

Chapter One The Gender-Neutral Society

Today the very word *manliness* seems quaint and obsolete. We are in the process of making the English language gender-neutral, and manliness, the quality of one gender, or rather, of one sex, seems to describe the essence of the enemy we are attacking, the evil we are eradicating. Recently I had a call from the alumni magazine at the university where I work, asking me to comment on a former professor of mine now being honored. Responding too quickly, I said: "What impressed all of us about him was his manliness." There was silence at the other end of the line, and finally the female voice said: "Could you think of another word?"

We now avoid using "man" to refer to both sexes, as in the glowing phrase "rights of man" to which America was once dedicated. All the man-words have been brought to account and corrected. Mankind has become human-kind; man of the year, person of the year; and so on. But even when "man" means only male, "manly" still seems pretentious in our new society, and threatening to it as well. A manly man is making a point of the bad attitude he ought to be playing down.

The attempt to make our language gender-neutral reveals something of the ambition of our democracy today. A gender-neutral language implies a gender-neutral society, marking a pervasive change in the way we live our lives. Our society has adopted, quite without realizing the magnitude of the change, a practice of equality between the sexes that has never been known before in all human history. The principle of equality, born in modern times, is several centuries old, but as its application to the sexes is very new, we can see that even democratic peoples were long content to ignore very obvious unequal-

ity between the sexes. That inconsistency is no longer accepted. Much more has occurred, and is yet under way, than a mere adjustment of law to ensure equal access of women to jobs. Some women want a law of affirmative action to give them an advantage in competitive situations from which they have been so long excluded, and for which they may not be prepared. But that adjustment — not accepted by all women — is considered temporary and transitional even by its advocates. New attitudes are recommended, new behavior is required, if only to sustain such a law and make it work. The long-term goal, however far in the future, is gender neutrality. Now what does that mean?

Let me try to fashion an answer from diverse strands of present-day thinking, keeping things simple for now. Gender neutrality in theory is abstracting from sexual differences so as to make jobs and professions (especially the latter) open to both sexes. Wherever your sex used to determine your opportunities, it must now be seen as irrelevant. How can you regard sex as irrelevant when it used to be considered highly relevant? The answer is that one must oppose the traditional thinking and “raise consciousness” as to what women can or ought to do. To overcome prejudice against women, they must be said and shown to be equal to men. It is not enough merely to set aside sexual differences. That is the principle. But since the new principle, like everything new in morals and manners, will meet resistance, it is necessary in practice to abolish or lessen sexual differences, at least the important ones. The meaning of gender neutrality, therefore, is transformed to some degree by the effort required to attain it. From a formal, negative, principle abstracting from sexual differences it becomes an actual, positive reformation so as to do away with them. Because there are no gender-neutral human beings, the gender-neutral society cannot simply let nature take its course: take off the pressure to be your sex, one might think, and both sexes will relax, everyone will become gender-neutral. This will not work; pressure in favor of gender neutrality needs to be applied. For some feminists, we shall see, the refashioning goes very far; they believe that gender neutrality can be achieved only if women are as sexually free as the most adventurous men.

Women today want to be equal to men, equal in a way that makes them similar to, or virtually the same as, men. They do not want the sort of equality that might result from being superior at home if inferior at work. They

have decided that work is better than home. To think that home is better is no more than the “feminine mystique,” the notion Betty Friedan attacked when she began the women’s movement in the United States. Any woman who believes in that is being fobbed off by men who don’t themselves believe that home is better. No, men are right to think as they do, and they deserve to be imitated by women in this fundamental point. Work gives you more money, more recognition, more freedom than home. The last advantage is decisive; work offers you more choice. “Choice” is the byword of modern women, and not only in regard to abortion. But being devoted to “choice” as a principle also limits your choices in practice because it requires you to choose work, which has more choice in it because you can change jobs, over home, where a woman is stuck with her husband and children. To the woman always at home, her husband is absent during the day and sometimes longer, engaged in activity that is more lucrative, more interesting, and more important than hers — while the children remain with her, all too present and ever-demanding, a constant worry and a constant occupation.

Thus the true, the effectual, meaning of women’s equality is women’s independence — which in turn means, so far as possible, independence from men and from children. Complete independence is obviously not possible; at least for women who want a family; but to gain maximum feasible independence, women will want to imitate men, lead the lives of men, and seek to reduce family responsibilities to the level that men have been inclined to accept for themselves. An alternative strategy is to get men to do more housework, to behave more like women, both partners making equal sacrifices of their independence. In such arrangements, women’s independence is sustained by the idea of a contract, in contrast to an imposed role. In the old society, marriage was called a contract but the woman had a servile role she could not escape. Now she can specify what she expects of her partner and how much she will cede to him. Her concessions, made knowingly and voluntarily, will be less bruising to the soul. Each marriage can be lived more freely and happily on its own terms, and these terms need not, ought not, be dictated by society. If a man finds a complaisant woman, let him rejoice while it lasts. If he does not, too bad; he, not the woman, needs to adjust.

A gender-neutral society is a society of independent men and women, especially the latter. Although modern women still have some of the ways of

traditional women, they behave much more as only men used to behave. The sexual difference is not so much set aside as actually *diminished*. Not only are women behaving more like men, but also men are more welcoming to such women, more *sensitive* toward them, as we say. The sensitive male is above all sensitive to the desire of women to be like men (though also, in a lesser degree, to their desire to remain women and to combine this with the main desire). Such a fellow is no longer the Male Chauvinist Pig he was accused of being when this great change got underway. Men have had to curb, if not totally suppress, their sense of superiority to women. And having done this at the behest of women, they have in a way abandoned the contest and acknowledged the artificiality and fragility of their superiority. By their failure to resist they admit that it is easier to live equally.

A society of independent men and women, in which the sexes are converging and surrendering their sense of difference, in both the grand projects and the routines of life, surely has its attractions. The central one is greater freedom. The women's movement in its initial phase in the 1970s released women from the oppression of millennia, let them be angry, and with exhilaration seized the task of starting a revolution. Both leaders and followers in this movement were full of fire, fight, and ambition, for they were opposed by traditional conventions that included alleged natural differences in the sexes supporting those conventions. All nature and convention had been arrayed against women, all of society's spurious wisdom joined with its hypocritical morality, and now was the time to throw them off and create something new. This was the heyday of feminism when, excited by a spirit of transgression, women were none too pleased with men and not shy about letting them know it.

One thing women let men know was that sexual harassment had to stop. Sexual harassment has existed ever since predatory males have been around, and until now it has been contained by the code of a gentleman. The new law on sexual harassment, intended to secure women's independence as well as their honor, replaces that code so that women no longer have to rely on it to restrain predatory males. For a traditional example of sexual harassment, not of course taking place at the office, one need only think of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Mr. Wickham, a man somewhere between a fool and a villain, takes advantage of Lydia Bennett. This case of

ungentlemanly behavior was offered for our dismay and indignation and contrasted to a standard of how a gentleman would behave. The gentleman, as opposed to a cad or a lout, does not take advantage of those weaker than himself, especially women. He declines opportunities to push himself on others by means of a stronger will, to say nothing of greater brawn. Although he is expected to take the initiative — since in the relations of men and women someone at some point always has to make the risky first move — he allows time for choice or second thoughts by the woman and does not proceed if he is not wanted. He may not give up easily, nor will he seek written permission for his every advance, but he mustn't complain if he is turned down.

The gentleman, however, is an embarrassment to the gender-neutral society. A gentleman, we now think, has the same pretension to inequality as the harasser, and because he carries this infection within himself, it may get the better of him on some future occasion. The old ideal of gentlemanliness was tolerant of male pretensions, seeking only to transform them, not remove them. We now believe it is safer to rely on the law rather than an ideal. The new law shows respect for the equality of the sexes and drops the odious presumption that men are stronger, women weaker. Thus gender neutrality came into being, replacing gentlemanliness as the standard of both morality and common courtesy.

The gender-neutral society has lately produced softer, more comfortable freedoms, too. Ambition has subsided from making a revolution to making one's career, as the movement has lost its feminist passion, and with that some of its antimale and antibourgeois resentments. In moving up the ladder, the two sexes do not compete as sexes, and they rather fancy seeing more of one another in freer circumstances as they do now. The sexual revolution allows them to act on what they see. Both sexes, not just the males, can harbor ulterior motives, which now can become perfectly frank. A new egalitarian mutual respect has appeared, in which men find out that women are capable and women see that men can be fair; and as the blessing resulting from mutual respect, it's very nice for the family (or its substitute) to have two incomes. Although both men and women work hard, harder in fact than they used to, a new sense of ease is replacing the sense of duty that men used to struggle with and the sense of being constrained and generally put upon that women labored under. Life is pleasant and less demanding even

as work is longer and more productive. The gender-neutral society of independents has more choice and less necessity. Its obligations are those one sets for oneself; they are fewer, more easily postponed, and more satisfying than they used to be.

A gender-neutral society can, we might think, lose its partisan character. In its mature phase it can leave behind most, perhaps all, of the specific, divisive theses of the feminism that brought it to be. It can simply base itself on the obvious truth that men and women have more in common than not. Of course, you can see sexual differences if you look for them (as we shall do), but why look? It would seem wiser and easier to rely on the overlap between sexes than to make a point of the differences. In one generation women have shown that they are quite capable in the occupations to which they were previously denied access; the exceptions are few, the discrepancies minor. Women may not be equally qualified with men to be firemen, say, but they are not disqualified for the job, and they may have advantages of temperament and finesse over men — if not there, then elsewhere.

To justify the gender-neutral society we can rely on the authority of great men who in previous times wrote on its behalf, so to speak, without meaning to. Who knows more about American democracy than Alexis de Tocqueville? He said that the American dogma is this: "Providence has given to *each individual*, whoever he may be, the degree of reason necessary for him to be able to direct himself in things that interest him exclusively."¹ Forget the masculine pronouns and look at their reference, "each individual"; are not women included in this? And as to the social advantages of believing in each individual's reason, take the word of Alexander Hamilton (not a gender-neutral but a man who gave up his life in a duel because he was a gentleman): "When all the different kinds of industry obtain in a community, *each individual* can find his proper element, and call into activity the whole vigor of his nature."² Again the language can be applied without correction to our condition today. One might say, then, that it is no longer necessary to raise the general question of equality between men and women, as did the feminists. Let women succeed as they will without counting up the results, without making a fuss. It does no good, no good at all, to revive and replay on every occasion the battle of the sexes. Let there be a division of labor not between the sexes but within them, so that differences between the sexes can

be treated in the same way as differences within the sexes. Many men, after all, are not cut out to be firemen. The question of equality between the sexes doesn't arise on its own if there is no one to insist on it.

It's a pretty picture. It's the one we hold of ourselves, and it is to some extent, even to a considerable extent, true. If it does not quite represent how we behave, it shows what we want and where we intend to go. It is the truth we wish for, and the wish is potent enough to silence would-be critics:

Nonetheless, a certain resistance to the gender-neutral society has been noticed by its admirers. One of them speaks hyperbolically, and preemptively, of "backlash," but there is no backlash; there is only inarticulate resistance in the form of reluctance, a residual, bodily, behavioral unwillingness on the part of men to do their share in the upkeep of gender neutrality.³ For the picture drawn above is of work, not of home. It takes for granted the standpoint of what has been called the "ideal worker," one who has somebody else to deal with the distractions of home.⁴ The ideal worker is now a woman as readily as a man. At work the men have been told to move over, and they have, but at home things are different. The independent woman does not have a wife to make her independence viable — to do the housework, cooking, and child rearing.

As women always said and men often admitted, the independence of men rested on the dependence of women. But now that women are independent, or mean to be, these former dependents are no longer available. So it's not enough for men to move over and make room for women. The logistical support team men used to have must be reconstructed. The government can be called in to provide funds for day care, and with these or with income from her job, a woman can begin to cover the tasks she used to do herself. The people she hires, often women, are employees and not so dependent as she used to be.⁵ Even if they do everything — not a likely prospect — they have to be managed. Who does that? The woman does because her husband does not want to do women's work.

What! How is it possible that men will let women do men's work but not reciprocate and do women's work when women are perfectly willing to let them do it — when women even invite them to do it? The answer is that *men look down on women's work*. They look down on it not because they think it is

dirty or boring or insignificant, which is often true of men's work; they look down on it because it is women's. Working around the house is not objectionable if it is the sort of thing men do, for example, a man's trying manfully to fix something. But in this enlightened age, the age of raised consciousness, men still do not care for what they regard as women's work. It is not correct these days to say such things (perhaps it never was), but men's sentiments are strong if mute. Women should not have been surprised at this as they, too, now officially prefer men's work. Their complaint was that in being excluded from men's work, they were denied access to better things in life. But for some reason women were unprepared for men's reaction. They thought that men could accommodate themselves to the new situation and make the best of it without too much complaint. Women used to put up with injustice; surely men could tolerate justice? One shakes one's head sadly at such naïve confidence.

Proponents of gender neutrality—feminists of all stripes—must be distinguished from its beneficiaries, who include all grown women today (for now, let's not mention men and children). The beneficiaries tend to be more moderate than the proponents, as well as somewhat ungrateful to them. Neither group has been much concerned at first with changing our idea of men's behavior, and the leaders of the women's movement, especially, had little or nothing to say about manliness. They denounced men as oppressors, but they did not try to understand what makes men want to be on top. Other women saw no reason to denounce in universal terms particular men they happened to love, but this was perhaps because they saw no reason why these men could not behave more reasonably than men have behaved up to now.

By some accounts, American men are doing more around the house than they used to do (which was, in democratic America, more than in most any other society). A recent study speaks revealingly of "household chores" rather than something more dignified such as homemaking, of which a woman could be proud. It finds that although nine-tenths of both men and women believe that the chores and child care should be shared equally, in fact women do two-thirds of the work (or give two-thirds of the time), with no change from 1955 to 2002. Men contribute two-thirds of the family income and one-third of time devoted to the family—still.⁶ In household tasks a considerable degree of sexual division of labor remains in force.

Women still do the cooking; men mow the lawns. The new freedom permits and encourages a great variety of arrangements within households, and necessity (which in the form of divorce and single parenthood still somehow attends the new freedom) pushes both sexes into what once were considered unmanly or unladylike tasks. The lines between men's and women's tasks vary from one society to another and from one time to another. Today they have certainly been blurred, especially for women. But they have not been effaced. Men still hold to, and seem to insist on, the difference between men and women, and they want to apply it to matters outside sex, to home if not work. This is their manliness still operating in a society that has no legitimate place for it.

Betty Friedan, the founder of American feminism, wrote of "the problem that has no name," by which she meant the boredom of the suburban housewife.⁷ But, to repeat, we have lost the name we used to have for what mainly resists gender neutrality, which is *manliness*. I do not say that manliness is the only obstacle to the new dispensation; the consequences for society generally and even the preferences of women may also get in the way. Nor do I say that manliness is defined only by insistent sexism. Far from it: this book has much more to say about manliness than that. But men's disdain not only for women's work but even for *women*—which let us hurry to say is unjustified and irrational—has shown itself to be neither ephemeral nor transitional. This is the point from which to open our inquiry.

From one angle, the attempt to create a gender-neutral society, never before recorded in human history, has been an amazing success. It has aroused virtually no open opposition. There were segregationists to defend the Old South and its unjust ways, but the universal order of patriarchy found no spokesman to set forth an ideology on its behalf, let alone defenders to mount a countermovement. There was no George Wallace, no Bull Connor, no massive resistance to oppose the women's movement. No men of our time had the nerve to make fun of the feminists as men did of the suffragettes a century ago. True, conservative women under the leadership of Phyllis Schlafly did succeed in defeating the feminists' campaign for an Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. But Schlafly's campaign was based on women's traditional protections and exemptions, such as not having to fight in wars and not having a man with you in a public toilet, rather than on women's tradi-

tional virtues that thrive only in the home. Opposition to the ERA was compromised by the fact that the most educated women, conservative as well as liberal, were leaving homemaking for careers. Jane Mansbridge's classic study, *Why We Lost the ERA* (1986), concludes that a constitutional amendment was perhaps unnecessary, that its aims could be accomplished through legislation and judicial interpretation — and this seems to have been correct.⁸ Even conservative women, I have been told on good authority, want two items from the collection of innovations in the new society: the two Cs, career and contraception. If that's all they want, it's still a lot.

The conquest in thought was accompanied by a massive shift of women into the workplace beginning in the 1960s, and it was quickly followed by wholesale changes in law and custom requiring us to get used to gender neutrality. Altogether, it seemed, there was a sudden and universal collapse of even the mildest forms of patriarchy. The American patriarch, if you want to call him that, was perhaps at that stage nothing more formidable than Dagwood Bumstead, bumbling husband of Blondie, manly only when tackling his hero sandwich. But such as he was, the dominant patriarch was overturned and he readily succumbed.

Yet from the standpoint of the complete gender-neutral society, how little has changed. The late feminist political scientist Susan Okin stated the principle of such a society as "a future in which men and women participated in more or less equal numbers in every sphere of life, from infant care to different kinds of paid work to high-level politics."⁹ For "high-level politics" and the like, the truth is that men are still in charge. Men have the highest offices, the leading reputations; they make the discoveries, conceive the theories, win the prizes, start the companies, score the touchdowns. Men run things; women follow, accompany, imitate, elaborate, develop. This is not to say that women do not excel, but they seem still to excel as women, in accordance with the traditional stereotype of women and not the new gender-neutral stereotype. Although the line between male and female occupations is much more blurred than it used to be, particularly in the white-collar professions — lawyers and doctors are now 30 percent women, college teachers, 43 percent — significant traces of the old ways remain. Legal assistants are 83 percent women; nurses, 93 percent; dental assistants, 98 percent. Pilots are 96 percent men; truck drivers, 95 percent; construction trades, 96 percent;

car mechanics, 98 percent. As children grow up, their teachers are 98 percent women in kindergarten, 83 percent in elementary school, 58 percent in high school, and as we saw, 43 percent in college.¹⁰ In business, women excel in small enterprises, in finding a niche for a specialized ambition. They seem to be less interested in becoming numero uno for its own sake. This is not true in every case, to be sure — think of Margaret Thatcher — but it is true on the whole.

In going to work, women have not deserted the home and most of them show a secret liking for housework. They continue to do more than their share of it, that is, more than an equal share. What they have abandoned is not the home but domesticity — the virtues of the home, the justification for staying home. Cheryl Mendelson's large book *Home Comforts* praises the home virtues that produce home comforts. Its title is a rejoinder to promoters of gender neutrality who would describe home comforts as disagreeable "household chores."¹¹ The book is a subdued but still very manifest claim on behalf of women to rule the household not from the top by making big decisions but from beneath by assuming the right to declare when it is clean. Even more pronounced than women's penchant for nesting is their desire to take loving care of the babies to be reared in the nest. They take nature's pleasure in giving milk, and they generally enjoy greater intimacy with their babies than do men. This applies, in one recent survey, to women assistant professors, a group likely to be loyal in principle to gender neutrality, and it includes among specific tasks changing diapers, which a majority of the women said they actually enjoyed.¹²

To these reservations against gender neutrality, we may add women's hesitancy to condemn manliness. The gender-neutral society permits, or rather requires, women to be independent, to carry on their own lives without following in the wake of some man. But suppose you have to fight to maintain your independence? Suppose it is not enough to agitate the community, shame the males, and raise everyone's consciousness? With the disaster of September 11, 2001, Americans were sharply reminded that it is sometimes necessary to fight, and that in the business of government, fighting comes before caring. Women were reminded that men can come in handy. The heroes of that day were (apparently) exclusively male — as were the villains. Does this mean that the gender-neutral society is valid only in peacetime?

The situation might make some women wish for the disappearance of men, so as not to be subject either to the threat of their aggression or to its remedy. And the wish has long ago been thought out in Charlotte Gilman's *Herland* (1915), a manless utopia. But the extirpation of males might have to be carried out with the aid of males like our hijackers, seeking the new world of justice by suicide.¹³ Women on their own are not ruthless enough. One suspects, moreover, that many of them have a sneaking admiration for manliness when it comes to the fore in time of need. Some women may welcome it with open arms. Women's manliness may take the form of appreciating manliness in men and — a further point — of censuring its absence when required.

Two notable instances of such reproach may be recalled. As the Moor Boabdil was being expelled from the city of Alhambra in Spain, he turned around to gaze at it and heaved one last sigh, whereupon his mother said, "You do well to weep as a woman over what you could not defend as a man." And Lady Macbeth, fearing that her husband was "too full o' the milk of human kindness," found it was true, and she told him that when they had decided to kill the king, "then you were a man."¹⁴ Are women in the gender-neutral society more tolerant of unmanliness in a man? I would not count on it. Think of Margaret Thatcher's public advice to George H. W. Bush that it was "no time to go wobbly" on war in the Persian Gulf.

Women still rather like housework, changing diapers, and manly men. The capacities and inclinations of the sexes do not differ exactly or universally, but they do seem to differ. These differences are, one could say, all the more impressive now that they are no longer supported, indeed now that they are denied or opposed, by society's ruling conventions. The old Adam is still effective and still visible despite all that Hollywood and the media (when they want to be serious) do to instruct us in gender neutrality.

Or is this judgment made too soon? We are still in transition from the old patriarchal society to the new gender-neutral one, it might be objected, and it will take time to see the change completed. But it's just a matter of time. To this the answer is, we shall see. Right now there remains an obstacle to gender neutrality — manliness — which does not seem easily removable, even in time. Gender neutrality seems at first to disregard sexual differences, but it also wants women to be more independent, more like men. It assumes that what was until recently specific to men is actually common to both sexes.

It requires that we guide ourselves by what is common to the sexes, and this is what we are presently trying to do. Everywhere in the media we see portrayed the aggressive female and the sensitive male — Xena the Warrior Princess and Alan Alda or Warren Beatty (sometimes together). Both roles are difficult to play, but somehow the latter is more so. Women may have trouble in playing the aggressor, they may not be consistent, they may not be as pleasing to men in the new format; but despite the difficulties they can usually manage. Women are more malleable; they are able to do what men do while still maintaining an identity for themselves specifically as women. Yet men reject and resist the expectation that they should abandon their manliness. They do not so much mind sharing their traditional opportunities with whoever can exploit them, and they have shown newfound respect for women who can. But they draw the line at doing what women have left behind.

In sum, a serious discrepancy exists between what men and women, and especially men, believe, or say they believe, and what they are in fact willing to do. Their unofficial desires are not what they should be officially to maintain the gender-neutral society. Democracy as a whole, Tocqueville tells us, overthrows the legitimacy of unequal privilege much more easily than it establishes a legitimacy of its own, for one equal person does not see why she should obey another.¹⁵ Today it seems generally admitted that gender neutrality is the only legitimate way to live — yet we are not living that way. This means that every woman has, or is entitled to, a grievance against her man and against men in general. The fact that her man is probably no worse than any other she can find may induce her to be resigned to her fate, or it may not. Either way she cannot be happy in the society that was supposed to bring the liberation of women. Men, too, are not altogether happy. They have shown themselves willing to accept women's liberation verbally as long as it does not subtract from men's satisfaction at home. But of course it does.

Why couldn't a woman content herself with rough justice in the family that finds more money from men an equal exchange for more time from women? With the higher incomes men receive they get more honor than women, more "recognition." Manliness prevents men from giving equal honor to women: this is the issue behind inequality in housework. If housework were equal in honor to the sort of work you "go to," instead of being

considered necessary chores, a woman could be satisfied with doing more of the first and less of the second.¹⁶

Once upon a time women received recognition of a sort from a gentleman, and it is not clear that women want to do away with manliness in this more moderate form. It is for them, I suspect, still something of a treat to be in the company of a man who behaves like a gentleman. Women are quite expert in the interpretation of small courtesies, and they are in the habit of awarding points to men who offer them, especially in the early stages of acquaintance. Are you *showing interest*, and if so, how? Moreover, precisely in times of greater sexual freedom, it is good to be with someone you (as a woman) can trust. A gentleman is a man who is gentle out of policy, not weakness; he can be depended upon not to snarl at or attack a woman when he has the advantage or feels threatened. It can be delightful, of course, to be surprised, as long as one is *pleasantly surprised*. With a gentleman you can hope, perhaps even expect, that most of the surprises will be of that sort.

We have come to appreciation of the gentleman, the manly gentleman. What is he doing in the gender-neutral society? His chivalry is not only obsolete but also dangerous. The protection he offers women comes at the price of recognizing his claim, usually unspoken, that certain things must be left to men. Most of the time the gentleman conceals his superiority with chivalric irony; he pretends to defer to his inferiors. He opens doors for women when nothing is at stake, but when a crisis comes his very utility commands women to "get out of my way!" The gender-neutral society cannot afford a price that affronts its principle. Hence it cannot remain passive while members of both sexes individually choose which occupation they want to pursue. That society, like any other society, has rulers, and it matters who rules in it, above all that men and women rule equally. If it turns out that the gender-neutral society is still ruled mostly by men, that fact may be fatal to it. It may not matter that firemen are mostly males and dental assistants mostly females, but presidents, legislators, and justices give a character to the whole; if they are mostly males, the society is not really gender-neutral.

Thus, prompted by costly nostalgia for the gentleman, one must raise the question of power. The gender-neutral society must secure itself despite the reluctance of men to conform to it. One must be sure that it is held and defended by people who believe in it. Its rulers must be equally male and fe-

male at the least, and perhaps a surplus of females would be safer. In any case, there must be no gentlemen with their dangerously attractive courtesies.

Now supporters of the gender-neutral society (call them feminists) are torn between showing that they are as competent as men and doing away with gentlemen who might oppose them. In the first mode, they want to show they are manly; in the second, they want to deny there is any such thing. The first mode predominated in the early wave of feminists in the 1960s and 1970s led by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, which was more critical of women than men. In the 1980s, however, an attempt began from within academia to "deconstruct" manliness and to replace it with *masculinity*. Many books appeared with "masculinity" in the title, and an academic subfield called "masculinity studies" popped up in the near vicinity of women's studies. In the anecdote recounted at the beginning of this chapter, I should have replied "masculinity" when asked for a word other than "manliness," but I wanted to honor the man I was describing, and somehow "masculinity" is not a compliment.

The process known as deconstruction addresses the question of power. It assumes that the notion of manliness has nothing to recommend it but the power of those who dreamed it up or "constructed" it. Their power does not come from their manliness, but rather their so-called manliness comes from their power. Let's dub it masculinity, say the deconstructors, to signify that it has no particular virtue or attraction. But this might seem to be a bad move. Power is gender-neutral and masculinity is not. Why should power-seeking be especially male? If so, that would be very damaging to a gender-neutral society because it would imply that women are not so gifted as men when it comes to shoving rivals out of the way. And yet if it is not so, how do we explain the apparent fact that all previous societies have been ruled by males? When one deconstructs manliness, is the effect to expose manliness as mere aggression, and therefore bad, or is it to deny that manliness has any intrinsic quality, and therefore doesn't exist except as an illusion?

We should be grateful to feminist deconstructionists for insisting on the question of who rules. That question can easily be lost in the delusion that choice is nonpolitical, that you can choose one thing, I another — and nothing follows. But a society of choice could not be one where it does not matter to me whether, say, you choose to be manly or not. If it were, choice

would be unimportant even though it is put forward as the very principle of human life. In such a society, you would think hard about what to choose and then find that your effort was wasted; there are no consequences to choice, or choice is of no consequence. When people are free to choose how they live regardless of their sex, it matters how they choose because the choice affects others; the choice of the majority rules everyone. Manliness tends to be insistent and intolerant, and it is truly a threat to the gender-neutral society. Those who want to “deconstruct” or do away with it may be wrong but they are not anxious over nothing. If manliness exists, it is probably a greater threat than these critics believe. For even if manliness is a social construction, it does not follow that it can be done away with, and reconstructed, overnight. Darwinians, as we shall see, believe in a kind of social construction of manliness that has taken place gradually over millions of years. Why would it take less time to reverse the construction? Deconstructing manliness to “masculinity” may rob it of virtue but only confirms its power.

I conclude that we must confront manliness. We cannot escape the gender-neutral society, and we cannot ignore the challenge to it. To establish choice we have to clear away the obstacle to choice. So, what is this manliness, today no longer so chauvinistic as it once was but still disdainful and yet perhaps still appreciated? We need a definition—something provisional—from which to begin.

Manliness is still around, and we still find it attractive. To begin the search for a definition that will continue through this book, let's consider what we like about manliness. Two things, I would say, for a start: the *confidence* of manly men and their ability to *command*. The confidence of a manly man gives him independence of others. He is not always asking for help or directions or instructions (for it is out of manliness that men do not like to ask for directions when lost). The manly man is in control when control is difficult or contested—in a situation of risk. He knows his job, and he stands fast in that knowledge. If he doesn't really know his job, his confidence is false and he is just boasting. If he knows it but lets himself be pushed around, he's also not really confident; he merely has the basis for confidence. The first

case of boasting is a manly excess, the second is a defect of manliness. For some reason manliness includes, or is hospitable to, too much manliness, but it emphatically rejects a person who has too little of it. Perhaps it is because a manly man wants his manliness to be visible. So he is often portrayed in novels, in the movies, or wherever, in exaggeration, even though too much manliness is also a defect and can have disastrous consequences.

The independence of a manly man would keep him from getting involved with other people. He would be aloof, satisfied with himself and none too interested in other people's problems. At the least, he would wait to intervene until he is called upon to do so. But that degree of independence is in tension with the other manly element, the ability to command. The manly man is good at getting things done, and one reason is that he is good at *ordering* people to get them done. In politics and in other public situations, he willingly takes responsibility when others hang back. He not only stands fast but also steps up to do what is required. In private life, in the family, this ability makes him protective of his wife and children because they are weaker. Being protective (as opposed to nurturing) is a manly form of responsibility in private life analogous to getting into politics in public life. In both there is an easy assumption of authority. Manly men take authority for granted—the need for authority in general and their own particular authority. To the extent that all of us recognize the need for authority, whether emergency or everyday, we are attracted to those who seem to radiate authority and thus inspire confidence.

John Wayne is still every American's idea of manliness. That tells you something about the standing of manliness because John Wayne is not of our generation; in fact, he's dead. He is so far from gender-neutral that one's imagination balks at picturing him as him/her. How could his manliness be abstracted from his easy male swagger? His characters are more manly than the frenetic heroes of today's action movies who do not know how to stay quiet. The typical John Wayne movie shows the conflict between manly independence and manly command, as the question is whether he will be trapped into marriage or some other responsible situation (*Stagecoach*) or remain aloof and wild in his independence (*The Searchers*).¹⁷ Manly men are often not hard for women to catch, but they are not easy to corral. So too in

politics, the manly one is often disgusted at the irresponsibility and incompetence of those who got themselves into a mess, and he is strongly tempted, like Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, to leave them there where they belong.

We are attracted to the manly man because he imparts some of his confidence to everyone else. With his self-assumed authority he vindicates justice and makes things turn out right or at least enables us to get even. He not only knows what justice requires, but he acts on his knowledge, making and executing the decision that the rest of us trembled even to define. He knows what he is doing, himself, but in a large sense he represents human competence to all of us. He is manly man asserting the worth of man the human being (perhaps this is why, in English and in other languages, male and human being are both called "man"). In asserting his own worth, he makes us feel worthy too. While admiring him, we come to admire ourselves, since we have someone or something to look up to. Admiration is quite different from sympathy or compassion for someone's suffering. Admiration makes you look up to someone in control, compassion makes you look down to someone in distress. As with manliness, we have lost the idea but not the practice of admiration.

Let us not be too sure about manly confidence, for not everyone finds it attractive. Manliness, like suffering, deals with fear. The Greek word for manliness, *andreia*, is also the word the Greeks used for courage, the virtue concerned with controlling fear. When we come to fear, we enter the dark side of manliness. Manly men rise above their fear, but in doing so they carry their fear with them, though it is under control. Some say that manly men do not truly control their fear; they continue to struggle with it. The struggling takes the form of boasting they can overcome fear. But can they? In this view, manliness is based on the anxiety of losing one's manliness. Manly men are not confident but actually fearful. When they try to command, they become bullies. In our century, these critics say, we have seen the epitome of manliness in fascism, the theory and practice of loud, boastful, bullying, swaggering — and murderous — men.

Recalling the men who fought fascism and recoiling from this extreme of distrust, we realize that manliness is not all bad. Let's take a more complex view and consider two well-known authors who show their doubt of manliness in two well-known writings.

First, recall the incident in the first chapter of *Tom Sawyer* between Tom and the new boy in town, the one with the "citified air" that Tom could not put up with. When they meet in the street, Tom finds it necessary to challenge the new boy. The result is a dispute over nothing, arising merely for the sake of superiority: a meaningless argument, vain boasting on both sides, a line drawn in the dust, the dare to step over it accepted, a scuffle followed by recriminations and threats. It is not hard to guess that this is Mark Twain's picture of manliness done in childish caricature. He seems to say that manliness *is* childish, only perhaps not so funny and its irrationality not so obvious or so innocent when assumed by adult males. In the adult version, the scuffle is a war. Twain's critique — though this is just a glimpse of a wonderful book — resembles a woman's disdain for men's foolish daring.

Another view of manliness, more negative than it appears, can be found in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; at the end, in Mark Antony's tribute to Brutus. The speech ends: "His life was gentle, and the elements so mix'd in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'" His life was gentle, says Antony — not anxious. What man would not want to have this said of him! But of course, Brutus has just lost the battle and has died by his own hand; any tribute from nature would be a kind of consolation in defeat. Indeed, we perhaps especially reserve tributes to manliness for noble losers; nothing more substantial is left to them. But we human beings have to make the tributes. Nature, unfortunately, does not stand up and speak for itself, as Antony seems to wish; Antony, a man, has to speak up for a man and say how perfect he was.

Actually, it is Shakespeare, speaking through Antony, who speaks for nature. Poets must assert the dignity and excellence of man against nature because nature on its own preserves no memory of the best human beings. It is only through Shakespeare (and other poets, aided by historians) that we know of Brutus, only through Homer that we know of Achilles. Manly men like Antony have a tendency to believe that manliness speaks for itself, as if manliness were a natural perfection that all can recognize implicitly, that nature makes perfectly obvious. In Shakespeare's view — again, nothing but a glimpse of one speech — manliness looks better than it does in the scene from *Tom Sawyer*. Because it serves the function of defending us against tyrants like Julius Caesar, it is not merely foolish. But manly men tend to exagger-

ate the naturalness of their behavior, believing that their deeds speak for themselves and need no explanation. They know how to “tell off” an opponent but not how to understand his opposition. They forget the need for poets, who are not men of action. Manliness is biased in favor of action over reflection. That is a severe criticism when you think about it. One could even say that thinking is by itself a challenge to the superiority of manliness, which is too confident of itself. Yet one could also say that imagination is in need of fact, that poets need the men of action to serve as examples of superiority, and that Shakespeare depends on Antony and Brutus to show us human greatness and individuality.

So we are beginning to get a picture of manliness, neither altogether favorable nor repellent. Manliness can have something heroic about it. (Tom Sawyer, the boy who caricatures manliness, is nonetheless Twain’s hero.) It lives for action, yet is also boastful about what manly men will do and have done. It jeers at those who do not seem manly and asks us continually to prove ourselves. It defines turf and fights for it, sometimes for no good reason, sometimes to defend precious rights. And it exaggerates its independence, as if action were an end in itself and manly men were the best or only kind of human being.

This is only the beginning of a definition, but it is solid enough from which to see that manliness is both good and bad. Manliness has always been attractive, but equally it has always lived under a cloud of doubt. The doubt is raised perhaps by men who do not have the time or taste for manliness. This suggests that it is possible that manliness is not in the interest of men, or of all men, let alone women.

What prevents a woman from being manly? Today we must explain what has for so long, for millennia, been taken for granted. Are not women as confident as men? They are in their way. A lady has been defined as one who never loses her dignity regardless of the situation. But this virtue does not encourage her, may even prevent her, from seeking out situations of risk in which her dignity is challenged. A woman would not risk her dignity for no reason, like Tom Sawyer and the new boy. But this means that she might not risk her dignity for good reason, like Brutus in killing Caesar to save the Roman republic. Let us not presume that killing Caesar was done for good reason as it led to the murder of the philosopher Cicero and did not, after

all, save the Roman republic. A prudent woman with confidence in her judgment might have foreseen this bad outcome, but to forestall it she would have had to take a risk or act through men who are in the habit of taking risks. Manliness is knowing how to be confident in situations where sufficient knowledge is not available.

Most people are either too enthusiastic about manliness or too dismissive of it. They think that manliness is the only virtue, and all virtue; or they think it is the last, stupid stereotype, soon to be dead as a dodo. To study it well, the trick is not to get carried away to either extreme. Yet manliness is a passionate quality, and it often leads to getting carried away, whether for good or ill. A sober, scholarly treatment risks failing to convey the nobility of manliness—it’s so easy to make fun of. That’s particularly true today when the picture of manliness conveyed to us is as direct and unsubtle as the actor Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*, the singer Ted Nugent in *Cat Scratch Fever*, and the wrestler Jesse Ventura in *Governor of Minnesota*.

So, we are confronted with a manliness that in refusing an equal share of housework disdains women as such, irrationally and indiscriminately—stereotypically. A manliness, too, that seeks glory in risk and cannot abide the rational life of peace and security. And a manliness that yearns for deference from the women it looks down on. In the book of an educated woman I came across this piece of wisdom quoted from another woman, not deeply educated: “The problem is that men need to feel important.”¹⁸ Exactly! Now what is the cause of this feeling and is it justified?