

into existence is *always* a serious harm” (Benatar 2006, 1, in Overall, 96; emphasis in Overall). The main argument behind Benatar’s claim is this:

Although the good things in one’s life make it go better than it otherwise would have gone, one could not have been deprived by their absence if one had not existed. Those who never exist cannot be deprived. However, by coming into existence one does suffer quite serious harms that could not have befallen one had one not come into existence.” (Benatar 2006, 1, in Overall, 96)

In a set of several arguments, Overall shows that Benatar’s theory is “fatally flawed” (97) and does not establish the strong argument against all procreation that it claims to do. She also shows that Benatar’s theory has negative implications for women and could have detrimental effects for women and girls were it to be accepted and widely adopted. Overall argues, for instance, that Benatar’s theory implies that women’s reproductive labor produces bad consequences. As she explains, “the idea that it is better in every case never to have been implies that women’s reproductive labor in pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, and even rearing children contributes to the accumulation of net harm on this planet” (Overall, 115). Downgrading procreation in this way is unlikely to elevate women’s status, she points out, especially in societies where women’s status is centered primarily on their role as child-bearers. Indeed, Overall is concerned to show that Benatar’s theory relies upon misogynistic presuppositions insofar as it implies that one of women’s primary social contributions is a liability. Would this view, she asks, if widely endorsed, lead to an increase in the rate of infanticide of girls or to assaults on pregnant women?

Overall identifies the utilitarian Principle of Procreative Beneficence (PPB)—whose overtly ableist presuppositions would have dire consequences for the diversity of the human population were they widely endorsed and adopted—as another example of a mainstream theoretical approach to the ethics of procreation that has gender-specific negative implications for women who reproduce, although the principle has been promoted and discussed as if it were gender-neutral. Until now, that is, the adverse implications for women (including for women’s autonomy) of the PPB have gone unrecognized and unremarked upon. Advanced by Julian Savulescu and Guy Kahane, the PPB articulates “the moral obligation to have the best children.” As Savulescu explains it, “Couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information” (Savulescu 2001, 415, in Overall, 125). Overall points out that despite the fact that Savulescu never refers specifically to women, but rather to “couples” or “single reproducers,” the PPB would put greater onus on women than on men to facilitate achievement of the ideal (or “best”) race of humans that the PPB is designed to ensure. As she notes, the achievement of procreative beneficence, in Savulescu’s sense, necessitates the use of preimplantation genetic diagnosis after in vitro fertilization (Overall, 125). Every prospective mother would be required to undergo the expensive, invasive, and possibly fatal procedures that these technologies involve. Furthermore, “Procreative Beneficence implies couples should employ genetic tests for non-disease traits in selecting which child to bring into existence, and that we should allow selection for non-disease genes in some cases *even if this maintains or increases social inequality* (Savulescu 2001, 415, in Overall 125-26; my emphasis). Overall asks, who is the “we” to whom Savulescu refers? And what non-disease traits are “we” to

select against? Savulescu and Kahane have in fact supplied an incomplete guide of characteristics for “us” to select against that includes clinical depression, autism, negative affect, Asperber’s syndrome, cognitive and physical abilities, personality traits, propensity to addiction, and sexual orientation (Savulescu and Kahane, 2009, 276, in Overall, 126). In short, the reach of the PPB, according to which certain allegedly natural characteristics should be selected (viz. as the consequence of de-selecting others) in order to produce the “best” offspring, is potentially limitless. Indeed, because the reach of the PPB is potentially without limits, it should never be advanced as the “best” reason to have children.

Notes

1. From 1993–2006, Overall also wrote a weekly feminist column entitled “In Other Words” for the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, the daily newspaper of Kingston, Canada, where she lives and works, and wrote a column entitled “It’s All Academic” from 2008–2011 for *University Affairs*, Canada’s academic magazine.

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The Second Sexism: Discrimination Against Men and Boys

David Benatar (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). 287 pages. \$29.95. ISBN 978-0470674512.

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This book is a defense of the claim that men are the victims of sex discrimination. David Benatar terms this phenomenon “the second sexism.” Over the past thirty years, sex discrimination against women has been discussed widely in the scholarly and popular discourse of many societies. Sexism against women, which he terms “the first sexism,” has been taken seriously as a form of social injustice. Benatar agrees that wrongful discrimination against women is a persistent problem, and he celebrates that “great inroads have been made against anti-female sexism in many parts of the world” (175). *The Second Sexism* draws attention to the overlooked phenomenon of sexism against men. Benatar argues that people who value gender equality should oppose wrongful discrimination on the basis of a person’s sex whether the victim is male or female.

The Second Sexism includes seven substantive chapters. In the first chapter, Benatar explains why disadvantage on the basis of being classified as male amounts to sexism. The concept of disadvantage is the foundational concept in his case that sexism against men exists. Disadvantage and discrimination are distinct concepts, and not all disadvantage and discrimination is wrongful. Benatar argues that discrimination is wrong only “when people are treated differently without there being a relevant difference between the people that justifies the differential treatment” (4). In his view, most but not all

disadvantages of being male or female are the result of wrongful discrimination.

In the second chapter, Benatar presents a range of detailed examples of disadvantages that only men experience. For example, in many countries men are conscripted and forced to serve in combat roles on the basis of their sex. Boys experience disadvantage by being more likely to receive corporeal punishment. Men are more likely than women to be the targets of violence on account of their sex. Sexual assault against men is more likely not to be taken as seriously as sexual assault against women. The bodily privacy of men is not given as much respect as is afforded to women. Benatar defends these claims with empirical research and identifies clearly which conclusions are well established and which hypotheses are contested because it is not clear how to interpret the existing data. Disadvantage and discrimination in education is an area in which his conclusions are tentative. That statistics show that more men drop out of high school and more women receive college degrees does not prove that either men or women experience disadvantage on the basis of their sex.

Chapter three focuses on the beliefs about men and the differences between men and women that many people contend justify differential treatment. These views include normative beliefs about how men and boys ought to behave and descriptive beliefs about sex differences. In chapter four, he returns to the specific examples of male disadvantage identified in chapter two and argues that most of these cases of male disadvantage are the result of sexist beliefs, social practices, and public policies.

In chapter five, Benatar responds to objections to the specific examples of male disadvantage and to his thesis in general. He first articulated his view that a second sexism exists in a 2003 article in *Social Theory and Practice*. The criticisms and the counterarguments offered by Carol Quinn and Rosemarie Tong, James Sterba, Kenneth Clatterbaugh, and Tom Digby in response articles that were also published in the issue receive detailed consideration in this part of the book.

In chapter six, Benatar examines the issue of affirmative action. He defends policies that aim “to remove impediments to equality of opportunity,” but he rejects the policy of showing preference to job candidates of one sex in professions in which that sex is underrepresented (235). In his view, sex-based affirmative action policies constitute sex discrimination. A job candidate’s sex is irrelevant to his or her capability to carry out job-related responsibilities. Employers should hire the best possible person for the position. In chapter seven, Benatar examines the ancillary questions whether feminism discriminates against men and whether men are worse off than women.

Why might someone reject the position that men experience sexism or wrongful discrimination? Benatar presents and responds to many objections to his interpretation of evidence and to his arguments. I consider three challenges.

First, many scholars do not wish to characterize discrimination against men as sexism. Marilyn Frye argues that sexism exists only when discrimination on the basis of one’s sex is systemic, and Catharine MacKinnon maintains that the primary feature of systemic sexism is that the meaning of being classified as a member of one sex is that one exists in a relation of subordination to another group of human beings. Kenneth Clatterbaugh, James Sterba, and Tom Digby denied in their 2003 responses that discrimination against men constitutes sexism. Benatar rejects definitions of sexism that require wrongful discrimination to reflect a system of gender inequality that involves domination, subordination, and oppression. He argues that this definition of sexism is stipulative and does not

reflect the use of the word in ordinary language. Benatar defines sexism as the activity of treating people differently on the basis of sex without a justifiable reason. In his view, this definition better shows why “prejudicial and discriminatory ‘isms’” are evaluated negatively (8). He urges readers to compare the similar structure of his definition of sexism to the common understanding of racism and Peter Singer’s conception of “speciesism.” Racism is the differential treatment of people on account of their race; speciesism describes the practice of valuing human life over non-human animal life on the basis of arbitrary and irrelevant differences.

The second challenge stems from the belief that the interests of women and girls are more important than those of men. Benatar terms people who hold this belief “partisan feminists.” Partisan feminists are interested primarily in advancing the position of women. “Since its goal is the advancement of female interests irrespective of whether this promotes or compromises equality, it will sometimes advance the interests of women even when this is unfair to men” (240). On his view, many feminists claim to be concerned with gender equality but actually “slip into a partisan form of feminism” (14). Benatar does not go as far as Janet Halley, who catalogs the harms of feminist theory and practice in *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*.¹ He simply exhorts feminists to assess carefully their efforts to correct unfair discrimination against women by eliminating the unearned advantages enjoyed by men. Proponents of gender equality for women should be consistent in their defense of equality by being “willing to diminish women’s relative position when that is necessary to promote equality” (240).

The third challenge is issued by people whom Benatar describes as “gender role conservatives.” Gender role conservatives defend traditional gender roles. They believe that there are differences between men and women and that social policies and practices should reflect these anatomical, physiological, and biological facts. Descriptive beliefs about the differential capabilities of men and women justify normative beliefs about personal behavior and the proper allocation of responsibilities. Benatar responds by presenting alternative interpretations of what accounts for the biological differences between the sexes and by undermining the purported normative implications of these differences.

What implications follow if Benatar’s thesis about sexism against men succeeds? People who are committed to gender equality and are moved by his argument should, as a matter of principle, consider the second sexism equally pernicious and as no less worthy of eradication than the first sexism. “The first step to taking the second sexism seriously is to acknowledge its very existence” (254). Public recognition that anti-male sexism exists will confer legitimacy on research into male disadvantage and attempts to modify policies and practices so that men and women will enjoy both formal and substantive equality.

The Second Sexism has a number of shortcomings. I identify two. First, Benatar’s response to gender role conservatives is weak. Philosopher Harvey Mansfield recently devoted a monograph to defending the thesis that women should be expected to be “womanly” and that men should be expected to be “manly.”² Instead of directly addressing sophisticated defenses of traditional gender roles, Benatar points his readers to the work of others: “Feminists have written volumes effectively refuting defenses of traditional gender roles. There is little point in rehearsing those arguments” (173). He brackets the questions whether sex is ever a morally relevant feature in specifying rights, liberties, and opportunities and whether working to eliminate the first and the second sexism will produce a gender-neutral society. Benatar should have taken

up these questions because the legitimacy of the arguments offered by Mansfield and other gender role conservatives depend on the answers.

Second, Benatar's presentation of the book's substantive content is strangely distant. Detachment from emotions and interests is uncharacteristic of the tone of feminist scholarship on sexism. He claims that *The Second Sexism* "is not a work of armchair philosophy" because he appeals to "facts about the world" (19). I suspect that many readers will find off-putting his philosophical methodology and that this judgment will likely undermine their willingness to consider him competent to make knowledge claims about sex discrimination. Although Benatar makes extensive use of observational data, he does not convey to readers a sense that men experience themselves as being the victims of sexism. For example, personal accounts of experiences with which female readers have no familiarity, such as registering for the United States Selective Service System, would be enlightening. Although we should not consider first-person accounts the final word on the matter, Benatar's claim that wrongful discrimination against men exists should be echoed in the narratives of men. Readers would likely find Benatar's philosophical arguments more persuasive if he included the testimony of men describing the experience of wrongful discrimination on the basis of their sex as a feature of their lives. In recent years men have become increasingly comfortable speaking about the ways in which the male gender-role stereotype is constraining. Yet stereotypical beliefs are distinct from discriminatory policies. The absence of familiar narratives framed in the language of discrimination lends support to the intuition that men are not the victims of sexism.

Benatar offers many keen comments in *The Second Sexism*, and I find that many of his arguments are well founded. I agree that men experience wrongful discrimination on the basis of their sex in many spheres of human activity. Versions of feminism that do not permit recognition of wrongful discrimination against men to be taken seriously fail to reflect the norm that all human beings have equal moral status. I also share Benatar's sense that making general statements about whether one sex is oppressed or subordinated does not advance the cause of gender equality. "[P]ower is spectral rather than binary," he notes (9). A social and political order comprises many domains of activity, practices, and patterns of behavior and belief. A judgment about the relative distribution of advantages and disadvantages is not synonymous with the claim that members of one group are dominated by the other.

I recommend *The Second Sexism* to scholars who investigate gender relations, and I urge academic feminists to take Benatar's thesis seriously and to respond to it with respect rather than with disbelief or derision. Evaluating the strength of his arguments is a welcome opportunity to reflect on whether feminist premises and conclusions have become dogmas. Benatar's book raised my hackles on many occasions, but it also provoked reflection. Students enrolled in introductory level courses in women's studies and in feminist philosophy would also benefit from engaging with his positions. Benatar's rigorous argumentation would complement personal narratives or sociological descriptions of the different ways in which boys and girls are reared and men and women are treated in specific domains of social life. In my view, raising awareness in the current generation of the possibility that boys and men can be the victims of sexism will facilitate an increased public recognition of gender-based harm and an enriched public discourse on how to achieve gender equality.

Notes

1. Janet Halley, *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
2. Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (Yale University Press).

The Ethics of Gender-Specific Disease

Mary Ann G. Cutter (New York: Routledge, 2012). 151 pp. \$125.00. ISBN 978-0-415-50997-8.

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Philosophers familiar with research ethics may recall that medical research performed on men was once used as the basis of treatment decisions for women. The corresponding lack of research on how women experience diseases shared by both men and women—heart disease, diabetes, asthma, etc.—is often cited by feminist bioethicists as an example of the classic assumption that "man is the measure of all things," by which we really do mean "man." As Lyster et al. note, though progress has been made on this front, pregnant women are still generally excluded from research to their detriment and treatment of conditions in pregnancy is often poorly justified.

Mary Ann Cutter's recent book addresses the ethical implications of just such gender-specific diseases. By this, she does not intend only the classic examples of prostate cancer and uterine cancer, but also gender-specific manifestations of diseases shared by both men and women. However, she emphasizes diseases that primarily affect women. Her study therefore focuses on "women's health care."

A preliminary note is in order regarding terminology. Like many in philosophy and the larger world, Cutter at first seems to conflate sex and gender: many of the conditions she refers to as "gender-specific" are commonly referred to as "sex-specific." One need only think of effective drag, in which a member of one sex is able to convincingly be taken as a member of the opposite sex, to be reminded that gender—man, woman, or gender queer—is distinct from the biological concept of sex, which itself is not a simple binary. However, unlike many who conflate these notions in their language use, Cutter uses this to very deliberately include both biological and cultural differences in her analysis. Using "gender" in this way allows her to apply concept of "gender-specific disease" not only to potential neurological differences in how depression manifests in men versus women but also to cultural differences in how it manifests due to gender stereotypes. As she puts it, "this inquiry focuses . . . on *gender or sex*" as an important variable in research and treatment (9). She proves well aware of arguments for the sex-gender distinction and those critiquing it, some of which argued for "feminine gender identities as expressing a social standpoint defining the lives and possibilities of women" (9–10). Cutter ultimately adopts Young's position and "retains the categories of gender and sex in the context of gender-specific medicine" (11). Cutter's analysis in the book as a whole "calls into question the possibility of arriving at an unequivocal unambiguous sociological account of gender and biological account of sex, as well as a binary account of woman and man, and female and male" (11). This account of sex and gender allows her to address the ethics of how gender-specific diseases are conceived and handled.

From her own experiences as a patient and caregiver, as well as her training in philosophy of medicine and applied ethics