality, now under a new name, more neutral and prosaic, such as “leadership.” On the one hand, the world seems to have been feminized, yet on the other hand, it is still a man's world, and in a strange way even more so, because both sexes are now engaged in employments that reward the manly qualities of aggression and assertiveness.

Further:

The present-day feminist notion of autonomy takes no account of women's domesticity. If women were autonomous, they would not want to live in a home. Let us not be too romantic about a home-much housekeeping is drudgery-but let us not sum it up as a necessary evil, either. To a woman, home is where your husband lives and where your children learn. In the best and also in the normal case, it is suffused with love. For the great majority of human beings, happiness is found in a happy home. To be the manager of a home is the moderate and attainable ambition of most women; it is the place where they find honor and joy. It is where they most readily find “recognition,” if we must use that word. The husband must make a contribution to the home, and there are tasks which by nature and convention are his; to these we may add, from them we may subtract, in particular cases after negotiation by the parties. The result is that each home will be its own. Yet the woman should want to be in charge and take responsibility for the home, for to give her husband an equal responsibility would be to lose her sovereignty over the whole. Does a prudent woman want to let her husband decide when the house is clean?

This paragraph is filled with moral wisdom. The definition of home for women as “where your husband lives and where your children learn” is truly poetic. Professor Mansfield's address deserves wide distribution and an appreciative reading.

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