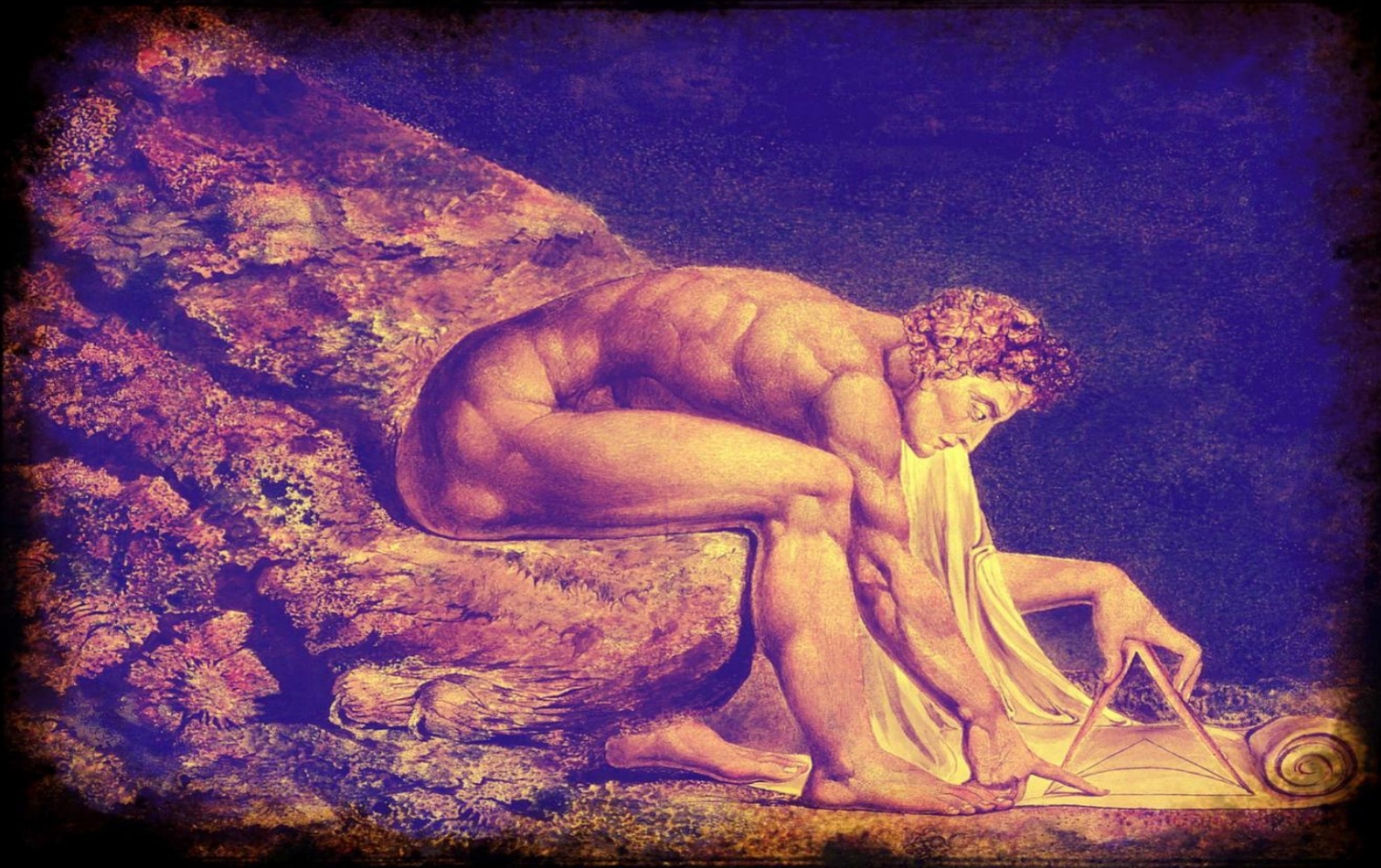


C. P. GILMAN



ANDROCENTRIC CULTURE

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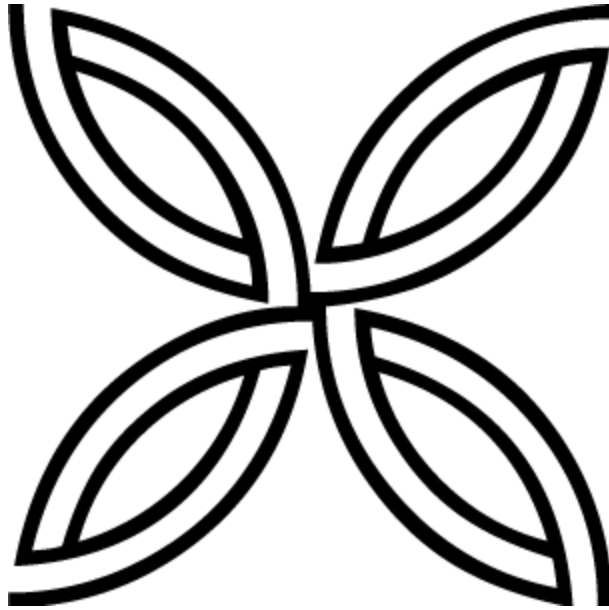
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Androcentric Culture

Charlotte Perkins Gilman



I. AS TO HUMANNESS.

Let us begin, inoffensively, with sheep. The sheep is a beast with which we are all familiar, being much used in religious imagery; the common stock of painters; a staple article of diet; one of our main sources of clothing; and an everyday symbol of bashfulness and stupidity.

In some grazing regions the sheep is an object of terror, destroying grass, bush and forest by omnipresent nibbling; on the great plains, sheep-keeping frequently results in insanity, owing to the loneliness of the shepherd, and the monotonous appearance and behavior of the sheep.

By the poet, young sheep are preferred, the lamb gambolling gaily; unless it be in hymns, where "all we like sheep" are repeatedly described, and much stress is laid upon the straying propensities of the animal.

To the scientific mind there is special interest in the sequacity of sheep, their habit of following one another with automatic imitation. This instinct, we are told, has been developed by ages of wild crowded racing on narrow ledges, along precipices, chasms, around sudden spurs and corners, only the leader seeing when, where and how to jump. If those behind jumped exactly as he did, they lived. If they stopped to exercise independent judgment, they were pushed off and perished; they and their judgment with them.

All these things, and many that are similar, occur to us when we think of sheep. They are also ewes and rams. Yes, truly; but what of it? All that has been said was said of sheep, *genus ovis*, that bland beast, compound of mutton, wool, and foolishness so widely known. If we think of the sheep-dog (and dog-ess), the shepherd (and shepherd-ess), of the ferocious sheep-eating bird of New Zealand, the Kea (and Kea-ess), all these herd, guard, or kill the sheep, both

rams and ewes alike. In regard to mutton, to wool, to general character, we think only of their sheepishness, not at all of their ramishness or eweishness. That which is ovine or bovine, canine, feline or equine, is easily recognized as distinguishing that particular species of animal, and has no relation whatever to the sex thereof. Returning to our muttons, let us consider the ram, and wherein his character differs from the sheep. We find he has a more quarrelsome disposition. He paws the earth and makes a noise. He has a tendency to butt. So has a goat—Mr. Goat. So has Mr. Buffalo, and Mr. Moose, and Mr. Antelope. This tendency to plunge head foremost at an adversary—and to find any other gentleman an adversary on sight—evidently does not pertain to sheep, to *genus ovis*; but to any male creature with horns.

As "function comes before organ," we may even give a reminiscent glance down the long path of evolution, and see how the mere act of butting—passionately and perpetually repeated—born of the belligerent spirit of the male—produced horns!

The ewe, on the other hand, exhibits love and care for her little ones, gives them milk and tries to guard them. But so does a goat—Mrs. Goat. So does Mrs. Buffalo and the rest. Evidently this mother instinct is no peculiarity of *genus ovis*, but of any female creature.

Even the bird, though not a mammal, shows the same mother-love and mother-care, while the father bird, though not a butter, fights with beak and wing and spur. His competition is more effective through display. The wish to please, the need to please, the overmastering necessity upon him that he secure the favor of the female, has made the male bird blossom like a butterfly. He blazes in gorgeous plumage, rears haughty crests and combs, shows drooping wattles and dangling blobs such as the turkey-cock affords; long splendid feathers for pure ornament appear upon him; what in her is a mere tail-effect becomes

in him a mass of glittering drapery.

Partridge-cock, farmyard-cock, peacock, from sparrow to ostrich, observe his mien! To strut and languish; to exhibit every beauteous lure; to sacrifice ease, comfort, speed, everything—to beauty—for her sake—this is the nature of the he-bird of any species; the characteristic, not of the turkey, but of the cock! With drumming of loud wings, with crow and quack and bursts of glorious song, he woos his mate; displays his splendors before her; fights fiercely with his rivals. To butt—to strut—to make a noise—all for love's sake; these acts are common to the male.

We may now generalize and clearly state: That is masculine which belongs to the male—to any or all males, irrespective of species. That is feminine which belongs to the female, to any or all females, irrespective of species. That is ovine, bovine, feline, canine, equine or asinine which belongs to that species, irrespective of sex.

In our own species all this is changed. We have been so taken up with the phenomena of masculinity and femininity, that our common humanity has largely escaped notice. We know we are human, naturally, and are very proud of it; but we do not consider in what our humanness consists; nor how men and women may fall short of it, or overstep its bounds, in continual insistence upon their special differences. It is "manly" to do this; it is "womanly" to do that; but what a human being should do under the circumstances is not thought of.

The only time when we do recognize what we call "common humanity" is in extreme cases, matters of life and death; when either man or woman is expected to behave as if they were also human creatures. Since the range of feeling and action proper to humanity, as such, is far wider than that proper to either sex, it seems at first somewhat remarkable that we have given it so little recognition.

A little classification will help us here. We have certain qualities in common with inanimate matter, such as weight,

opacity, resilience. It is clear that these are not human. We have other qualities in common with all forms of life; cellular construction, for instance, the reproduction of cells and the need of nutrition. These again are not human. We have others, many others, common to the higher mammals; which are not exclusively ours—are not distinctively "human." What then are true human characteristics? In what way is the human species distinguished from all other species?

Our human-ness is seen most clearly in three main lines: it is mechanical, psychical and social. Our power to make and use things is essentially human; we alone have extra-physical tools. We have added to our teeth the knife, sword, scissors, mowing machine; to our claws the spade, harrow, plough, drill, dredge. We are a protean creature, using the larger brain power through a wide variety of changing weapons. This is one of our main and vital distinctions. Ancient animal races are traced and known by mere bones and shells, ancient human races by their buildings, tools and utensils.

That degree of development which gives us the human mind is a clear distinction of race. The savage who can count a hundred is more human than the savage who can count ten.

More prominent than either of these is the social nature of humanity. We are by no means the only group-animal; that ancient type of industry the ant, and even the well-worn bee, are social creatures. But insects of their kind are found living alone. Human beings never. Our human-ness begins with some low form of social relation and increases as that relation develops.

Human life of any sort is dependent upon what Kropotkin calls "mutual aid," and human progress keeps step absolutely with that interchange of specialized services which makes society organic. The nomad, living on cattle as ants live on theirs, is less human than the farmer, raising

food by intelligently applied labor; and the extension of trade and commerce, from mere village market-places to the world-exchanges of to-day, is extension of human-ness as well.

Humanity, thus considered, is not a thing made at once and unchangeable, but a stage of development; and is still, as Wells describes it, "in the making." Our human-ness is seen to lie not so much in what we are individually, as in our relations to one another; and even that individuality is but the result of our relations to one another. It is in what we do and how we do it, rather than in what we are. Some, philosophically inclined, exalt "being" over "doing." To them this question may be put: "Can you mention any form of life that merely 'is,' without doing anything?"

Taken separately and physically, we are animals, *genus homo*; taken socially and psychically, we are, in varying degree, human; and our real history lies in the development of this human-ness.

Our historic period is not very long. Real written history only goes back a few thousand years, beginning with the stone records of ancient Egypt. During this period we have had almost universally what is here called an Androcentric Culture. The history, such as it was, was made and written by men.

The mental, the mechanical, the social development, was almost wholly theirs. We have, so far, lived and suffered and died in a man-made world. So general, so unbroken, has been this condition, that to mention it arouses no more remark than the statement of a natural law. We have taken it for granted, since the dawn of civilization, that "mankind" meant men-kind, and the world was theirs.

Women we have sharply delimited. Women were a sex, "the sex," according to chivalrous toasts; they were set apart for special services peculiar to femininity. As one English scientist put it, in 1888, "Women are not only not the race—they are not even half the race, but a subspecies told off for

reproduction only."

This mental attitude toward women is even more clearly expressed by Mr. H. B. Marriot-Watson in his article on "The American Woman" in the "Nineteenth Century" for June, 1904, where he says: "Her constitutional restlessness has caused her to abdicate those functions which alone excuse or explain her existence." This is a peculiarly happy and condensed expression of the relative position of women during our androcentric culture. The man was accepted as the race type without one dissentient voice; and the woman—a strange, diverse creature, quite disharmonious in the accepted scheme of things—was excused and explained only as a female.

She has needed volumes of such excuse and explanation; also, apparently, volumes of abuse and condemnation. In any library catalogue we may find books upon books about women: physiological, sentimental, didactic, religious—all manner of books about women, as such. Even to-day in the works of Marholm—poor young Weininger, Moebius, and others, we find the same perpetual discussion of women—as such.

This is a book about men—as such. It differentiates between the human nature and the sex nature. It will not go so far as to allege man's masculine traits to be all that excuse, or explain his existence: but it will point out what are masculine traits as distinct from human ones, and what has been the effect on our human life of the unbridled dominance of one sex.

We can see at once, glaringly, what would have been the result of giving all human affairs into female hands. Such an extraordinary and deplorable situation would have "feminized" the world. We should have all become "effeminate."

See how in our use of language the case is clearly shown. The adjectives and derivatives based on woman's distinctions are alien and derogatory when applied to

human affairs; "effeminate"—too female, connotes contempt, but has no masculine analogue; whereas "emasculate"—not enough male, is a term of reproach, and has no feminine analogue. "Virile"—manly, we oppose to "puerile"—childish, and the very word "virtue" is derived from "vir"—a man.

Even in the naming of other animals we have taken the male as the race type, and put on a special termination to indicate "his female," as in lion, lioness; leopard, leopardess; while all our human scheme of things rests on the same tacit assumption; man being held the human type; woman a sort of accompaniment and subordinate assistant, merely essential to the making of people.

She has held always the place of a preposition in relation to man. She has been considered above him or below him, before him, behind him, beside him, a wholly relative existence—"Sydney's sister," "Pembroke's mother"—but never by any chance Sydney or Pembroke herself.

Acting on this assumption, all human standards have been based on male characteristics, and when we wish to praise the work of a woman, we say she has "a masculine mind."

It is no easy matter to deny or reverse a universal assumption. The human mind has had a good many jolts since it began to think, but after each upheaval it settles down as peacefully as the vine-growers on Vesuvius, accepting the last lava crust as permanent ground.

What we see immediately around us, what we are born into and grow up with, be it mental furniture or physical, we assume to be the order of nature.

If a given idea has been held in the human mind for many generations, as almost all our common ideas have, it takes sincere and continued effort to remove it; and if it is one of the oldest we have in stock, one of the big, common, unquestioned world ideas, vast is the labor of those who seek to change it.

Nevertheless, if the matter is one of importance, if the

previous idea was a palpable error, of large and evil effect, and if the new one is true and widely important, the effort is worth making.

The task here undertaken is of this sort. It seeks to show that what we have all this time called "human nature" and deprecated, was in great part only male nature, and good enough in its place; that what we have called "masculine" and admired as such, was in large part human, and should be applied to both sexes: that what we have called "feminine" and condemned, was also largely human and applicable to both. Our androcentric culture is so shown to have been, and still to be, a masculine culture in excess, and therefore undesirable.

In the preliminary work of approaching these facts it will be well to explain how it can be that so wide and serious an error should have been made by practically all men. The reason is simply that they were men. They were males, avid saw women as females—and not otherwise.

So absolute is this conviction that the man who reads will say, "Of course! How else are we to look at women except as females? They are females, aren't they?" Yes, they are, as men are males unquestionably; but there is possible the frame of mind of the old marquise who was asked by an English friend how she could bear to have the footman serve her breakfast in bed—to have a man in her bed-chamber—and replied sincerely, "Call you that thing there a man?"

The world is full of men, but their principal occupation is human work of some sort; and women see in them the human distinction preponderantly. Occasionally some unhappy lady marries her coachman—long contemplation of broad shoulders having an effect, apparently; but in general women see the human creature most; the male creature only when they love.

To the man, the whole world was his world; his because he was male; and the whole world of woman was the home;

because she was female. She had her prescribed sphere, strictly limited to her feminine occupations and interests; he had all the rest of life; and not only so, but, having it, insisted on calling it male.

This accounts for the general attitude of men toward the now rapid humanization of women. From her first faint struggles toward freedom and justice, to her present valiant efforts toward full economic and political equality, each step has been termed "unfeminine" and resented as an intrusion upon man's place and power. Here shows the need of our new classification, of the three distinct fields of life—masculine, feminine and human.

As a matter of fact, there is a "woman's sphere," sharply defined and quite different from his; there is also a "man's sphere," as sharply defined and even more limited; but there remains a common sphere—that of humanity, which belongs to both alike.

In the earlier part of what is known as "the woman's movement," it was sharply opposed on the ground that women would become "unsexed." Let us note in passing that they have become unsexed in one particular, most glaringly so, and that no one has noticed or objected to it. As part of our androcentric culture we may point to the peculiar reversal of sex characteristics which make the human female carry the burden of ornament. She alone, of all human creatures, has adopted the essentially masculine attribute of special sex-decoration; she does not fight for her mate as yet, but she blooms forth as the peacock and bird of paradise, in poignant reversal of nature's laws, even wearing masculine feathers to further her feminine ends. Woman's natural work as a female is that of the mother; man's natural work as a male is that of the father; their mutual relation to this end being a source of joy and well-being when rightly held: but human work covers all our life outside of these specialties. Every handicraft, every profession, every science, every art, all normal amusements

and recreations, all government, education, religion; the whole living world of human achievement: all this is human.

That one sex should have monopolized all human activities, called them "man's work," and managed them as such, is what is meant by the phrase "Androcentric Culture."

II. THE MAN-MADE FAMILY.

The family is older than humanity, and therefore cannot be called a human institution. A post office, now, is wholly human; no other creature has a post office, but there are families in plenty among birds and beasts; all kinds permanent and transient; monogamous, polygamous and polyandrous.

We are now to consider the growth of the family in humanity; what is its rational development in humanness; in mechanical, mental and social lines; in the extension of love and service; and the effect upon it of this strange new arrangement—a masculine proprietor.

Like all natural institutions the family has a purpose; and is to be measured primarily as it serves that purpose; which is, the care and nurture of the young. To protect the helpless little ones, to feed and shelter them, to ensure them the benefits of an ever longer period of immaturity, and so to improve the race—this is the original purpose of the family.

When a natural institution becomes human it enters the plane of consciousness. We think about it; and, in our strange new power of voluntary action do things to it. We have done strange things to the family; or, more specifically, men have.

Balsac, at his bitterest, observed, "Women's virtue is man's best invention." Balsac was wrong. Virtue—the unswerving devotion to one mate—is common among birds and some of the higher mammals. If Balsac meant celibacy when he said virtue, why that is one of man's inventions—though hardly his best.

What man has done to the family, speaking broadly, is to change it from an institution for the best service of the child to one modified to his own service, the vehicle of his

comfort, power and pride.

Among the heavy millions of the stirred East, a child—necessarily a male child—is desired for the credit and glory of the father, and his fathers; in place of seeing that all a parent is for is the best service of the child. Ancestor worship, that gross reversal of all natural law, is of wholly androcentric origin. It is strongest among old patriarchal races; lingers on in feudal Europe; is to be traced even in America today in a few sporadic efforts to magnify the deeds of our ancestors.

The best thing any of us can do for our ancestors is to be better than they were; and we ought to give our minds to it. When we use our past merely as a guide-book, and concentrate our noble emotions on the present and future, we shall improve more rapidly.

The peculiar changes brought about in family life by the predominance of the male are easily traced. In these studies we must keep clearly in mind the basic masculine characteristics: desire, combat, self-expression—all legitimate and right in proper use; only mischievous when excessive or out of place. Through them the male is led to strenuous competition for the favor of the female; in the overflowing ardours of song, as in nightingale and tomcat; in wasteful splendor of personal decoration, from the pheasant's breast to an embroidered waistcoat; and in direct struggle for the prize, from the stag's locked horns to the clashing spears of the tournament.

It is earnestly hoped that no reader will take offence at the necessarily frequent, reference to these essential features of maleness. In the many books about women it is, naturally, their femaleness that has been studied and enlarged upon. And though women, after thousands of years of such discussion, have become a little restive under the constant use of the word female: men, as rational beings, should not object to an analogous study—at least not for some time—a few centuries or so.