

The “Good Feminism” Delusion

Carol Iannone

Throughout the history of the U.S.S.R., both before and after Stalin’s crimes were exposed, true believers and fellow travelers would insist that the monstrous oppressions committed in the name of communism were only perversions of, or temporary detours from, the march toward a classless society living in universal brotherhood. The cruel treatment of “class enemies” and of insufficiently devoted Communists by both Stalin and Lenin was, according to these apologists, an aberration, in no way intrinsic to Communist ideology, and never intended by the father of communism, Karl Marx. This self-serving Communist myth was refuted by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973). In one of the most gripping chapters of that book, titled “The Fingers of Aurora,” Solzhenitsyn showed how the foundations of the Gulag were laid at the very dawn of Communist thought, namely in Marx’s approval of forced labor for political indoctrination and re-education. Reading Solzhenitsyn’s account many years ago was a formative experience for me, as I saw more clearly than ever before the power and consequence of ideas.

Another formative influence was

Solzhenitsyn’s shattering Harvard Address of 1979, in which he observed the lamentable weakness of liberalism in confrontation with extremism, an idea I’ve always connected with Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Like the Pequod’s well-meaning but hapless first mate Starbuck, cowering before the determined, demented Captain Ahab, the liberal clinging to his watery humanistic values is no match for the strong, determined radical invested in gaining power at all costs and using it for his own ends.

While the women’s movement has produced no Gulags—not yet, anyway—it clearly has its tyrannical side. Solzhenitsyn’s and Melville’s insights into the moral impotence of liberalism in the face of tyranny therefore help us explain the effortless ascendancy of feminist ideology in the modern world. The radical nature of feminism was evident from early in the contemporary movement. In *An Old Wife’s Tale* (2001), Midge Decter recalls her amazement that mid-twentieth century middle-class American women could have in any way considered themselves “oppressed.” Studying the literature of the early days of the feminist movement, Decter found herself wading in disbelief through obscenity-marked tirades recasting the elevated situation of the contemporary Western female into an experience of victimization and rage.

CAROL IANNONE is editor-at-large of *Academic Questions*, and writes on literature, education, and culture for a variety of publications.

Yet alongside this radical call to class warfare in the guise of sex warfare, there was a very different message. We were constantly being assured that the true feminism was sober and moderate, advancing worthy and unexceptionable demands such as “equal pay for equal work,” and deserving the support of a society dedicated to justice, fairness, and equality. The anger and resentment (“bitchpower”), the belligerence and hyperbole (“patriarchy *requires* violence”), the outrageous comparisons and claims (“a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle”), were rising only from the ideologues, we were told, from the extremes that perhaps any movement features in order to get attention.

Truth to tell, “equal pay for equal work” sometimes seemed the entire content of the moderate agenda, but it managed to gain support for a veritable revolution that in short order reconstituted women as a separate social and political class. It’s possible to imagine that without feminism, things might have turned out better for women and more harmoniously for everyone. The changes in law, policy, habits, customs, and expectations that may have been needed to help women advance into the public sphere would have developed gradually, as a normal part of societal progress, without recourse to a poisonous ideology that separated women’s interests from those of society as a whole, and without rewriting the past as one long history of injustice toward the female sex. Women might have grown more naturally into the expanded roles mandated by changing times (a process which, believe it or not, was underway even before contemporary feminism hit the scene), and thus not have needed to fall back on the politics of “sisterhood” to explain their doubts, setbacks, failures, and hesitations as the result of systemic oppression, false consciousness, and the sense of inferiority inculcated by the dominant culture. Without feminism,

women would not have been tempted to distort the normal dissatisfactions of human existence into an indictment of society, the male sex, and life itself.

And finally, if things had developed in this fashion, women aware of the deleterious consequences that feminism has brought about in so many areas would not still feel obliged to express gratitude for the movement as solely responsible for their deliverance from bondage and darkness into freedom and light.

It might have happened that way, but, tragically, it didn’t. Some think feminism succeeded despite its destructive excesses because its message struck a chord with many women. Yes, when you tell people that they are being denied something that they deserve, that will often win them over. As I came to see it, however, the thing that allowed feminism to get away with it, get away with murdering so much that was good in our collective life, was not that it struck a chord, and not that it spoke home truths, but rather that moderate feminism covered up and made less threatening the lies of radical feminism. The belief in a good, moderate, reasonable feminism protected feminism as such from being exposed and discredited, and thus smoothed the way for the advance and establishment of extreme feminism.

Whatever the secret of its undeserved success, what was once called radical feminism has won. Single motherhood has become an established institution up and down the socioeconomic ladder. Men, manhood, and masculinity are routinely ridiculed, denigrated, and villainized throughout the popular culture. Families grow small and family life even smaller. Many children grow up without fathers and without much parental care at all due to high divorce and the imperative for women to work. Female soldiers kiss their babies goodbye as they go off to war, sometimes to return in body bags or minus limbs. And all of this is seen

as so normal that few outside of conservative circles even think of questioning or criticizing it.

No Clear Dividing Line

According to Christina Hoff Sommers in *Who Stole Feminism?* (1994), the traditional, classically liberal, humanistic, or “equity” feminist “wants for women what she wants for everyone: fair treatment without discrimination.” In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, says Sommers, this meant working within the system to obtain discrete political goals such as winning the vote and changing the laws governing family and property. More recently, it has meant protecting abortion rights. The more radical, or “gender” feminist rejects liberal enlightenment ideals and seeks instead to overthrow or alter a system that she views as a male hegemony in which the male/female relationship is one of oppressor and oppressed. Radical feminism exhorts women to reject “androcentrism”—the notion that what we call reality is actually filtered through a so-called male perspective, in favor of “gynocentrism”—seeing reality through a so-called female point of view.

This neat division of the two types of feminism has sometimes proved helpful. Moderate feminists such as Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, as well as Sommers herself, did noble and important work in repudiating the extremes and offering useful correctives to some of the absurd pronouncements of the radicals, such as that for a man to treat a woman to a romantic dinner is to prostitute her. They also beat back some of the feminist exaggerations regarding anorexia, domestic abuse, date rape, sexual harassment, and job discrimination, not to mention the fallacious propaganda and pseudo-scholarship produced by the ever-burgeoning field of women’s studies. And in the analogy I am drawing between communism

and feminism, I am by no means saying that those who tried to uphold a more reasonable vision of feminism are comparable to the fellow travelers and apologists for the crimes of communism. On the contrary, their efforts were admirable. (And for their pains, they are often smeared and pilloried by the radicals.)

Nevertheless, they have been ineffective in checking the increasing feminization and feminist-ation of our society, because in reality the line between liberalism and radicalism never holds steady, as Solzhenitsyn saw, and what previously might have seemed out of bounds eventually becomes the new normalcy. In my view it would have been better if they had outright condemned the feminist ideology as the source of the excesses rather than trying to rescue the supposed good feminist ideal from the bad feminist result.

For one thing, even when feminists worked within the political system and the Civil Rights movement, their efforts were predicated on the bizarre assertion that female experience is similar to that of blacks. Women, over half the population, thus became a designated “minority,” acquiring the semi-sacred status that now accrues to minorities in our society, and “sexism”—*i.e.*, speech or action which supposedly treated women as inferior, but which in most cases consisted simply of taking account of normal sex differences—became equal to racism as a gross violation of justice. Undifferentiated equality between the sexes, while not always pursued in practical terms, became the bottom line against which women’s progress would now be measured.

Furthermore, even as feminism turned itself into a simulacrum of the Civil Rights movement, that movement radicalized itself, abandoning the demand for equal treatment under the law in favor of special entitlements for “minorities,” now including women, and an ever expanding

sense of grievance over purported inequities not only in the present, but in the past as well.

Similarly, and regardless of one's view of the abortion issue per se, the campaign for "abortion rights" was not just an effort toward some loosening of restrictions through the legislatures, but aimed at "abortion on demand" as an absolute constitutional prerogative. Yet this campaign was conducted within the political system, only to move the system itself toward the extremes.

Another weakness in moderate feminism is that it is largely derivative, crystallizing mainly in reaction to this or that aspect of radical feminism. It thus remains too nebulous to offer its own positive vision and direction for women's lives, and was therefore bound to be overtaken by the more aggressive, content-rich vision of the radicals. As Sommers puts it, moderate feminism "offer[s] women a liberal version of consciousness raising whose aim was to awaken them to new possibilities of individual self-fulfillment." The problem with the ideal of self-fulfillment guided by individual choice is that it does not help women see or find *what* the good is that they ought to choose. People need vision, definition, guidelines in order to give shape to their lives. Such guidelines come from a teleological understanding of our nature and its best fulfillment, and this, manifestly, is something that "individual choice" liberalism can never offer.

Meanwhile, the more convicted radicals actively seek to force society into achieving parity between men and women in every sphere of life, driving more and more women into the workplace, relegating the homemaking and childrearing roles to paid care, and making women as independent of men as possible. In response, the moderates are often reduced to ridiculing the silliness or extremism of the radical's demands, which demands nevertheless move society toward at least

their partial fulfillment.

For example, few ordinary human beings will subscribe to the extreme feminist idea that gender has no biological basis and is entirely socially constructed. Yet we now tolerate and even support same-sex bathrooms in student dormitories across the land, a development that would have shocked and appalled most women not that long ago. Startling reminders that this now routine arrangement can still cause offense occasionally emerge. Wendy Shalit has written of the coercion and invasion of privacy she experienced in her Williams College dorm in *A Return to Modesty* (1999), and Tom Wolfe's novel of contemporary college life, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (2004), describes the heroine's horrified embarrassment when she is forced to use such facilities.

Yet other points at which the moderates feed the demands of the radicals arise from certain general principles of "classical feminism," as delineated by Katherine Kersten in "What Do Women Want? A Conservative Feminist Manifesto" (1991). One of these principles is that women have been and continue to be the victims of historical injustice, an outlook that will inevitably keep women at odds with all of history and tradition.

Another of these principles is that men and women share "a universal human nature conferring inalienable rights," and that, therefore, "the application of uniform standards of justice and equality to both sexes is morally imperative." While this is true in certain delimited areas, it immediately runs into the problem of how male/female differences can result in different outcomes for men and women in, say, the workplace. The moderates must backtrack, allowing for statistical disparities of outcome based on choice and ability, not by positively asserting an essential truth about life, however, but only by adopting a kind of common sensical default position.

Thus, for example, the moderates may defend fire departments from charges of discrimination for failing to employ a sufficient proportion of females, but they will not attack the very idea that fire departments should even be expected to recruit, test, train, and hire female firefighters, so long as a handful of women believe that to be their avenue of fulfillment. While the moderate position remains weak, that is, that men and women are the same except when they're different, the radicals are once again firm, consistent, and completely unabashed in their vision, as Gloria Steinem showed when asked if at some point feminist activism might no longer be necessary. When Congress is fifty-fifty male-female, she said, when half of CEOs are women, and so forth, setting by implication a standard of total parity impossible to reach and yet under which our society will continue to labor, indicted for ongoing injustice against the female sex.

Furthermore, by holding for the general idea of a universal human nature that transcends sex, the moderates unwittingly and ironically help stoke the extreme vision. As Carolyn Graglia points out in *Domestic Tranquility* (1998), egalitarianism under the law, as, for example, in no-fault divorce provisions, can deprive women of the necessary supports that sustain them as homemakers and thus fuel the rush into the workplace. And in the arena of sexual relations, this concept of equality translates into the idea that men ought to be able to treat women as they treat men, and that women ought to be able to behave as men do. But, because in reality women are not like men, such behavior will inevitably be hurtful to many women; and this in turn will support the radical feminist notion of male brutality and oppression, which in turn will necessitate a panoply of new protections for women in the form of speech codes, sensitivity workshops, sexual harassment policy, and so forth.

Thus in *The Morning After* (1993), Katie Roiphe blasts the campus feminists' excessive protectiveness toward women and their draconian controls on men, but she doesn't realize that it is the model of equal sexual freedom that she supports that produces such strictures.

Allan Bloom memorably made the same point in *The Closing of the American Mind*, (1987). Bloom pointed out how sexual liberation produced a veritable jungle in which many young women were misused and hurt, leading to the demand for a regime of bureaucratic rules governing sexual relations. Thus the liberationist, everyone-is-free-and-equal type of sexual liberalism led directly to its own opposite, the rigid, politically correct type of sexual liberalism, in which permission for every erotic step forward must be secured ahead of time.

Once again, though, observing the horrendous sexual warfare and coarsening of womanhood that arises from making men and women equal and the same with regard to sex, the moderates will hasten to register their objections, demurrals, and qualifications, but their efforts to define the differences in women's sexuality are too minimal and come too late to halt the ongoing animosity and vulgarity that characterizes much sexual interaction today, or to forestall the PC sexual tyranny. The horse was out of the barn, the genie out of the bottle, the toothpaste out of the tube, with the first trumpet call to "equality" sounded by feminists of all stripes. Women demanding their share of sexual liberation was an aspect of the movement from the first, and it rapidly passed into the popular culture, as evidenced in such creations as the vulgar television series, *Sex and the City*.

Likewise, in the theoretical and undefined space of purported male/female parity, feminists mock the traditional relationship of men and women, decrying the need for women to cater to the "male

ego,” to serve as “sex objects,” and to supply domestic wants. This is surely very satisfying to many women. Trouble is, that without the support of women, many men fail to fulfill their manhood, become insecure, prove unreliable, remain immature, and leave women lamenting male inadequacy. This in turn leads to the growth of a larger and larger population of unmarried women who look to the state rather than to a husband to be their provider and protector, and also helps contribute to the feminization of poverty that feminists will then take up as yet another example of society’s injustice toward women. Similarly, women mock marriage and make female independence and “choice” primary, so many men, taking in the message that women don’t need them, leave their wives for greener pastures and younger females, thus fulfilling the feminist notion of men as bastards.

Moreover, feminism in general, radicals in the forefront, moderates alongside, has managed to convince society that becoming a woman is harder than becoming a man and so to devote enormous resources to the effort. The truth is the opposite. Becoming a man is the real ordeal, as most cultures have recognized, and therefore a sane society would devote substantially more attention to the development of men into manhood than to the development of women into womanhood, if only to ensure women ultimate satisfaction in their relationships. Reversing this basic reality, our feminist dominated culture leaves boys and young men without moral support, without guidance, without models, without ideals, while pumping girls and young women full of the most fantastic and thoroughly obnoxious sense of self-regard. As a result, our society has filled with confident young Amazons striding half naked in the public square, while the young men slink invisibly about, often dressed like overgrown kids.

This female centric approach has had

particularly devastating effects in the black community. With all the emphasis on aiding and empowering the female sex apart from the male, black women are flourishing, while black men languish. To a lesser extent, this has been true of whites as well.

(And now, startlingly, the Independent Women’s Forum, a more or less moderate feminist organization, plans to bring this unbalanced approach to the Muslim world as well, in a project aimed at demanding basic human rights for women there. This in a culture where the concept of basic human rights as we know it scarcely exists at all. On the other hand, the IWF has to be given credit for at least taking note of the often miserable treatment of women in Islam. The feminist movement as a whole has studiously and hypocritically avoided this subject almost entirely, as Phyllis Chesler illuminates in her 2005 book, *The Death of Feminism*.)

Overly confident men may boast of how they are not “threatened” by “strong women,” or not offended by the stupefying degradation and vilification of men in the culture today. But the truth is, without some emphasis on the need for a positive affinity between the sexes, taking its substance from the differences and complementarities of their natures, there is nothing that can resist the social mandate for men to become more like women and women more like men. In *The Language Police* (2003), Diane Ravitch writes of the quasi-totalitarian prohibition on “stereotyping” in school textbooks, but what this really amounts to is “reverse stereotyping,” in which men and boys must be made more passive and women and girls more active. By nature men tend to be more dominant, but without social support and guidance, they will gladly shuck off that burden and become “metrosexual,” letting women take the lead and finding other outlets for their masculinity, sometimes undesirable. As a result, the ascendant sex these days is

female, though it is a female sex shorn of its graces.

To get a glimpse of a mode of sexual interaction different from the unhappy, competitive antagonism that pervades contemporary society, here is a snapshot retrieved from the mists of time. Virginia Woolf, feminist icon, often displayed a rich and empathetic understanding of the relationship between the sexes. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), after perusing a number of biographies of famous men, Woolf

began thinking of all these great men who have for one reason or another admired, sought out, lived with, confided in, made love to, written of, trusted in, and shown what can only be described as some need of and dependence on some persons of the opposite sex.... But we should wrong these illustrious men very greatly if we insisted that they got nothing from these alliances but comfort, flattery and the pleasures of the body. What they got, it is obvious, was something that their own sex was unable to supply; and it would not be rash, perhaps, to define it further, without quoting the doubtless rhapsodical words of the poets, as some stimulus, some renewal of creative power which is in the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow. He would open the door of the drawing-room or nursery, I thought, and find her among her children perhaps or with a piece of embroidery on her knee—at any rate, the centre of some different order and system of life, and the contrast between this world and his own, which might be the law courts or the House of Commons, would at once refresh and invigorate; and there would follow, even in the simplest talk, such a natural difference of opinion that the dried ideas in him would be fertilized anew; and the sight of her creating in a different medium from his own would so quicken creative power that insensibly his sterile mind would begin to plot again.

Woolf goes on to hope that this creative power of womanhood not be lost even as women begin to create for more public consumption.

The Conservative View

In contrast to the distortions of the radical vision and the tenuousness of the liberal vision, each of which in its own way considers women as a separate entity and fails to address the need for complementarity between the sexes, a truly conservative view holds to an idea of society as an organic whole, built on principles rising from an understanding of the totality of human nature, male and female, and reaching upward to a transcendent truth uniting them biologically and spiritually. Our natures are meant to be perfected in society, as Aristotle posited, our sense of good refined by the deepest understanding of man as a being of mind, heart, and soul. Individual rights are a vital part but not the only part of what makes a good society, and “equality” is not necessarily the answer to every question of existence. We need to redeem the personal from the feminist political and keep the political in its place.

In his essay, “Equality” (1943), C. S. Lewis deplores the way that the concept of equality has come to characterize all aspects of the male-female relationship in modern times. “Have as much equality as you please—the more the better—in our marriage laws,” he recommends, “but at some level consent to inequality, nay, delight in inequality, is an erotic necessity.” He cites a contemporary female author who writes of “women so fostered on a defiant idea of equality that the mere sensation of the male embrace rouses an undercurrent of resentment.” This results in marriages being “shipwrecked.”

Lewis ventures further in what he calls “a little plain speaking”:

This is the tragi-comedy of the modern woman; taught by Freud to consider the act of love the most important thing in life, and then inhibited by feminism from that internal surrender which alone can make it a complete emotional success. Merely for the

sake of her own erotic pleasure, to go no further, some degree of obedience and humility seems to be (normally) necessary on the woman's part.

Would the moderate feminists, whose main focus is on the equality of individuals, be able to support Lewis's view of sexual relations, based in primary sexual difference? Unlikely. Yes, they're not anti-male, but, being principally focused on the level of individual rights and choice rather than on the essences that constitute the male and female human nature, they could never actively embrace a vision such as Lewis's, without asserting in the interests of equity the now expected retort that the contrary is true as well, that is, that the sexuality of men could also be normally fulfilled in this manner. To be able to consider such ideas as Lewis's would require a complete divestment of the distorted feminist picture of human nature.

Learning the Hard Way

I started out believing myself a moderate feminist but found myself colliding with radicals at every turn. First, there was an abrasive job interview and follow-up experience with a pair of radical feminists who had their liberal department chairman well in hand. Then, in my early teaching career, I saw how one or two radical students could intimidate a whole classroom of moderates. Now and again, when I gave talks critical of feminism to college groups, young women would come up afterward to whisper that they agreed with me but couldn't say so aloud for fear of the radical feminists in their midst. Then, when I looked at the rise of feminist criticism for my doctoral dissertation, I was dismayed to see there also the occasional reasonableness and good sense overtaken by stridency, reductiveness, and politicization. I thought, if they are doing this to literature, what will they do

to the rest of the culture.

The same patterns obtained with feminism and literature as with feminism and society in general. The moderate approach, which consisted simply of taking a closer look at female characters and female authors, was not enough to justify a whole new area of study, since whatever was genuinely fresh or insightful or necessary could easily be incorporated into the extant body of literary criticism, and did not need even to be labeled feminist. Indeed, a fine book such as Elizabeth Hardwick's *Seduction and Betrayal* (1974) was no doubt a response to the broad mandate for a feminist criticism, taking as its purview some of the outstanding novels employing the seduction plot, but her interpretations were quite traditional. If there were going to be "women's studies" and "feminist criticism" as separate categories, something much more definitive and aggressive was called for: a politics of injustice, exclusion, and oppression—the idea that literature has reduced female characters to oppressive "stereotypes" (by which the feminists often meant the way women are, rather than the way the feminists want them to be); that traditional literary criticism was replete with male bias necessitating a female approach or "gynocritics" (which basically meant being free from traditional critical standards); that there had been a massive neglect of women writers who now deserved to be prominently read and studied (resulting in the elevation of much lesser writers to undeserved eminence).

Extremism Always Part of the Picture

Eventually, when I came upon Solzhenitsyn, I felt I had the answer. Some systems of thought, like communism, feminism, even liberalism itself, may have certain idealistic aspects but carry within themselves the seeds of extremism and radicalism—a fury at the contingencies and inevitable inequalities of life itself and the

drive to overturn the existing order of the world, thus eventuating in seriously corrosive outcomes.

And here is the forbidden truth that must become unforbidden if we are ever to free ourselves from the succubus of radical feminism: There never was a good feminism. Even the supposedly sober nineteenth-century feminist movement commended as an ideal of benign liberal feminism, itself stated principles that if followed consistently could lead to nothing other than the destruction of all existing institutions. What prevented nineteenth century feminism from turning into the monstrosity of today is that the larger society was less liberal, less liberationist, and less guilt-ridden, and thus held it in check.

True, the Declaration of Sentiments signed at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, launching the first women's movement in our nation's history, is not written in imitation of Marx, but of Jefferson. Echoing the Declaration of Independence, the document lists some specific, rational grievances, particularly the denial of the franchise. But its adoption of the language of the Declaration of Independence turns out to be spectacularly inapposite, since, in casting the entire male sex as Great Britain and the entire female sex as the American Colonies who are seeking to cast off any connection with the oppressor country forever, the document denies the very possibility of normal co-existence between men and women. Thus, it proclaims that the "history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." And suddenly striking a quasi-Marxian note after all, it portrays the curious willingness of woman to cooperate in her own "social and religious degradation" as a type of false consciousness imposed on woman by man, who has "endeavor[ed] in every way that he could to destroy her

confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life."

It is true that the Seneca Falls Declaration, like the Declaration of Independence, and unlike modern feminism, bases itself on the laws of "nature" and the "Creator." But, here again the appearance of moderation produced by such language turns into its opposite, repudiating all values and understandings derived from the totality of human nature, male and female, as well as from experience, history, and tradition. Thus a woman's right to absolute equality as delineated by the Declaration is described as "a self-evident truth growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature," and any "custom or authority adverse to it" is "to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind." It becomes clear that the revered feminist founders in 1848 were using the revered Locke and Jefferson to sound the notes of a personal liberationism and anti-culturalism every bit as radical as that of the feminists of the late twentieth century.

When we jump forward from the dawn of the nineteenth century women's movement to the dawn of the contemporary women's movement, namely the publication of Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), we find another "moderate" icon who in fact is as radical as they come. Friedan's book is marked by outrageous assertions, particularly its comparison of suburban housewives of the 1950s and early 1960s to the zombified inmates of concentration camps, and its adamant insistence that American girls be collectively educated out of any desire to devote themselves to family life. "It is urgent to understand how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, nonexistence, nothingness, in women," Friedan asserts, portraying the homemaking role as a form of death-in-

life. “There are aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of the self or ‘I’ without which a human being, man or woman, is not truly alive.”

And then comes the concentration camps comparison:

In a sense that is not as farfetched as it sounds, the women who “adjust” as housewives, who grow up wanting to be “just a housewife,” are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps—and the millions more who refused to believe that the concentration camps existed.

The extended metaphor goes on for some length and winds up at, why, genocide, of course:

If we continue to produce millions of young mothers who stop their growth and education short of identity, we are committing quite simply genocide, starting with the mass burial of American women and ending with the progressive dehumanization of their sons and daughters.

And the preventative measures must therefore be universal, thoroughgoing, revolutionary, and indeed totalitarian, aimed at the total reconstruction of female nature:

A massive attempt must be made by educators and parents—and ministers, magazine editors, manipulators, guidance counselors—to stop the early-marriage movement, stop girls from growing up wanting to be just a housewife.

We should not have been surprised some years later to learn that Betty Friedan

was hardly the typical suburban housewife she presented herself as in her book, but had been a Communist activist for much of her earlier adulthood. As David Horowitz writes,

Her famous description of America’s suburban family household as “a comfortable concentration camp” in *The Feminine Mystique* therefore had more to do with her Marxist hatred for America than with any of her actual experience as a housewife or mother.

Perhaps she was also taking a cue from Friedrich Engels who objected to the private household and family life as a replica of class oppression, with the husband as bourgeois and the wife as proletariat, and saw women’s emancipation as identical with entry into the workplace.

An amusing if rather unhappy coda to the story of Friedan and feminism takes place years after the publication of her book. Divorced and living alone in New York City, she awoke feeling sick, only to find that there were no neighbors, specifically no female neighbors at home who could get her medicine or bring her food. All the women were at work. That quiet apartment house, emptied of women, deprived of their care-giving and life-giving qualities, symbolizes the evisceration of our culture by feminism.

The only way back from the “Silent Spring,” the empty private space, that feminism has imposed on our time is to recognize that feminism itself—not merely “radical” feminism—is the problem. And to recognize this, we must cast off the delusions of “moderate” feminism at last.