

Feminist Impracticality

If feminism is to mean anything, it must recognise similarities instead of differences, fight to change constitutions, leaving people's attitudes alone, if for no other reason than the right to be objectionable is part of our freedom

FEMINISM SUFFERS, BY DEFINITION. Is a feminist a woman who believes in women's rights or is it simply a woman who believes women don't enjoy any or a man who believes in women's rights and feels bad about their wrongs? Could it even on the analogy of racist be someone who discriminates on the grounds of femininity, and if so how? The roots of 20th C. women's movements I suppose were the suffragette agitations of the Victorian and particularly Edwardian era. The suffragettes have a worthwhile place in History; they were after something tangible and they got something tangible. Insofar as the women's libbers of the braless 70s helped bring about the equal pay act and other such reforms they too have seen fruit borne of their actions, and all movements which seek to redress injustice must be wholesome if not always fruitful. Legally and constitutionally there are still gaps which are harmful to a woman's ability to live a free life. What can be done about this and how seem to me the two axes on which any feminism should rest, and the clearcut goal of projected reform X and constitutional change Y, if sighted could be aimed at with some directness. In fact it is probably unfair to its most serious proponents to say that there is any single women's movement today. What we have is a welter of well and not so well meaning contradictions and downright wrong headed assumptions which are eroding the true goals of sensible political behaviour which, after all, must include women.

The fact that I am a man will immediately disqualify me as a valid spokesman in the eyes of many people reading this piece. I can only appeal to such sexists not to dismiss me on the grounds of Y chromosomes. Actually the position of the man in the feminist movement is the one aspect of this debate which intrigues me more and more. In the famous Andy Peebles' interview/exercise in sycophancy with Lennon/Ono sometime in New York City, Yoko explained that John was a feminist because, as I took the drift of her argument he was concerned about the wellbeing of the world's women. We have reached the height of terminology mania when someone who is concerned about women has to be cited as a feminist. Can't he just be a reasonable human being who dislikes any repression? Remember that the self-proclaimed male feminist is in essence the direct descendant of the Elizabethan gallant and all subsequent gallants, who sought to treat the woman as an example of perfection. No-one could have been more understanding towards women than the classic lovesick gentleman who pined away

with unrequited love but reserved his mistress' right to treat him that way. Of the same breed were the staunch hearts who decreed there were certain types of behaviour that were unacceptable in the presence of ladies. Something in all this must have stank as far as the ladies were concerned; it was what we call patronisation. Catch 22: The perfect gentleman who goes out of his way to accommodate the comfort and wishes of his or any other lady is a sexist because he dares to presume what it is that the woman wants; his male chauvinist counterpart (excuse the clichés) is a sexist because he never even thinks to presume what it is the woman wants. The modern day male feminist, whilst taking his lead in most cases from what the woman tells him he ought to think she wants, does not wholly escape the net of

that our rational powers are subjected to our sexual urges something deserving of a crusade worthy of an Ist and ism taxonomy.

Sex is there. It is not by its nature something to rationalise or analyse. The biggest mistake of feminism has been to try and explain sex, by which I include masculinity, femininity, male/female attraction, copulation, wooing acceptance and rejection and any other activity or propensity which this blanket term has sheltered. Advertising, we are told, exploits the sexual attractiveness of women to sell products. Yes, of course it does, but who on earth expects fair play of the ad-man, when it is his job to make you want something you don't need? And if the woman is exploited here, so is the man who lets his penis pull his purse-strings. We are all constantly being



patronisation. A recent edition of Granada T.V.'s Late Night From Two (June 1st) debated our present topic with the 'help' amongst others of a male member of the Guardian's womens page. Readers of the Grauniad will know his name. Together with the (female) editor of the Sunday Times women's page he turned incredibly on a topless model (clothed in the studio I might add) and actually tried to tell her what it was she thought even if she didn't realise it. The nadir of this exhibition of the worst facets of intellectualism (Imagining that the model wasn't capable of reasoning with them, a. because she hadn't had a university education and b. because she wasn't persuaded by their Lilliputian intellects) was when our Sunday Times lady told our model (who had just said she had always been treated courteously and didn't think the media exploited women since they were free to work for it or not as they chose) no you can't really think that, that's what you think you think. The Guardian man nodded sagely. My own view of the male feminist (as distinct from the man who treats women equally as a matter of course) is simple. Like the gallants before him he is the height of sexism, he does all he does in order to treat women in the best possible way in order to impress women with his sincerity. All men want to impress women, no-one can argue but that this is a profoundly sexual impulse. Paradoxically some men are now doing this by seeking to attack this very impulse and to make the fact

exploited and exploiting one another. If we try we can stop ourselves being conned, but we can't expect others to stop trying to con us. As a matter of fact, the feminist attack on the English language is one of the biggest cons we have at the moment.

The phobia like intensity with which words are attacked is an indication of how backward looking any so-called radical movement can be. The traditional taboos disappear one by one, but they are never missed for long — i.e. since feminism, for one, is rapidly replacing them. Consider the word chairman, the suffix 'man' is a long way removed both in pronunciation and in semantic signification from the separate morpheme (or meaning carrying unit) 'man', as it is used to denote a male human. Why women have to be chairwomen or chairpeople is understandable but as

pointless as arguing that manual work must be carried out by hand, when most people take it to mean work done by human non-automated agency. The descent into jargon, into quibbling over words, is a sign of sterility in any movement. In lieu of anything valuable to say words are bandied as if they were responsible for the way things are, rather than mere reflections of this. To think that anything can be gained by tampering with the word-stock is a foolish oversimplification, since without ideas of a practical nature to inform them words become nothing more than echoes of their authors' prejudices, like the Tory cry 'socialist', dragged out as if to expose countless evil, or the Soviet Russian's emotive and semantically futile cry, capitalist! imperialist!, as if putting a label on an opposing ideology they can show the world exactly what, they believe, is wrong. But as a matter of fact plying with words does nothing but eradicate the very bases of sympathy which the words seek to build on, for no-one is impressed by rhetoric unless it points to recognisable wisdom, which is what I mean when I say that feminists must be practical, and why I thought fit to decry the patent lack of practicality which bandwagon-feminists repeatedly display. Every time a committed feminist tells me of a genuine grievance to which there is a practical remedy I feel moved to shift from my anti-feminist bias into a contemplation of how things are. Genuine thought is the root of all worthwhile political action. Whenever an unthinking woman screams 'sexist' over what is nothing more than realism I feel inclined to distrust the whole movement. This is the danger for any cause, that its bastardised by-products will ultimately corrupt its true aims. And as a matter of fact there are a lot of things in the world which transcend sexuality even while referring to it. These things are not matters for feminist outcry but simple indexes of the fallibility of human nature. For example, much is made of so-called sexual harassment at work. It may be true that women have to endure humiliation at the hands (often literally) of office 'chauvinists' but unless the playfully degrading sexual

