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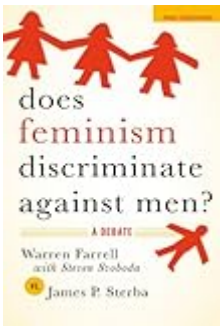

Warren Farrell, J. Steven Svoboda, James P. Sterba. *Does Feminism Discriminate against Men? A Debate.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 258 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-531282-9; $17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-531283-6.

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Does Feminism Cause Injustice to Men?

The title of this book is not ideal, though my own may be no better. Either way, we must first define "feminism" in order to discuss whether or not it injures the rights of men. One Trotskyist group makes a distinction between "women's liberation" (good) and "feminism" (bad). Christina Hoff Sommers distinguishes between "feminism" (good) and "gender feminism" (bad).[1] Camille Paglia describes herself as "absolutely a feminist," but sharply criticizes "PC feminism."[2] Wendy McElroy distinguishes three forms: "liberal feminism" (the ideology of the 1960s); "gender feminism" (the dogmatic, men-are-the-enemy form); and "individualist feminism" (her own preferred form).[3] The trouble is that very few people observe distinctions, and are likely to end up examining both the good and the bad aspects of a single ideology. In an interview with Steven Svoboda, Warren Farrell said: "I'm a 100 percent supporter of the portions of feminism that are empowering to women and a 100 percent opponent of the portions that hone victimhood as a fine art".[4]

The title of the book is also misleading, as there is no true debate. Farrell presents his case–thirteen areas in which he believes that feminism discriminates against males, then James Sterba challenges Farrell's arguments. But Farrell is not allowed a rebuttal, and Sterba's arguments are less than convincing. Farrell is still a feminist, so his argumentation lacks the vigor that a forthright opponent of feminism might bring to the case for men's rights. He often sounds like a marriage counselor (which indeed he is)–concerned with helping men and women "listen" to each other, rather than with decrying the real injustices that are done to men and boys (and women and girls). Farrell started off as an enthusiastic supporter of feminism, writing *The Liberated Man* (1974), a book that considered the ways in which men could support the women's movement. He was in great demand as a speaker, and was elected three times to the Board of the National Organization for Women. Then, as he began to see things from men's perspectives: "Almost overnight my standing ovations disintegrated" (p. 5). He wrote two more books, *Why Men Are the Way They Are* (1986) and *The Myth of Male Power* (1993), thereby becoming persona non grata to the feminists and an elder statesman to the fledgling men's movement.

The thirteen issues (and chapter headings) examined by Farrell and Sterba are as follows: (1) "Do We Need Men's Studies?"; (2) "Do Men Have the Power?"; (3) "What the All-Male Draft and the Combat Exclusion of Women Tell Us about Men, Women, and Feminism"; (4) "Why Do Men Die Sooner, and Whose Health is Being Neglected?"; (5) "Domestic Violence: Who is Doing the Battering, and What's the Solution?"; (6) "The Politics and Psychology of Rape, Sex, and Love"; (7) "Does the Criminal Justice System Discriminate against Men?"; (8) "Why Men Earn More: Discrimination? Choices?"; (9) "Are Women Doing Two Jobs while Men Do One?"; (10) "Marriage, Divorce, and Child Custody"; (11) "Does Popular Culture Discriminate against Men?"; (12) "Are Schools Biased against Girls? Or Boys?"; and (13) "The Future of Feminism and Men."

For each issue Farrell finds evidence of anti-male discrimination, and Sterba in turn minimizes it. Obviously, it would be beyond the scope of this review to go into all of these, so I'll concentrate on four issues where Farrell's case is strongest: health, domestic violence, rape, and the criminal justice system. Concerning health, Farrell makes one strong point: the life expectancy for women (80.1 years) is over five years longer than that for men (74.8 years)–and life expectancy is one of the best indicators of real power. He argues that much more money has been spent researching female health issues than male health issues. Unfortunately, he then veers off into a hodgepodge of thirty-four "neglected areas of men's health" (pp. 28-30).

First on his list is "a men's birth control pill"–a horrible idea: any drug that could arrest a man's reproductive potential would almost certainly be toxic, and possibly mutagenic and teratogenic as well. More reasonably, Farrell lists "circumcision as a possible trauma-producing experience," which is undoubtedly true (p. 29). How could such an intimate assault not be traumatic for an infant or child? More importantly, circumcision removes a good and healthy part of the penis, thereby destroying the full potential for sexual pleasure. This is a human rights issue, and neither sanitary ideology nor religious beliefs should be invoked to allow the mutilation of those incapable of giving informed consent. He also cites "ADHD (attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder): alternatives to Ritalin" (p. 29). This is fine, but one needs to add that ADHD is a phony diagnosis, created by the therapy-pharmaceutical industry; that Ritalin is a harmful drug with no real benefits; and that it was approved on the basis of faulty research. Ritalin may stunt growth, cause brain damage, and ruin the lives of the children who are forced to take it. Often the victims of Ritalin include the very best children: boys with high energy, who fidget because they are forced to sit still for hours, or those with high IQs, who fidget because they are bored.[5]

Sterba's response to Farrell's health section consists of various quibbles: women are less likely than men to be subjects in drug trials (this is bad?); more money is spent on "AIDS" than on breast cancer; and so on. With regard to the difference in life expectancies, Sterba can only speculate: motor vehicle accidents, cigarettes, drinking. He regards Farrell's claim that men experience greater stress to be refuted by a survey in which a greater proportion of women reported high levels of stress; in fact, even if well done, the survey may merely indicate that women are more likely to complain.

From the outset the women's movement has focused on battered women, and rightly so. With the ascendancy of men-are-the-enemy "gender feminism," however, the myth has taken hold that all victims of domestic violence are female, and all of the perpetrators are male. Farrell cites several studies showing that "Women and men batter each other about equally, or women batter men more" (p. 34). In the context of the myth, these findings cause extreme cognitive dissonance, and are generally ignored. One may ask, since men are usually bigger and stronger than women, how could they be victims of battering? The answer is that males from childhood are conditioned to believe that a boy must never strike a girl, and a man must never strike a woman, not even in self-defense. The result is that a large, muscular man can be helpless against the blows of his diminutive wife. Also, a common modus operandi of battering wives is to wait until the husband is "asleep, drunk, or otherwise incapacitated" (p. 34). Women are also more likely to inflict severe injury; and they are "70 percent more likely to use weapons against men than men are to use weapons against women" (p. 34).

Bureau of Justice reports indicate that "women are the perpetrators in 41 per cent of spousal murders" (p. 35). Males tend to kill their wives themselves, with knives or guns, and often commit suicide afterwards. In sharp contrast, females tend to use poison or to have their husbands killed by other males, either a professional killer or a boyfriend; the latter two are known as "multiple offender killings," and are not counted as female-perpetrator killings. The purpose of all three female methods is to elude discovery. According to Farrell, "It is rare for a man who has no insurance to be killed by

a woman" (p. 36). Sterba acknowledges the validity of some of Farrell's points, but ends up reasserting that "the major problem of domestic violence is men's battering of women" (p. 157).

In the section on rape Farrell takes on a number of "myths" about rape–that rape is a manifestation of male power, that rape is about violence rather than sexual attraction, and that false accusations of rape are rare. He demonstrates that the very concept of "rape" has become so muddled and mystified that college students and administrators are no longer sure what the term means. If both partners have a few drinks before sex, does this mean that the male has committed rape? If the female decides afterwards that she really didn't want to have sex, was she raped? One survey found that a much greater proportion of men (63 percent) than women (46 percent) said that they had "experienced unwanted intercourse" (pp. 43-44). These might seem like frivolous questions, but they are not: at this very moment college administrators are in a quandary trying to deal with them. The same point has been made cogently by feminist Camille Paglia: "The area where contemporary feminism has suffered the most self-inflicted damage is rape. What began as a useful sensitization of police officers, prosecutors, and judges to the claims of authentic rape victims turned into a hallucinatory overextension of the definition of rape to cover every unpleasant or embarrassing sexual encounter."[6]

Farrell neglects to discuss Susan Brownmiller's seminal book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975). This book, replete with disinformation, did much to create an atmosphere of sexual hysteria and irrationality, which led to censorship and assaults on civil liberties. In a 1976 review I described *Against Our Will* as "a shoddy piece of work from start to finish: ludicrously inaccurate, reactionary, dishonest, and vulgarly written."[7] Rereading my review, I find nothing to retract.

Farrell puts forward a concept of "date fraud"–when "a woman says 'no' with her verbal language but 'yes' with her body language"– and suggests that the purpose of "date fraud" is "To have sexual pleasure without sexual responsibility, and therefore without guilt or shame; to reinforce the belief that he is getting a sexual favor while she is giving a sexual favor, and thus that he 'owes' her the Five Ds [Drinks, Dinner, Driving, Dating, and Diamond] before sex or some measure of commitment, protection, or respect after sex" (p. 41).

He also inveighs against the "double standard of 'rape-shield' laws" (pp. 45-46). These are a direct product of feminism; they "shield a woman's sexual past from being used against her in court. No law shields a man's sexual past from being used against him in court" (p. 45). Regardless of the intention of these laws, they violate due process and thus prevent a man from receiving a fair trial. Farrell cites an Air Force study to argue that false accusations of rape are not rare. Sterba in turn argues that false accusations are indeed rare, using the same study. However, this study is only one among many, and neither Farrell nor Sterba is a qualified survey research analyst. That false accusations of rape are by no means uncommon was well established by John MacDonald more than a third of a century ago, but his work is not listed in the bibliography.[8]

The section on the criminal justice system makes a strong case that men are treated far more severely. Men receive much longer sentences for the same crimes, and are "twenty times more likely than a woman convicted of murder to receive the death penalty" (p. 49). Farrell's "items" highlight many instances of glaring injustice to males, but at least one of them is inadequate: "ITEM," he writes, "Andrea Yates murdered her five children. She was found not guilty in 2006 by reason of insanity and was given treatment rather than punishment" (p. 49). I agree that Andrea Yates was guilty and should have been punished, but an important factor in this case, and one covered up by public relations firms, was that she was taking medication for depression, a "selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitor" (SSRI) drug. Suicide and murder are recognized as possible (if rare) consequences of SSRI consumption.[9]

Farrell believes that the very real gender injustices of the criminal justice system are a consequence of feminism: "For nearly four decades now, we have become increasingly protective of women and decreasingly protective of men" (p. 50). It has become almost commonplace that a woman can commit premeditated murder and then be acquitted under the "learned helplessness defense"–claiming that the man had battered her and she was helpless to leave him–even in cases where friends and family of the murdered man testify that no battering or other form of abuse ever took place. But what is sauce for the gander is not necessarily sauce for the goose: "The feminists often say, 'There's never an excuse for violence against a woman.' When it comes to female violence against men, though, there's always an excuse" (p. 54).

Strangely, Farrell does not mention the case of Hedda Nussbaum, in which feminists played a major role in her

acquittal of murder charges, and in changing her reputation from that of perpetrator to victim, and creating what is now known as the "Hedda Nussbaum defense." Briefly, here is what happened. A young unmarried woman became pregnant and, being a good Catholic, decided to have the baby rather than get an abortion. Too poor to raise the baby herself, she gave $500 to a New York lawyer, Joel Steinberg, who told her the baby would be adopted by a wealthy Catholic family, who would give the child every advantage. In the event, however, Steinberg illegally adopted the baby, Elizabeth or Lisa, to be raised by himself and his live-in partner, Hedda Nussbaum. By the time Lisa went to school, she was a lovely little girl, well liked by her teachers.

But for years she had suffered severe physical abuse at home. At some time on November 1, 1987 Lisa received a blow that rendered her unconscious. For fourteen hours her body lay on the bathroom floor, while neither Steinberg nor Nussbaum called for medical help. For hours, Hedda Nussbaum was alone in the apartment with the unconscious child, stepping over her body every time she went to the bathroom, yet she did nothing. When an ambulance finally arrived, Lisa was in a coma, and she died a couple of days later.[10]

When the case came to trial, Nussbaum and Steinberg were both charged with second-degree murder. It was not a question of who struck the decisive blow: if murder is committed in the course of a felony, all participants in that felony are guilty of murder, regardless of who actually did it, and the long-term violence committed against Lisa was surely a felony. However, Hedda Nussbaum was given total immunity from prosecution in return for testifying against her partner. Almost overnight, the status of victim was transferred from Lisa to Hedda–an adult woman, who was indeed battered badly by Steinberg, but who was nevertheless free to leave him. Lisa had no such capability.

The lawyers for Steinberg were incensed by the solicitude shown Nussbaum, and stated publicly that she herself had struck the fatal blow and was "a flat-out, plain, ordinary, conventional, garden-variety liar." According to an account in the *New York Times*, his attorney (Ira D. London) stated: "She didn't care about that kid, not one bit. Lisa Steinberg was a rival. She got all the attention Hedda thought was hers." London further stated that Nussbaum had struck the blows that killed Lisa and then took revenge on Steinberg by testifying against him.[11] We may never know the truth, but it is just possible that Steinberg beat Hedda because he was revolted by her cruelty. Prominent feminists, including Gloria Steinem and Andrea Dworkin, then set about turning Hedda Nussbaum into a heroine as well as a victim. Dworkin was indignant that sympathy had been spent on Lisa, when it should have gone to her stepmother.[12]

Hedda, who never spent a day in prison, has been redeemed and is doing well for herself. She is in demand on college campuses as a speaker on domestic abuse. Her entry in Wikipedia begins: "Hedda Nussbaum (born circa 1942) is an American domestic-violence survivor and the author of a memoir, Surviving Intimate Terrorism, published in 2005."[13] Not a murderess, not child abuser, but a domestic-violence survivor. What a pity Medea or Lady Macbeth did not have Dworkin and Steinem (who wrote an introduction to Hedda's book) as spin-doctors.

In conclusion, this book is a useful overview of the injustices to men caused by feminism, though it is sometimes superficial. Too much of it consists of points ("items"), which are merely ticked off. Readers may prefer Farrell's earlier book, *The Myth of Male Power*, where he had more space to develop his ideas.

Notes

[1]. Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); *The War Against Boys* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

[2]. Interview in *Playboy*, May 1995.

[3]. Wendy McElroy, *Liberty For Women: Freedom and Feminism in the 21st Century* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

[4]. Warren Farrell interviewed by Steven Svoboda. `http://www.menweb.org/svofarre.htm`

[5]. Peter Breggin, Toxic Psychiatry *(New York: St Martin's Press, 1994);* Talking Back to Ritalin *(Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2001); and* The Ritalin Fact Book_ (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2002). Further information available on his website, www.breggin.com.

[6]. Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 24.

[7]. John Lauritsen, "Rape: Hysteria and Civil Liberties," review of Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, available at `http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/RAPE.HTM`.

[8]. John MacDonald, *Rape: Offenders and Their Victims* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1971).

[9]. See http://www.breggin.com.

[10]. Joyce Johnson, *What Lisa Knew: The Truth and Lies of the Steinberg Case* (New York: Putnam, 1990).

[11]. Ronald Sullivan, "Steinberg Lawyers Say Nussbaum Killed Lisa," *New York Times*, January 20, 1989.

[12]. Andrea Dworkin, "What Battery Really Is," in *Letters from A War Zone: Writings, 1976-1989* (New York: Dutton, 1989).

[13]. "Hedda Nussbaum," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedda_Nussbaum.

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