

# Correspondence

## "Man on Women"

To the Editors: If ever there was a lot of rot and rubbish published on any subject, Benjamin Barber's "Man on Women" (April and May issues) is it. And it belongs where rot and rubbish are usually put, in the trashbin, rather than in the pages of a journal purportedly of mature and serious thought.

Throughout the two instalments of fifteen pages and some 15,000 words Mr. Barber never once gives any evidence that he can think, reason or even write with any degree of clarity. Confused is obviously what he is, at least in this domain. So confused that he has faint grasp of the meaning of elementary words. (He seems to believe "oppressed" means persecuted, for instance.) He heaps false comparisons on top of trite clichés on top of strings of clumsily worded relative clauses in his effort to persuade women they have no real grounds for complaint, life is like that all over, think of the countless millions whose lot has been or is far far worse.

Further, he adds insult to injury in harping forever on white, middle-class American women as though they alone of all the women in the world consider they are abused and put upon. How provincial can you be, Mr. Barber? The "feminist movement," which Mr. Barber mistakenly uses synonymously with the Women's Liberation movement in the USA, exists in all nations, in all societies, among women of all colors and circumstances. A movement, that is, toward seeking a fuller measure of equality as human beings. In some cases, even recognition as such. To achieve this requires total revision of man's *seeing* of women and not merely a few minor reforms here and there as sops to placate them.

The fact is that Mr. Barber, like many another man who fancies he esteems women, is so behind the times as to seem doddering. He is stuck in the dust and cobwebs of the nineteenth century, mouthing palaver about how "no civilization can survive . . . unless the human trinity of woman, man and child sanctifies its spirit," and clinging to the Marxist accusation that it is "capitalist mentality" that "has produced corrupt marital partnerships," etc. etc. ad nauseam.

Honestly, Mr. Barber, wake up! Here we are only twenty-seven years this side of the twenty-first century. When a lot of things are going to happen men never dreamed of, but women have.

Florence Ponce de Leon  
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To the Editors: I read Benjamin Barber's essay and, to put it simply, found it the best critical appraisal of the radical feminist movement that I have seen. It had a restraint that is valuable and rare. Although he half-apologizes for his existentialist homilies, he need not—it is these verities that create the anxieties that, sadly, too often in radical movements have driven some to erect their anti-Christ, so that there is a palpable target who, if eliminated, would allow for transcendence of human fate. And this aspect is rarely kept in focus in the writings in the area.

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To the Editors: On Benjamin R. Barber's "Man on Women." Whether he believes it or not, women are oppressed in Western industrial societies. My Webster's says: *exploit* — utilize selfishly; *oppress* — treat tyrannically; *tyrannize* — unrestrained exercise of power (if you dissent openly you're dead — my addition). Tyranny is unrestrained selfish utilization.

Most women in Western industrial society are not being tyrannized over, but some are—what about women dying from abortions

every year? But women are utilized selfishly by men who are petty tyrants. By the same definition, most blacks in Western industrial societies are not being tyrannized over or more would be dead than Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and Malcolm X (3).

Benjamin Barber is bending over backwards to concede feminists every complaint but oppression. Now why? So he doesn't have to take them seriously?

Let me cite Shirley Chisholm, a black, who says she had more trouble as a woman than a black. Many black women do feel more oppressed as blacks than as women, but they may change their minds when they're behind their men too long in black solidarity.

Groups waste a lot of time in trying to put down other groups that claim they're more oppressed than they. Some feminists are guilty of this.

"What victim of racism or economic oppression can simply decide to be free?" Barber says. But what about sexism? If a child is conditioned to be a bride and *nothing else* by six, how can she decide to be free at twenty and seek a multiple life? It's true men suffer the agonies of the human condition, but nobody is forcing them to be daddies and *nothing else*. This is what sexism is all about; for girls their reproductive system determines their life—they haven't got to the human condition yet to agonize over. Who conditions a boy at six to be a daddy? It even sounds silly. The human condition has some advantages we'd like to have just as you men do.

It's not the eradication of sexuality that is the point. The point is sexual differentiation being used as a limit to human development. (But then you have agony, according to Barber. We'd like some agony for a change, instead of being defined as a chick, a bunny, an ass, meat, doll, baby, peach, tomato—this is dehumanizing and numbing.)

One point where we do agree is that feminists overromanticize

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