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Spitting Out the Kool-Aid

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Kate Manne's *Down Girl* breathes new life into an underexplored yet urgently important topic. Using a diverse mixture of current events, empirical findings, and literary illustrations, Manne guides her reader through the underbelly of misogyny: its nature, how it relates to and differs from sexism, and why, in supposedly post-patriarchal societies, it's "still a thing."¹

Chapter 1 challenges the standard dictionary-definition or "naïve conception" of misogyny, as Manne calls it. This view understands misogyny primarily as a psychological phenomenon, operative in the minds of men. Accordingly, misogynists are disposed to hate all or most women *because* they are women.

The naïve conception fails because it renders misogyny virtually non-existent and, as a result, politically inert. Misogynists need not feel hatred towards all or even most women. A misogynist may love his mother or other women with whom he shares close personal relationships. Manne insists that this should not detract from his *being* an outright misogynist. For example, the naïve view fails to make sense of how Donald Trump could both love his daughter while simultaneously being misogyny's poster boy. A different analysis is needed.

Following Haslanger (2012), Manne outlines her "ameliorative" project in chapter 2. She aims to offer an analysis of misogyny that is politically and theoretically useful; an analysis that will help to reveal the stealthy ways misogyny operates upon its perpetrators, targets, and victims. Manne argues that misogyny should be understood in terms of its social *function*: what it *does* to women and girls.

On her view misogyny functions to uphold patriarchal order, it punishes women who transgress and rewards those who abide.² Misogyny is thus selective: it does not target all women wholesale, but prioritizes for those who protest against patriarchal prescriptions. In Manne's words: "misogyny primarily targets women because they are women in a *man's world*...rather than because they are women in a *man's mind*."³

Chapter 3 outlines, what I take to be, one of the most original and illuminating insights of the book, a conceptual contrast between sexism and misogyny. Manne dubs sexism the "justificatory" branch of patriarchal order: it has the job of legitimizing patriarchal norms and gender roles. Misogyny, on the other hand, is the "law enforcement" branch: it patrols and upholds patriarchal order. Both misogyny and sexism are unified by a common goal "to maintain or restore a patriarchal social order."⁴

In Chapter 4, Manne discusses the gender coded give/take economy that she takes to be at the heart of misogyny's operation.⁵ Patriarchal order dictates that women have an obligation

¹ Manne (2017): xxi.

² Manne (2017): 72.

³ Ibid: 69.

⁴ Ibid: 80.

⁵ At least as it is manifests in the cultures of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, these are the focus of Manne's analysis. Cf. *ibid*: fn. 3.

to be *givers* of certain feminine-coded goods and services such as affection, sex, and reproductive labour.

Correspondingly, men are the entitled recipients of these goods and services in addition to being the *takers* of certain masculine-coded privileges, including public influence, honour, power, money, and leadership. When men fail to receive these feminine-coded goods, which patriarchal order deems they are entitled to, backlash may ensue. What's more, women who seek masculine-coded privileges, for example, leadership positions or other forms of power and prestige, are in effect violating a patriarchal prohibition. Such goods are not theirs for the taking—women are not entitled takers, but obligated *givers*.

In chapter 5, Manne considers a popular “humanist” kind of view according to which misogyny involves thinking of women as sub-human, non-persons, lifeless objects, or mere things. She turns this view on its head. She argues that: “her personhood is held to be *owed* to others in the form of service labour, love, and loyalty.”⁶ As per the previous chapter, women are socially positioned as *human givers*. Manne's contends that misogyny is not about dehumanization, but about men feeling entitled to the human service of women. She pushes this even further by noting that in some cases, when feminine-coded human goods and services are denied, it is *men* who may face feelings of dehumanization.⁷

Chapter 6, in my opinion, is where a lot of the action happens. In this chapter Manne presents the much-needed concept of *himpathy*: the undue sympathy that is misdirected away from victims and towards perpetrators of misogynistic violence.⁸ She explains how certain exonerating narratives, such as the “the golden boy”, function to benefit highly privileged (normally: white, non-disabled, cis, heterosexual, etc.) men who commit violent acts against women.⁹

In this chapter Manne also draws upon and adds to the growing literature on testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker receives either a deficit or surplus of creditability owing to a prejudice on the part of the hearer.¹⁰ Manne discusses how in cases of he said/she said testimony involving accusations of sexual assault, privileged men may be afforded excess creditability, thereby undermining the creditability of victims – there is only so much creditability to go around.¹¹

This, she notes, may lead to the complete erasure, or “herasure” as Manne calls it, of the victim's story altogether.¹² Creditability surpluses and deficits, she says: “often serve the function of *buttressing dominant group members' current social position*, and protecting them from *downfall* in the existing social hierarchy.”¹³ Exonerating narratives puff up privileged men and,

⁶ Ibid: 173.

⁷ Ibid: 173.

⁸ Ibid: 197.

⁹ Ibid: 197.

¹⁰ Cf. Fricker (2007), though, Fricker focuses primarily upon creditability deficits. See, Davis (2016), Medina (2011, 2012), and Yap (2017), among others, for discussions of how creditability surpluses can also constitute testimonial injustice.

¹¹ See Manne's discussion of Medina (2011) who stresses this point, 190.

¹² Ibid: 209-14.

¹³ Manne (2017): 194.

as a result, deflate the creditability of women who speak out against them. These unjust distributions of creditability safeguarding dominate men against downward social mobility. In a slogan: “testimonial injustice as hierarchy preservation.”¹⁴

In Chapter 7, Manne discusses why victims of misogynistic violence who seek moral support and attention are regularly met with suspicion, threats, and outright disbelief. Patriarchy dictates that women are *human givers* of moral support and attention, not recipients (as per the arguments of chapter 4). Drawing moral attention towards women who are victimized by misogyny attempts to disrupt patriarchy’s divisions of moral labour. Manne says that this is “tantamount to the server asking for service, the giver expecting to receive...it is withholding a resource *and* simultaneously demanding it.”¹⁵

In chapter 8, Manne explores how misogyny contributed to Hillary Clinton’s loss of the 2016 US presidential election. She claims that misogyny routinely targets women who infringe upon man’s historical turf; women who try to take what patriarchal order decrees as the jobs and privileges reserved for men. Overstepping or trespassing upon his territory often results in misogynistic retaliation. Such women are seen as “greedy, grasping, and domineering; shrill and abrasive; corrupt and untrustworthy”¹⁶ or, in the words of the current President of the United States, “nasty.”¹⁷

Down Girl ends by discussing the prospects of overcoming misogyny. At one point Manne says, as if to shrug her shoulders and throw up her arms in despair: “I give up.”¹⁸ Later, in a subsequent interview, Manne claims she did not intend for this to be a discouraging statement, but a “liberating declaration.”¹⁹ It is an expression of her entitlement to bow out of this discussion (for now), after having said her piece and making conversational space for others to continue.

In my opinion, *Down Girl* is essential reading for any serious feminist, moral, or political scholar. The proposed analysis of misogyny is lucid and accessible while at the same time remaining acutely critical and rigorous. The text does not get bogged down in philosophical jargon or tedious digressions. As such, this book would be fairly congenial to even the philosophically uninitiated reader. I highly recommend it to both academics and non-academic alike. Moreover, Manne’s addition of “himpathy” and “herasure” to the philosophical lexicon helps to push the dialectic forward in innovative and insightful ways.

Despite being on such a sombre and depressing topic, I found this book to be engrossing and, for the most part, enjoyable to read. Manne has an inviting writing style and the book is scattered with a number of brilliant quips, clever examples, and gripping case studies. Though, be warned, there are certainly sections that might reasonably be difficult,

¹⁴ Ibid: 185.

¹⁵ Ibid: 304.

¹⁶ Ibid: 303.

¹⁷ Berenson (2016).

¹⁸ Manne (2017): 300.

¹⁹ Cleary (2018).

uncomfortable, and potentially triggering. *Down Girl* examines some of the most fraught and downright chilling aspects of our current social and political atmosphere; including real life depictions of horrific violence against women, as well as the attendant sympathy (himpathy) that is often given to those who perpetrate it. This is to be expected in a book on the logic of misogyny, but it is nonetheless important for readers to be extra cognisant.

After finishing the book, I have one main concern regarding the explanatory reach of the analysis. Recall that on Manne's account: "misogyny's primary function and constitutive manifestation is the punishment of "bad" women, and policing of women's behavior."²⁰ Misogyny's operation consist in a number of "down girl moves" designed to keep women in line when they fail to "know their place" in a man's world.²¹ She emphasizes the *retaliatory* nature of misogyny; how it functions analogously to a shock collar: fail to do as patriarchy demands as and risk being shocked.²²

I worry, though, that this emphasis on punishing patriarchy's rebels fails to draw adequate attention to how misogyny can target women for what appears to be nothing more than the simple reason that he is dominant over her. It is not only rebels who are misogyny's targets and victims, but also patriarchy's cheerleaders and "good" girls. (Though, those who protest are presumably more vulnerable and have greater targets on their backs.)

Perhaps the analogy is better thought of not in terms of him shocking her when she fails to obey patriarchal order, but him administering shocks whenever he sees fit, be it for a perceived failure of obedience or simply because he is the one with the controller. Or, to use another analogy that picks up on Manne's "policing" and "law enforcement" language, maybe misogyny is characterized best as a *crooked* cop, one who will pull you over for a traffic violation, but also one who will stop you simply because he feels he can, for he is the one with the badge and gun.

A woman might play her role in a man's world to a tee; she may be happily complacent, she may give him all of her feminine-coded goods, in the right manner, in the right amount, at the right time, and so on. She may never threaten to overstep historical gender roles, nor does she attempt to cultivate masculine-coded privileges. She may even add fuel to patriarchy's fire by policing other women who disobey. Even *still*, despite being on her very best behaviour, she too can be victimized by misogynistic violence. Why? It remains unclear to me how Manne's analysis could offer a satisfying answer. While I deeply admire the proposal, I am curious of how it captures non-corrective cases of misogyny that don't aim to punish for (apparent) violations of patriarchal order.

Manne notes that a major motivation for her writing is "to challenge some of the false moral conclusions we swallow with the Kool-Aid of patriarchal ideology."²³ I came away from this book having learned a great deal about the insidious ways misogyny operates to put women and girls down; many a Kool-Aid has been spit out. *Down Girl* also plants fertile seeds for future research on misogyny, a topic desperately in need of more careful attention and

²⁰ Manne (2017): 192.

²¹ Ibid: 68.

²² Cf. Penaluna (2018).

²³ This is from an interview with *Los Angeles Review of Books*; see Cleary (2018).

intelligent investigation.

In the preface Manne says that: “ultimately, it will take a village of theorists to gain a full understanding of the phenomena.”²⁴ This book makes headway in offering theorists a myriad of conceptual tools and resources needed to facilitate and push the discussion forward. I anticipate that *Down Girl* will be a notable benchmark for many fruitful discussions to come.

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²⁴ Manne (2017): xiii.

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