

The Revolt of the Primitive—An Inquiry into the Roots of Political Correctness

by Howard S. Schwartz, Praeger, Westport, 2001

reviewed by Lou Marinoff

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As fuller effects of the PC reign of terror percolate through the porous, deconstructed mindscape of America, and begin to wreak their true havoc in the aftermath of the political indoctrinations that pass for higher education, the contempt for merit that masquerades as equal opportunity, the hatred of reason that poses as social justice, and the denial of objective reality that portends a collective descent into savagery, Howard Schwartz's book looks increasingly like one that will outlast the wretched age that unwittingly compelled it. All those who detest PC's tree on the basis of its anathema to civilization, all who find its fruits abominable, its boughs rotten, its trunk hollow, its bark infested, and its sap venomous, should look to Schwartz's magnificent excavation of its roots. Here they will discover why the visible portions of this growth offer such appalling affronts to humanity's nobler aspirations, and present such tangled impediments to the flourishing of human decency.

Schwartz has effected an erudite and elegant reduction of primary political, social, educational and military manifestations of current sexual rectitude to a phenomenological psychoanalytic substrate. He never lapses into mere psychologism, but perspicaciously embraces useful insights from Freudian and neo-Freudian models of human psychosexual function—and dysfunction—in exposing the plausible and archetypally primitive ground in which PC has taken its most fervid and twisted root. A keen observer of the empirical niceties of PC's nastiness, Schwartz provides a correspondingly rich account of PC's impoverished metaphysics, and of the dire consequences that flow from PC's preposterous presuppositions concerning the putatively arbitrary nature of the World, the Self and the Other.

I offer a succinct synopsis of each chapter, so that you may sample the full sweep of Schwartz's pointed arguments. In the Introduction, he sets the scene by observing that hard-core PC denies any distinction between sanity and insanity, reality and fantasy, rationality and irrationality, nature and nurture. In consequence, "The strange is being replaced by the even more strange, and good sense is no defense" (p.xiv).

In Chapter One, *Scenes from a Sexual Holy War*, he shows how the propagandists of leading feminist orthodoxy, typified by Pollack and Gilligan, have "taken the most vulgar stereotype of men and pronounced it to be a universal and inviolable cultural norm" (p.10). This leads to the full-blown myth of the "Toxic Man" as the primordial, eternal and implacable enemy of the "Madonna-and-Child" (pp.12ff). As in any war, truth is the first casualty; Schwartz reminds us that all empirical data are interpreted or—if need be—re-invented to service the myth itself.

In Chapter Two, *The Sexual Holy War and the Meaning of Work*, Schwartz begins by observing that "the distortions involved in the image of the sexual holy war are likely to propagate themselves as distortions within the whole range of our self-understanding" (p.56). He then draws upon

the work of neo-Freudian Chasseguet-Smirgel to illustrate that Freud's image of the quintessentially weak, passive and dependent woman (vis-à-vis the mature male view) has its persistent psychoanalytic complement in the ideal of the omnipotent mother (vis-à-vis the infant's view) (pp.39ff). While woman's psychic fulfillment lies largely in replacing herself as mother in this fundamental pair-bond, man has no such option; hence man's fulfillment must come largely from woman's appreciation of his work—that is, of his prowess in providing and protecting the mother-child dyad. Moreover, to be an effective provider and protector he must be competitive. But when sexual correctness ordains that competition in the workplace is a toxic male attribute (therefore wicked and undesirable), whereas cooperation in the workplace is a nurturing female attribute (therefore good and desirable), man's psychic fulfillment and familial role are pre-empted. The promulgation of this doctrine du jeu estranges man from his Self, the Other and the World.

In Chapter Three, *Feminist Reattribution of Work's Discontents*, Schwartz shows how the feminization of the workplace is driven by the archetypal need to remake it into a maternal world—a soft, nurturing, loving, sharing, caring, fantasy-filled and perfectly impossible world—and to banish from it all the discomforts, dangers, uncertainties, risks, and all other ineluctable imperfections that shape the hard realities of survival and progress..

For the woman who defines herself in terms of this identification, the whole world should be the maternal world; her desires, selfless as she assumes them to be, define what is morally good ... stress caused by moral uncertainty can become transformed into self-righteous moral rage against men for having corrupted the world. (p.66)

And so the “chilly climate” is born, which spawns in turn the industry of “chilly climate studies” and its Quixotic quest to make the primordial hunt more comfortable by the expedient of excluding men from it. But as Schwartz reminds us, reality is a place in which we sometimes experience discomforts, and often must do things we do not wish to do (e.g. duties). But the denial of reality entails the assertion that the hunt is uncomfortable because men are bad. The re-assertion of reality leads this reviewer to remark that manless organizations—in which the odd man is tolerated as a token, drone or eunuch—are circles of Hell quite beyond Dante's tortured imagination. Ultimately, in the PC unreality that denies reality, the great cultural achievements of civilized man, along with the male necessity “to create order, to organize, to understand, to accept the bounds of logic, to use words in a consistent way (p.79),” are repudiated by boundless female fantasy and endless desire for pleasure.

In Chapter Four, *The Sin of the Father*, Schwartz traces the confluence of radical feminism's tributary with postmodernism's river. Their common enemy turns out to be patriarchy, as well as the great civilizations founded by patriarchs. In their “standard” litany (ironically entailing the repudiation of standards) manliness is the sole alleged obstacle between the feminine mystique and its perfection of the world. This fantasy having become “the norm” (p.112), Schwartz reveals the depth of narcissistic infantile rage that underlies the attack on patriarchs, who dare assert the existence of extramental and extra-emotional realities, and in so doing dare to locate the human subject in, and subordinate it to, an objective world. The flagrant and desperate intolerance that characterizes so much of PC is ultimately predicated on the inability or unwillingness of its psychologically regressive or immature ideologues to subordinate subject to object where appropriate, necessary or conducive to progress.

In Chapter Five, *Political Correctness and the Revolt of the Primitive*, Schwartz reaches the core of his work. He endeavors to explain how PC "... an assemblage of dubious ideas, together with a manner of argumentation foreign to everything the university has traditionally stood for" (p.115) has come to dominate and transform Academe itself. Anyone whose profession or career entails spending (or serving) time in the contemporary academy, and anyone who does not subscribe to the specious, jargon-ridden kernel of academic PC—that white male heterosexual patriarchal hegemony is responsible for all the world's ills, the most malignant of which is Western Civilization itself—will benefit from Schwartz's analysis of how unreason usurped reason, surrealism replaced realism, and untruth unseated truth in the mind-politic of the higher education system. That this mind-politic is charged with preparing future rulers of the body-politic does not bode well for lovers of reason, managers of reality and seekers of truth. In essence, the debasement of standards, the mockery of achievement, the regulation of thought, the infringement of liberty, the supersession of "group rights" over individual entitlements—in short, the bolshevization, balkanization and Stalinization of the university can be seen as the effects of one underlying cause:

Neither society as a whole nor families have been formed by the domination of the male principle over the female. Rather they have been formed by an evolution in which parental elements are engaged with maternal ones to form a complex, biparental whole. The revolt of the primordial mother, then, is not simply an attempt to overturn a paternal order, but an attempt to repudiate the father's role within the biparental order, and to bring us back to a world in which the primordial mother, who in the infant's mind did not need the father, prevails. This is the meaning of political correctness. (p.117)

Schwartz contends that by ridding itself of the paternal component of the superego, the academy has in the process rid itself of verisimilitude (i.e. approach to truth) in research, of all things cognate with it, and in particular of "the development, application and transmission of standards" (p.118). "When the idea of an objective external world is lost, the idea of doing good work, of achievement, no longer has meaning" (p.119). Welcome to the feminized postmodern academy, whose most militantly politicized supporters, namely administrators, emasculated male and empowered female alike—assume "the right to destroy whatever stands in the way of their experience of the world as their mother" (p.133).

As the American Civil Rights movement engendered ubiquitous equal opportunities, which in turn gave rise to inevitably unequal outcomes, PC has redefined the winner of every foot-race as an oppressor, and all the losers as victims. Schwartz's analysis of our culture of victimhood is well-worth heeding:

In the absence of a superego that can adjudicate between reasonable and unreasonable claims, the measure of victimization must be the subjective feeling of being victimized. To be sure, the feeling of being victimized may come from real victimization, but the exploration of narcissism shows that this feeling can also come from interpreting the world as a personal threat. This, of course, is the mechanism of paranoia. It means that, as real victimization is eliminated, the university's process stands in danger of coming under the control of the community's most easily offended, paranoid, and hysterical elements. (p.135).

One forgives Schwartz's tendency to understate the problem. In reality, such people are running the academy—straight into the ground. One daily encounters the insidious anomaly of the

“helpless” or “vulnerable” woman on campus, lately empowered to respond to any real or imagined offense with the ponderous mass of a system designed to presume the guilt of the accused, to proceed without due process against him, and to crush his career on an irrational, moody or bitchy caprice. It makes no difference that the “empowered” may be suffering from PMS, or may feel “victimized” by a bad hair day, or may be upset by a poor grade or a bad date, or may simply be seeking attention.

In Chapter Six, *The March of the Virgin*, Schwartz assesses the role of women in the armed forces. Having succumbed uncritically to the specious notion that equality under the law is co-extensive with or otherwise implies sameness in psycho-social function, many feminists have long insisted that women be fully integrated into mortal armed combat. (Plato long ago touted this very idea in his *Republic*, and my female students usually ooh and ahh until they turn the page, and discover that he also suggested bringing young children to the battlefield, to habituate them to the sight and stench of gore.) Training women for and deploying them in combat, save in extreme circumstances, is the final folly of the PC farce. Having thoroughly demonized man, woman can no longer abide his protection. Since all men are by definition rapists, there is no distinction between having consensual sex with a husband on leave from battle, and being forced to have sex with an enemy who has won a battle. Assembling a mixed gender military force is a recipe for psychosexual cannibalism. The obligatory dessert will be crow. In a rare omission, Schwartz neglects to mention that women dissociated from hearth and home tend to make far better terrorists than men—with the possible exception of those suffering from the PITS (“Psychotic Islamic Terrorist Syndrome”)—and thus could be sequestered and trained in all-female neo-Kamikaze units. But since this would be tantamount to the assertion of an objective sex-difference, it could hardly be acceptable to PC, which seeks to infiltrate the core defenses of Western civilization. PC has already paralyzed American corporations, and has rendered the universities brain-dead.

In conclusion, I heartily commend and recommend Schwartz’s book. However, I cannot forebear from adding that it arrived for review prior to the events of September 11, 2001. Now it is just conceivable that PC’s death knell has been sounded by those very events. It transpires that all but the most rabidly politically correct own stock in Al Qaeda’s brand of enlightened self-interest. After all, the PC movement seeks to make men homeless in the cosmos, not to make women officeless in Manhattan. If Schwartz’s thesis is sound, then any PC advocate who feels troubled by the collapse of the World Trade Center’s towers has rediscovered both extramental reality and non-relative morality, in which case the revolting edifice of PC may soon collapse as well. In any case, Schwartz’s book is a monument in thought that towers conspicuously above the figurative rubble of our age.