

MAN'S FIELD

Book Review by Diana Schaub

Manliness, by Harvey C. Mansfield.
Yale University Press, 304 pages, \$27.50

IN A FOOTNOTE, HARVEY MANSFIELD admits that the seminal insight of his new book, *Manliness*, came from his wife, Delba Winthrop, and her astute understanding of Aristotle. The insight is the discovery of a distinction between saying and asserting. Anyone and everyone can say things, but “asserting...is the business of manliness,” since it takes courage to make a forceful claim in the face of resistance. While Mansfield generously acknowledges what he learned from the Lady and the Philosopher, he adds the audacious postscript: “but I have asserted...it.”

Certainly, the assertion of the notion of assertion is an improvement on other assertions that might be made. Mansfield cites Homer's Ajax as an example of manly assertion gone awry. The honor-crazed Ajax refused to listen to his insightful and prudent wife, Tecmessa, and died regretting it. Just about the only advice that Mansfield gives to his fellow men is to “ask [women] what they think. And when they tell you, try to listen.”

Mansfield listened and then asserted what he learned, which is to say he made it political. In writing this book, he has lodged a contention; he has set forth a claim to justice. (One of the things we learn about asserting is that it is, in essence, a justice-seeking action.) Why, one might wonder, do the definition and understanding of manliness need to be asserted? Why

can't manliness simply be understood? Well, for one reason because it has been misunderstood for such a long time. From an embattled position, Mansfield offers a defense of manliness.

He does not seem, however, to subscribe to the manly view that the best defense is a strong offense. His defense of manliness is not all-out, go-for-broke, throw-caution-to-the-wind. It is, as he says, a “modest” defense—a defense that does not aim to give offense, although there may be readers who take offense. But why the modesty? Is it, like a woman's modesty, a function of physical weakness? A minority view is well-advised to take a demure stance when the majority opinion is strong and not especially amenable to reason. A modest, or politic, defense may be the only hope an unpopular intellectual position has of gaining adherents and shifting the tide of battle. There is much to suggest that Mansfield's defense has something diplomatic and rhetorical, even deceptive and ironic, about it.

He indicates early on that the book's target audience is educated women, presumably because public opinion is their special preserve (though later he writes, “My book is for thinkers”). Nietzsche thought that a man should only go among women with a whip; Mansfield tries a gentler approach. Still, he can't resist delivering the occasional lashing with stinging quips. But as Mansfield himself points out,

the under-the-breath quip is a feminine mode. I suspect that he may get in as much trouble for his mocking quips as for his manly assertions. Despite that, the witty asides are one of the book's great delights.

IDON'T WANT TO LEAVE THE IMPRESSION that the modesty of Mansfield's defense of manliness is primarily a matter of presentation—an appearance of modesty that belies the reality. In truth, he expresses serious reservations about the goodness of manliness; and it is those reservations that genuinely moderate his defense. Despite the contemporary censorship of the word “manliness,” Mansfield finds plenty of the thing itself among us—too much in fact. What has happened is that manliness has been refashioned, through gender-neutral language, into “autonomy,” “independence,” and “transcendence.”

In the past, manliness was characteristic of men, and not all men, but only a portion of them: the manly men. Manly men ruled, but they did not rule absolutely; they were kept in check by the unmanly, particularly by women and philosophers. Mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters let their sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers know when the courage and protective manliness on which women depended had crossed the line into rashness or tyranny or male bull-headed idiocy. Whereas a woman



spoke (or, more accurately, complained) only to the men in her domestic circle, the philosophers (being men themselves) abstracted from the personalism of women and generalized the critique. Socrates and Plato challenged Homer and the Homeric heroes; Aristotle sought to tame the militaristic manliness of the Greeks by pointing out that war should be pursued for the sake of peace. Both women and philosophers have traditionally been critics of manliness, but appreciative critics; they have been, like Mansfield, modest defenders of manliness.

IT MAY BE THAT A ROSE BY ANY OTHER name would smell as sweet, but it turns out that in the case of manliness, the name matters. According to the genealogy that Mansfield traces, when manliness assumed its various gender-neutral aliases (autonomy, for instance), it became noxious. In being separated from males and universalized, manliness escaped its natural or God-given limits. The heart of the book traces how manly assertion was transformed into manly nihilism (via Darwin and Nietzsche) and in turn how manly nihilism was embraced by the woman warrior, Simone de Beauvoir, who refashioned it into the womanly nihilism of radical feminism. Like Athena sprung fully armed from the brow of Zeus, Beauvoir's feminism is the motherless and mother-hating offspring of Nietzsche's hypertrophic philosophic manliness.

Nihilism denies a human essence and denies as well the political and moral significance of the bifurcation of that human essence into male and female natures. When there is no sense of one's own being nor of a higher being or end for assertion to serve, then assertion itself becomes the be-all and end-all of human existence. Assertion runs riot. Manliness loses its protective, responsible, patriarchal side. It becomes virulent rather than virtuous. Mansfield shows the dark side of the force at work not only in fascism, but closer to home in feminism and modern science. It turns out Rush Limbaugh was not too far off when he coined the expression "femi-nazis." Mansfield's brilliant analysis of the scientific approach, especially the political and moral consequences of the doctrine of evolution, helps one understand how those with such a reductionist view of mankind can think so highly of themselves and so hubristically of their enterprise. If it is true that "the more science diminishes man, the more it encourages manliness," then that is a recipe for scientific tyranny. There is no end in sight to the imperialistic project to engineer and improve the human mechanism in accord with a scientific, soulless view of desirable functioning.

Mansfield's modest defense of manliness is, in truth, a profound critique of manliness—a cri-

tique that used to be readily available from both women and philosophers, until they converted to manliness themselves. Mansfield's exploration of the paradoxes and perversities in both scientific and feminist nihilism is inexpressibly rich. So too are his wonderful interpretations of the novelists, poets, and playwrights who help us think more clearly about manliness, from Homer to Hemingway, from Aristophanes to Oscar Wilde, from William James to Henry James. The superiority of Mansfield's method is confirmed by the insights it yields. Unlike the



psychologists and neurologists who study men in bits and pieces, Mansfield seeks to assemble and assess male nature as a coherent whole.

Academic studies of sex differences, for example, have documented certain traits more pronounced in men, like aggression and spatial reasoning, but no researcher has ever bothered to ask "how is spatial ability in men related to their aggression?" Mansfield not only asks the question, he answers it, with a concise account of the deep link between aggression and abstraction. Mansfield, however, quickly transcends the realm of generic masculinity. His chosen poets are better guides than the social scientists to the

higher and more exclusive levels of manliness, where the phenomenon is both more admirable and more dangerous. Literature teaches us about the few really manly men who assert themselves against nature and authority. It teaches us about the civilized manliness of the gentleman, and even how such manliness might comport itself in the face of nihilism. The very highest reach of manliness is visible in the courageously free-thinking philosopher. While Plato and Aristotle might criticize manliness (and early modern philosophers like Hobbes go further and try to suppress it), Mansfield suggests it is no accident that philosophers are always (or almost always) men.

By the time his tour is complete, Mansfield has made the case for a manliness properly circumscribed by morality. This means a manliness subordinated to the welfare of the weaker sex (with ungentlemanly frankness, he insists on women's weakness) and to the well-being of weaker and more vulnerable human beings in general. It turns out that the proper employment or deployment of manliness depends greatly on how that weaker sex behaves. He agrees with Tocqueville that women establish the moral horizon and that they do so through their privileged position in the domestic sphere. Nonetheless, Mansfield does not endorse a return to the traditional separate-but-equal arrangement. In fact, he dismisses as reactionary the division of labor based on sexual complementarity (in which men and women, equally valued, are understood to have different natures, different virtues, and different responsibilities). Following John Stuart Mill, the contemporary world now understands sexual equality in the economic and individualistic terms of equal access to education and the professions. Mansfield does not call for any curtailment of this. He does, however, envision some redrawing of the public/private distinction in American life. In public and under the law, we should continue to insist on gender neutrality, but in private there should be a more honest acknowledgment of gender differences, and yes, even the truth of sex stereotypes. In sum: let us follow John Stuart Mill in public and Aristotle in private.

I'M CHARMED BUT NOT ALTOGETHER PERSUADED by this conclusion; or maybe I'm so persuaded that I don't see why the triumph of Aristotle in private would not eventually undermine our official stance of gender neutrality. When Mansfield dismisses the reactionary solution, he considers how Tocqueville sought to preempt feminism by lavishing praise on American women. Tocqueville extolled American women's "superiority," by which he seemed to mean their manly courage in accepting their domestic lot. Mansfield



responds: "Praise for their courage in settling for domesticity will not convince them to do it when they are not compelled." True enough, women are no longer compelled to remain at home (if anything they are compelled into the work force); and true enough, women could not be brought back to the home by presenting it as the manly thing to do—a noble self-sacrifice. But what if it does not take courage to settle for domesticity; what if women just prefer domesticity; what if domesticity is not something a woman settles for, but something she settles into; and what if settling is not a sacrifice but a comfort? It seems to me that both Tocqueville and Mansfield temporarily forget woman's different outlook, the different constitution of her soul's desire.

ALTHOUGH MANSFIELD SUGGESTS THAT we at least pay lip service to Mill's androgynous version of sexual equality, he indicates that Mill's triumph may not be due to the merits of his argument but rather to the fact that "modern progress has not left much for women to do at home." Mansfield does say that "a determined woman might live wholly absorbed in the tasks set down for her in Cheryl Mendelson's *Home Comforts*" (a how-to book for the cleanliness-minded professional housewife). Here and elsewhere in the book, he seems to echo the feminist demotion of women's work to housework, and the consequent undervaluing of it. Modern progress might have made laundry easier to do, but it has not made childrearing any easier, and it has made it more than ever likely that women, in addition to caring for children, will spend many years caring for elderly parents. Moreover, discontent with "modern progress" has induced many women to take over completely the task of schooling their children. Home-schooling is becoming more than a fringe phenomenon. It is also still women who perform most of the volunteer and charity work. Particularly in those segments of American society where women's work is conceived in its fullness, the reactionary arrangement will remain the choice of a substantial and, I suspect, increasing minority.

A recent survey of female undergraduates at Yale revealed that 60% of them hoped to be stay-at-home moms (or, as the devotees of Dr. Laura define the job, "I am my children's mom"). The recent rash of Nanny shows (*Nanny 911* and *Supernanny*) reveals that the traditional arrangement is still fairly common and still the aspiration of many couples, but also that stay-at-home mothers, raised doubtless by 1970s feminists, no longer have a clue how to raise their kids. In these shows, a proper British nanny arrives at the household to instruct the parents in discipline and hierarchy.

If we are serious in admitting, in private, the truth of gender differences, won't that force public acknowledgment as well? Take an issue like sexual predation and rape at the nation's military academies. A real solution would start from an acknowledgment of women's physical vulnerability, and would recommend, not more karate training, but the cultivation of female modesty and male gentlemanliness. But that solution flies in the face of gender-neutrality. How can an officer be a gentleman when he is trained to be impervious to the cries of a wounded or captured female soldier? Gender neutrality requires the neutralization of his tenderness towards women. If a man is taught to ignore the screams of a tortured woman, why should he pay much heed to other violations of her bodily integrity, even ones for which he is responsible? The co-ed military is of course the toughest test of gender neutrality (as Plato's *Republic* illustrates), but the situation there is just a more extreme version of the co-ed university or the co-ed corporation.

Mansfield admits that greater private truthfulness about men and women would spill over into society. How far would it wash into policy? Since the original liberal distinction between state and society doesn't erect a wall of separation, wouldn't a return to the free recognition of gender differences in society bring about changes in public policy and law as well—perhaps changes allowing for discrimination on grounds of sex?

Mansfield is certainly right that "we need to both respect and ignore sex differences," but it is hard to envision precisely how liberalism is going to accommodate manliness, and, I think, even harder to envision what the analogue for women will be. The final lines of Mansfield's book show the difficulty. He says "men should be expected...to be manly" and women, while free to pursue a career, "should also be expected to be women." Note that the formulations are not parallel. What does it mean for women to be women? Should they be "womanly" as in "feminine," or should they be like Margaret Thatcher, "the mightiest woman of our time" and a paragon of manliness? Women, as Mansfield notes, "want it all," and he calls for a new and better feminism that would understand womanhood, and its contradictory desires, better than the old feminism. Nonetheless, he leaves that task to others, perhaps women who read his book and fashion a model more suitable than either Simone de Beauvoir ("Nietzsche in drag") or Rousseau's Sophie.

Although women and philosophers used to put manliness in its proper place, neither group is at present performing its crucial unmanly

role. It might be worth exploring whether there are other avenues (political or theological) by which manliness could be moderated. At least in our regime, I believe there are.

Mansfield presents manliness as fundamentally aristocratic. The manly individual asserts himself and his significance in the cosmos. According to Mansfield, the case for human significance cannot be made in general; it must be made by particular individuals, usually men, who assert human meaning through such deeds as the founding of political communities. Founding is not, as Nietzsche would have it, a nihilistic assertion in the void, but rather an assertion in accord with, though not determined by, our nature as political beings. In founding and other chosen acts of manly assertion, nature and nurture (or nature and convention) are fused together. Moreover, this fusion is accomplished in particular and highly partisan ways. The superior man asserts his own superiority and the superiority of his way of life. Thus, the Greek poets who celebrated Greek manliness held that "it is fitting that Greeks rule barbarians."

Following Aristotle, Mansfield concludes that manliness is at heart tyrannical or imperialistic: "manly men in taking responsibility for others cannot stop themselves from ruling their inferiors and from treating them as slaves. Their very goodness, when it is responsible, compels them to compel others so as to make them good too." Of course, Aristotle tries to administer a check to these responsibility-hogging tyrants by arguing for the superiority of the contemplative life over the active life, but we know that the powerful don't listen to the wise any more readily than to women.

IWONDER WHETHER THE AMERICAN FOUNDING and its doctrine of the equality of rights-bearing individuals—the endowment of nature and nature's God—does not contain a remedy for the tyranny implicit in manliness, at the same time that it calls forth the manliness required for human flourishing. The Declaration of Independence demands manly virtue, because it is left to human beings to vindicate and secure the rights that belong to us (rather precariously it seems) by nature. But the Declaration of Independence restrains manliness too, since those human beings who hazard their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor act not for themselves alone, but for all and in the name of all. Moreover, by their success they acquire no title to rule that goes beyond self-rule or the limits of republican self-government.

The American Founding aims for a new kind of impartiality in politics. Yes, we separated ourselves from the mother country and set ourselves apart, but the ground on which we did so was not an assertion of our superiority



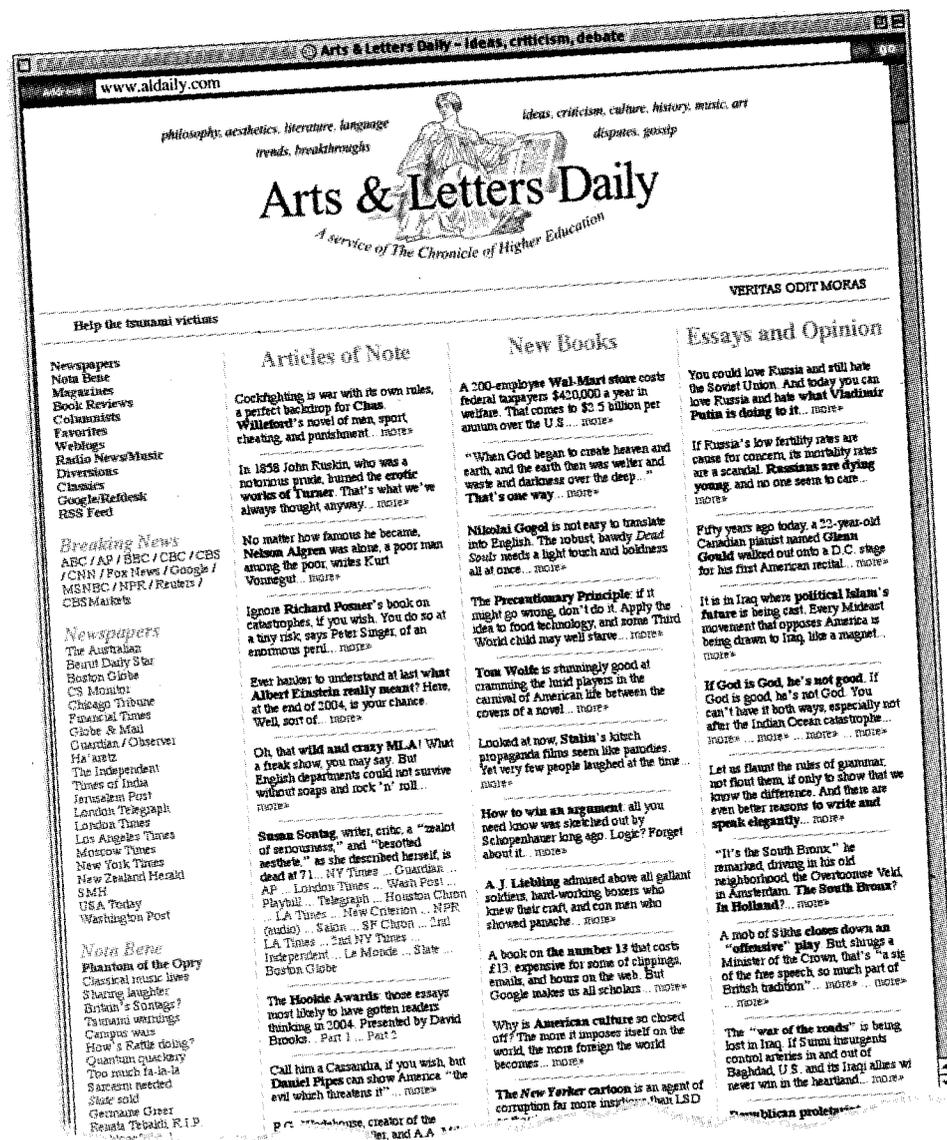
(as in "it is fitting that Greeks rule barbarians"), but an assertion of an equality shared by all mankind. The American regime is better than those regimes not founded upon the consent of the governed, but our goodness does not compel us to compel others to similar goodness. In fact, the way we understand the goodness of our regime (the doctrine of human equality that underlies the need for consent) sets internal limits to virtue's imperialism.

When I tried to fit Washington and Lincoln (or Churchill) within the ancient account of manly virtue (with its inherent tyranny) I couldn't quite do it. Washington, Lincoln, and Churchill are not like Pericles, Alcibi-

ades, and Caesar. George Washington, the father of his country, who could have ruled for life, relinquished command of the victorious army and resigned from the presidency in deference to republicanism. Abraham Lincoln saved the Union and inaugurated a new birth of freedom by bringing his fellow citizens back to the credal truth of human equality and the political meaning of that truth ("in giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free"). Churchill, after rescuing the West from the peril brought about by democratic softness on the one side and nihilistic hardness on the other, dutifully left office when he was unceremoniously voted out. Does the phenomenon

of modern democratic statesmanship show the possibility of a self-restrained, non-tyrannical manliness? Perhaps our best bet for a revival of moderate manliness is the re-assertion of the truths of the Declaration. If we once again asserted those truths to be self-evident, we might find both manly wherewithal and a standard by which to keep manliness moderate and moral. We will certainly need both manliness and morality if we hope to meet the looming threats of our own era, whether Islamist terrorism or imperialistic science.

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HOW TO ELIMINATE IRAN'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS: A SYMPOSIUM



IN AUGUST 2002, AN EXILED IRANIAN OPPOSITION group produced evidence that the Islamic Republic of Iran had managed, for the previous 17 years, to conceal from the world a nuclear weapons project. In June 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verified the group's claims, declaring Iran in violation of its commitments to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That September, the U.S. called for Iran's referral to the U.N. Security Council. But in the event, the Bush Administration agreed to defer to a coalition comprising the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (the "E.U.-3"), which sought through a variety of political, economic, and technological concessions to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

In December 2003, Iran confessed to the IAEA its years of clandestine nuclear experiments, claiming that they were designed for peaceful civilian purposes. That month, Iran signed an agreement with the foreign ministers of the E.U.-3 to suspend the country's uranium enrichment—but in June 2004 was caught by the IAEA in violation. E.U.-Iran talks resumed in November 2004, leading to an agreement in which Iran promised, once more, to suspend its program. But Iran reneged and threatened to withdraw from the negotiations unless various concessions were made—which Iran won.

In June 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a former commander in Iran's Revolutionary Guard, was elected president. "The wave of the Islamic revolution will soon reach the entire world," he declared, and in September 2005, indicated that Iran was willing to transfer nuclear technology to other Islamic nations. The next month, Ahmadinejad declared that Israel must be "wiped off the map," a slogan subsequently seen adorning Iranian missiles during parades.

In January 2006, defying Western warnings, Iran broke the U.N. seals at its Natanz uranium enrichment plant. The E.U.-3 suspended negotiations and recommended that the matter be referred to the Security Council. On February 17, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy declared, "No civilian nuclear program can explain the Iranian nuclear program. It is a clandestine military nuclear program." The same day, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the head of Iran's ruling Guardian Council, warned: "Nuclear technology is our red line and we will never abandon our legitimate right to this technology. They are trying to terrify us with a scarecrow called the Security Council. We are not scared.... They will be harmed more than Iran if they act unwisely."

ON MARCH 7, SHORTLY BEFORE THIS issue went to press, Vice President Dick Cheney told an audience, "The Iranian regime needs to know that if it stays on its present course, the international community is prepared to impose meaningful consequences. For our part, the United States is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the regime.... We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon." The next day, in Vienna, the IAEA concluded that after nearly three years of inconclusive inspections, it would finally refer the matter to the Security Council—30 months after America's initial call to do so. In response, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's envoy to the IAEA, said: "The United States has the power to cause harm and pain, but the United States is also susceptible to harm and pain. So if that is the path that the U.S. wishes to choose, let the ball roll out." (Iran also threatened to curtail oil production.) On March 9, before a Senate committee, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said of Iran, "We may face no greater challenge from a single country."

The *Claremont Review of Books* asked seven leading thinkers to reflect on our political and military options in eliminating Iran's nuclear capability.