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## EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND FEMINISM<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

It is often argued that evolutionary theory and feminism remain in tension, since the evolutionary view of human nature is hard to reconcile with the feminist view. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that this thesis is false. This goal is realized by reconstructing a certain anti-feminist evolutionary argument (whose descriptive conclusion is the “patriarchal” picture of male and female nature, and the normative conclusion is the claim that given the deep differences between men and women the feminist postulates cannot be achieved) and providing its critique. The argument is based on three premises: a theory of parental investment, the assumption of a relatively large (compared with other species) men’s parental investment in ancestral environments, and the uncertainty of paternity. Its (descriptive) conclusion is the claim that men are “by nature” much more polygamously disposed, much more desirous of power (over the opposite sex), and much more aggressive than women. The paper presents several objections to this argument. The first objection questions its internal coherence. The second one points at its counterintuitive (not supported by empirical facts) consequences. The third one criticizes one of the assumptions of the argument, i.e. the assumption about a relatively large (compared with other species) men’s parental investment in ancestral environments.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was prepared as part of the project realized by the Foundation of Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Studies “Humanities in Dialogue”, financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education within the program “Dialog” (No. of the contract: 0239/DLG/2018/10).

## KEYWORDS

feminism, evolutionary theory, moralistic fallacy, parental investment, human nature, conception of paternity, patriarchal ethos

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feminizm, teoria ewolucjonizmu, błąd moralistyczny, inwestycje rodzicielskie, natura ludzka, pojęcie ojcostwa, etos patriarchalny

### 1. THE ANTI-FEMINIST EVOLUTIONARY ARGUMENT

It is still widely believed by feminist theorists (and also by the broader audience) that there is a tension between feminism and (biological/Darwinian) evolutionary theory. Even though in recent thirty years or so, as a result of the publishing of a number of important works<sup>2</sup> there has developed an “evolutionary” current within feminism, many feminist thinkers still retain a skeptical attitude towards evolutionary theory (as applied in the social sciences, and especially in the analysis of feminist issues). This skepticism may (at least partly) result from the fact that in evolutionary analyses there still quite often appears (although is rarely explicitly formulated) certain argument or reasoning which leads to the conclusions which can hardly be accepted by feminists. This argument – which I will call “the Anti-Feminist Evolutionary Argument (hereinafter AFEA)” – is supposed to demonstrate, at the level of facts, that there exist deep differences of the “patriarchal” kind (i.e. such differences which were assumed within the patriarchal ethos) between the nature of men and women. It can also be used, at the normative level, to defend the claim that the feminists’ basic postulates (e.g. those of removing all the obstacles for an equal access of women to social positions, of increasing women’s participation in the power structures, or more generally, of eliminating all the relics of the patriarchal ethos) cannot be fully realized, since they are based on what is sometimes called “the moralistic fallacy” – the mistaken conviction that “what ought to be, can be” (the term “moralistic fallacy” is used

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. S.B. Hrdy, *The woman that never evolved*, Cambridge, MA., London 1981, 1999; B. Smuts, *Evolutionary origins of patriarchy*, “Human Nature: An Interdisciplinary Biosocial Perspective” 1995, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1–32; P.A. Gowaty, *Sexual natures: How feminism changed evolutionary biology*, “Signs” 2003, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 901–921; G. Vandermassen, *Who’s afraid of Charles Darwin? Debating feminism and evolutionary theory*, Lanham 2005.

e.g. by Crawford<sup>3</sup>, although in a different context than discussed here). In other words, according to this argument (in its normative part), the realization of these postulates can never be fully successful, because the “default” male nature is, so to speak, strongly patriarchal, and the “default” female nature is complementary to it (i.e. it fits with the patriarchal ethos). As is well known, there are various currents in contemporary feminism (e.g. liberal, radical, cultural, essentialist/difference), but what is common for them (apart from the above mentioned basic postulates) is the rejection of the patriarchal picture of sex differences and of its normative implications.

It will be convenient to start the presentation of AFEA from stating more precisely what picture of male and female nature this argument is supposed to support. As was already mentioned, this is the patriarchal – “Victorian” – picture, according to which men are: a) much more dissolute (promiscuous), and thereby much less sexually discriminating than women, b) much more desirous of power (*as such and over the opposite sex*) than women, and c) much more aggressive than women (all these differences between sexes are assumed to be *substantial* – hence the phrase “much more”)<sup>4</sup>. This picture implies, among other things, that if men dominate, or have dominated, over women, this is because they have a stronger desire for power (as they have a stronger biological interest than women both in holding power as such and in holding power over the opposite sex), and because their level of aggression is higher.

The argument (AFEA) for this picture consists of two parts<sup>5</sup>. Its first part is a theory of parental investment<sup>6</sup>, according to which the members of the sex (male sex in humans and most other species) – whose parental investment in the offspring is lower and thereby whose maximum (potential) number of offspring is higher – will be less discriminating in choosing the sexual partner, more

<sup>3</sup> C.B. Crawford, *Public policy and personal decisions: The evolutionary context*, (in:) C.B. Crawford, C. Salmon (eds.), *Evolutionary psychology, public policy and personal decisions*, Mahwah, NJ 2004, pp. 3–22.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that when seen in the historical perspective, the patriarchal picture of male and female nature is not homogenous as regards its “female component”. In several patriarchal cultures, e.g. in ancient Greece, it was believed that women are by no means “coy” by nature: they were regarded as promiscuous, possessing low self-control, morally weaker than men, treacherous, and – as such – in need of being controlled (by men). But in my analysis, I am focused on this variety of the patriarchal picture according to which women are different in their sexual proclivities than men. This is the picture which is supported by AFEA (and was also accepted within the Victorian variety of patriarchal ethos). On the changes in the patriarchal ethos see e.g. M. Bogucka, *Gorsza pleć. Kobieta w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XXI*, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>5</sup> A more loosely formulated version of this argument can be found e.g. in M. Ridley, *The red queen*, Hammonworth 1994; D.M. Buss, *The psychology of human mate selection: Exploring the complexity of the strategic repertoire*, (in:) C.B. Crawford, D.L. Krebs (eds.), *Handbook of evolutionary psychology: Ideas, issues, and applications*, Mahwah, NJ 1998, pp. 405–429.

<sup>6</sup> R.L. Trivers, *Parental investment and sexual selection*, (in:) B. Campbell (ed.), *Sexual selection and the descent of man 1871–1971*, London 1972, pp. 139–179.

polygamously inclined, and more intensely competitive (aggressive) with other members of the same sex. This part is supposed to explain why men are much more dissolute and much more aggressive than women (by this kind of behaviour men, unlike women, can increase the likelihood and extent of their reproductive success), but it does not explain why men are considered to be (within the patriarchal/"Victorian" picture which AFEA is supposed to support) much more desirous of power (*as such* and *over the opposite sex*). This last feature (the desire of power over the opposite sex) is explained by the second part of AFEA, i.e. the two-element assumption that: a) in the ancestral environments (in which human genotype was being shaped) parental investment of men in their offspring was relatively large (mainly because of the prolonged helplessness of human infants) as compared with the other species (although, of course, still smaller than that of women), and b) that a man cannot be certain of his paternity of the child whom he rears. In other words, so the argument goes, since men invested relatively much in their offspring, but could not be certain of their paternity, they are likely to have developed an adaptation that diminished the risk of their misplaced (i.e. in a child of another man) parental investment. This adaptation can be most generally described as men's will of power over their sexual partners, or as male sexual proprietariness, or as men's tendency to treat their sexual partners "as a chattel"<sup>7</sup>. It can be decomposed into various more specific "mental mechanisms", the most important of them being, as is claimed by evolutionary psychologists, sexual jealousy which hypersensitizes men to any potential signal of women's sexual infidelity, and, when triggered off, often leads to violent behaviours. It bears stressing that evolutionary psychologists claim that women's jealousy (unlike men's) is in the first place emotional rather than sexual: it consists, above all, in sensitivity to men's emotional infidelity (emotional attachment to some other woman) rather than to men's sexual infidelity. Thus, in accordance with evolutionary psychology, men and women value different things in their relationships: men value in the first place sexual fidelity, while women emotional fidelity<sup>8</sup>. I shall present some critical remarks on this claim in the further part of this paper. As far the (putatively) stronger male will of power *as such* (rather than *over one's sexual partners*) is concerned, it is believed (by evolutionary psychologists) to stem from the fact that women prefer to choose men with high social status (the will of power is therefore "ultimately" reduced to sexual motives: men pursue power because they want to gain sexual access to women who prefer men with power). This last (controversial) point is not strictly connected with the AFEA, but, rather, is an additional hypothesis. Since my main focus is AFEA, and the main point I want to make is

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. Wilson, M. Daly, *The man who mistook his wife for a chattel*, (in:) J.H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, J. Tooby (eds.), *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*, New York 1992, pp. 289–322.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. D.M. Buss, *Evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*, New York 2003.

that AFEA is implausible, I shall not analyze thoroughly this additional hypothesis. I shall only make some general remarks on it in section 6.

To sum up, according to AFEA, men are dissolute (since they may increase their reproductive success by mating with many women), and sexually proprietary (since they may misdirect their relatively high parental investment), whereas women are dissolute to a much lesser degree than men (since they cannot increase their reproductive success by mating with many males), and less sexually proprietary than men (since they cannot misdirect their high parental investment).

## 2. THE FIRST OBJECTION TO AFEA: INTERNAL INCOHERENCE

The first objection to AFEA which I shall raise concerns its very structure. This objection questions the internal coherence of AFEA by pointing out that one cannot plausibly maintain *at the same time* that men are, by virtue of their nature shaped by evolutionary forces, *highly* dissolute and *highly* desirous of power over (possessive towards/sexually jealous of) women. If men's investment in their children must be relatively large for their achievement of reproductive success (this fact is supposed to explain within AFEA men's sexual jealousy and desire of power over women), then one can hardly claim that natural selection endowed men with a strong predilection for sexual variety (and with the concomitant lack of discrimination in choosing sexual partners): *mere having* (without subsequent parental investment) many sexual partners does not guarantee reproductive success. In other words, the quest for sexual variety without readiness to invest in children is futile (from the standpoint of reproductive success), and such readiness decreases the willingness for such quest. But it must be admitted that the logic of AFEA becomes more convincing when it is more focused on costs than benefits: in the ancestral environments, sex was potentially more costly for women than for men, so that women's optimal sexual strategy must have been more careful – more discriminating – than that of men. At any rate, even if this objection does not undermine AFEA, it substantially weakens its conclusions. If this objection is taken into account, AFEA may still justify the claim that men's proneness to promiscuity is stronger than women's but the differences will be smaller than AFEA was believed to imply.

## 3. THE SECOND OBJECTION TO AFEA: COUNTERINTUITIVE PICTURE OF MEN AND WOMEN

One can plausibly argue that the picture of sex differences implied by AFEA is strongly counterintuitive – contradictory to empirical facts. This objection can be

developed by appealing to commonsensical observations and to scientific results (although these results, as we shall see, provide a rather ambiguous picture).

As for the former, it seems that many people would be surprised to hear that men have a stronger desire for power over women than women over men, or that men are “by nature” much more dissolute than women; they might admit that women’s desire for sexual variety may be indeed somewhat smaller than men’s but would add that the intersex differences in this regard should not be overestimated.

As for the latter, there are quite a few evolutionary psychologists who, to some extent at least, depart from the view that the differences between male and female sexual strategies are deep and radical. For instance, Buss and Schmitt<sup>9</sup> developed a “sexual strategies theory”, arguing that both men and women have evolved a complex repertoire of sexual strategies – a “pluralistic mating strategy”: on the one end of the continuum there is long-term mating (extended courtship, the emotion of love, large investment of resources), on the other end there is short-term mating (casual sex, one-night stands, fleeting sexual encounters), and between these two ends: brief affairs, prolonged romances<sup>10</sup>. The choice of a strategy (or their mix) will depend on such factors as, for instance, opportunity, personal mate value, sex ratio, cultural norms, or parental influences. However, the adherents of this theory still maintain that there are some important differences in men’s and women’s sexual strategies. The differences are of two types. The first type is manifested in the context of long-term mating. The theory asserts that men pay more attention to signals of fertility and reproductive value (youth and physical attractiveness), whereas women pay more attention to „cues to his [a potential partner’s – W.Z.] *willingness* to provision women and their children”<sup>11</sup>, i.e. to kindness, generosity, emotional openness, and to cues to „his *ability* for long-term provisioning (status, resources, ambition, maturity)”. The differences of the second type concern reasons for engaging in short-term mating; according to the sexual strategies theory, women’s reasons are „1) access to high quality genes, 2) immediate access to resources, 3) using short-term mating in the service of long-term mating goals, 4) a cluster of functions involved in mate-switching, such as obtaining „mate insurance”, getting rid of a cost-inflicting partner, and „trading up” to a better partner”<sup>12</sup>. Briefly: „women’s psychology of shortterm mating appears to center more on obtaining men of high-genetic quality rather

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Buss, *The psychology...*; D.P. Schmitt, *Fundamentals of human mating strategies*, (in:) D.M. Buss (ed.), *The handbook of evolutionary psychology*, New York 2005, pp. 258–291; D.M. Buss, D.P. Schmitt, *Evolutionary psychology and feminism*, “Sex Roles” 2011, Vol. 64, No. 9, pp. 768–787.

<sup>10</sup> D.P. Schmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 270–271.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. D.M. Buss, D.P. Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 775.

than numerous men in high-volume quantity”<sup>13</sup>. As we can see, even though the sexual strategies theory departs from the patriarchal picture of the differences between men and women by claiming that both men and women may have good (although different) evolutionary reasons for engaging in short-term mating, it still retains its important element: it implies that *men are more dissolute than women*, „possess a greater desire than women do for a variety of sexual partners, (...) require less time to elapse than women do before consenting to sexual intercourse, (...) tend to more actively seek short-term mateships than women do”<sup>14</sup>.

Let me summarize. The view of male and female nature implied by the sexual strategies theory is that men are more dissolute than women but the differences between sexes in this regard are assumed to be smaller than within the patriarchal picture. Furthermore, since desire for power over the opposite sex is a function of parental investment, and males’ parental investment in short-term relationships is small (nonexistent, or not taken into account), so the male desire for power over the opposite sex should also be small in such relationships. But the sex differences are still believed to exist: men are still regarded as more dissolute and in long-term relationships their desire of control over the opposite sex is regarded as stronger than that of women. One may ask, however, whether sex differences are still not overestimated within this theory; should not one make a more resolute departure from the patriarchal picture? Are there really (and here we return to the commonsensical observations from which we started this section) good evolutionary reasons for the claim that men’s drive for power over women is likely to be much stronger than that of women over men? Also the claim about male’s stronger tendency to dissolute behavior can be questioned, e.g. by appealing to the first objection. But one may also criticize this claim in a different way: by maintaining that women are more dissolute than they are considered to be (within sexual strategies theory, and also – obviously – within the patriarchal picture). This line of criticism was developed by some evolutionary feminists (especially Hrdy). I shall discuss her view in the next section.

<sup>13</sup> D.P. Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*. There are some empirical findings that support this claim: “men are more likely than women to engage in extradyadic sex”, “men are more likely than women to be sexually unfaithful multiple times with different sexual partner”, “men are more likely than women to seek short-term sex partners that are already married”, “men are more likely than women to have sexual fantasies involving short-term sex and multiple opposite-sex partners”, “men are more likely than women to pay for short-term sex with (male or female) prostitutes”, “men are more likely than women to seek one-night stands”, “men are more likely than women to consent to having sex with a stranger”, “men are more likely than women to consent to having sex after a brief period of time”, “men perceive more sexual interest from strangers than women”, “men generally relax mate preferences (whereas women increase selectivity for physical attractiveness) in short-term mating contexts”, “men are less likely than women to regret short-term sex or ‘hook-ups’” (D.M. Buss, D.P. Schmitt, *Evolutionary psychology and feminism*, “Sex Roles” 2011, Vol. 64, No. 9, pp. 768–787).



#### 4. THE THIRD OBJECTION TO AFEA: ANCESTRAL MEN AS “UNRELIABLE PROVIDERS”

This objection boils down to rejecting one of the premises of AFEA, i.e. that in the ancestral environments parental investment of men was relatively high. Hrdy argued that “wherever fathers prove unreliable providers or protectors, it makes sense for mothers – if they are free to do so – to line up one or several “secondary fathers”<sup>15</sup>. Now, in Hrdy’s view, the main reasons why in ancestral environments “providers” could have been “unreliable” was that “in societies like the Aché adult as well as child mortality rates are high. Fathers may die; others may sire their children and then defect. Under some economic circumstances, it just may not be feasible for one man to provide for a family”<sup>16</sup>. This is description of the Aché societies (an indigenous tribe of Paraguay) but it may suit, in Hrdy’s view, also the more primitive societies, in which our genotype was being shaped. She argued that women must have developed certain strategies to cope with the fact that men are “unreliable providers”. One of their (possible) strategies is blatantly contradictory with the “Victorian” picture of woman as being by nature *univira*, i.e. the strategy of associating with multiple males (sequentially or simultaneously) in order to ensure resources from them and to obtain their protection from other males. This last protection was important because, as Hrdy claimed, “what mothers and infants most urgently needed a male for was to protect them – not just from predators but from conspecific males”<sup>17</sup>. Another important female strategy to deal with the “unreliable providers” was, in Hrdy’s, view, to cooperate with other women in upbringing their progeny: the role of a community in rearing children was therefore essential: “a Pleistocene mother responsive enough to make her baby feel secure was likely to be a mother embedded in a network of supportive social relationships. Without such support, few mothers, and even fewer infants, were likely to survive”<sup>18</sup>. It should be added that this “cooperative breeding” or “allomaternal care”, as Hrdy calls this phenomenon, which made women less dependent on men, was not only a way of dealing with the fact that men were rather unreliable providers; it also created, as Hrdy argued<sup>19</sup>, a selective pressure for developing more general (i.e. manifesting themselves not only in the context of breeding) cooperative and altruistic traits.

<sup>15</sup> S.B. Hrdy, *The woman...*, p. xxiii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> S.B. Hrdy, *Mothers and others: The evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*, Cambridge, MA 2009, p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> S.B. Hrdy, *The past, present, and future of the human family*, Tanner Lectures on Human Values 2001, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> S.B. Hrdy, *Mothers...*



The above view of female nature implies that females' continuous sexual receptivity and concealed ovulation, as well as their capacity to experience multiple orgasms<sup>20</sup>, do not serve only the monogamous purpose of cementing the pair-bond; they may also contribute to confusing paternity, and thereby to inducing more men to invest in a woman's child (or at least to dissuading them from harming the child). As a result, women are also sexually assertive, and the female intra-sexual competition and variance in reproductive success is much greater than assumed or implied by AFEA, since women compete for the attention of multiple males<sup>21</sup>.

Let me summarize. Hrdy – one of the “evolutionary feminists” – presented arguments for the claim that women are not “by nature” passive, chaste, in short: the coy female is a myth<sup>22</sup>. Female nature is multi-layered and complex: it embraces in itself the capacity to be passive, coy, and chaste, but also the capacity to be active, resolute, even libertine<sup>23</sup>. Women are able to cooperate with other females if it is necessary, but also to compete with them. They may also become more aggressive than implied by the “Victorian” picture: as mentioned, within-sexual competition between women is likely to be high, especially if it is assumed (as in Hrdy's account) that women compete for multiple males.

## 5. THE IGNORANCE OF “PSYCHOLOGICAL PATERNITY”

By way of digression, let me devote some attention to the question of the implications of a certain conception of paternity for the feminist debate. This section should not be seen as belonging to the main line of my argumentation, as it has a distinctly speculative character. However, I have decided to insert it in my analysis, as it is likely to broaden its scope and enrich it.

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<sup>20</sup> As Hrdy put it: “The paradoxes of human sexuality – the mismatch between men, who are transiently impotent after an orgasm, and women, who are not only capable of multiple orgasms but may prefer them – may not be so paradoxical after all, if we no longer assume that these traits evolved in a strictly monogamous context. The physiology of the clitoris, which does not typically generate orgasm after a single copulation, ceases to be mysterious if we put aside the idea that women's sexuality evolved in order to “serve” her mate, and examine instead the possibility that it evolved in order to increase the reproductive success of primate mothers through enhanced survival of their offspring” (S.B. Hrdy, *The woman...*, p. 176).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. S.B. Hrdy, *The woman...*, p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. S.B. Hrdy, *Empathy, polyandry, and the myth of the coy female*, (in:) R. Bleier (ed.), *Feminist approaches to science*, New York 1986, pp. 119–146.

<sup>23</sup> A similar picture emerges e.g. from the excellent paper on “female infidelity and sperm competition”, T.K. Shackelford, A.T. Goetz, N. Pound, C.W. Lamunyon, *Female infidelity and sperm competition*, (in:) D.M. Buss (ed.), *The handbook of evolutionary psychology*, New York 2005, pp. 372–394.

Bronisław Malinowski<sup>24</sup> famously argued that the Australian and Aborigenes and the tribes from the Trobriand Islands believed that the father plays no physiological (biological) role in child generation: there are no ties of blood between the child and the father (the latter being only a sociological concept)<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, Malinowski claimed that physiological paternity was unknown not only to the Australian Aborigenes and Trobrianders but also to “primitive humanity”:

This ignorance is of general sociological importance, because there are well-founded reasons for believing that it was once universal amongst primitive mankind, as may be held to be proved by Mr E.S. Hartland in his thorough treatise on *Primitive Paternity* (...) primitive humanity was certainly wholly ignorant of the process of procreation<sup>26</sup>.

Malinowski invoked also some other scientific authorities to support his claim about the ignorance of paternity among the primitive humans, e.g. Frazer and Gennep<sup>27</sup>. But, needless to say, neither Malinowski’s particular hypothesis that the Australian Aborigenes and Trobrianders ignored physiological paternity, nor his more general hypothesis that also “primitive humanity” ignored it, were unanimously accepted by the anthropologists<sup>28</sup>. It is hard to have a strong opinion on these very complicated issues. But let us assume that his more general hypothesis is right. What would be its implications?

<sup>24</sup> B. Malinowski, *The family among the Australian Aborigenes: A sociological study*, London 1913; B. Malinowski, *The father in primitive psychology*, London 1927; B. Malinowski, *Sex and repression in savage society*, Oxford 1927.

<sup>25</sup> Although, it should be added, mother was not considered to generate a child *by herself* but with the (crucial) participation of ancestral spirits (*Baloma*). Sexual intercourse is therefore not a necessary condition of pregnancy, although it is helpful, as it is one of the ways of opening the mother’s birth canal (breaking the hymen) for letting the ancestral spirit in. And as such, strictly speaking, it is necessary only once, though Trobriand women in fact pursued a very active sexual life, also before marriage (though one should add that Trobriand Islanders maintained that sexual intercourse could be replaced, e.g., by digital manipulation; thus, in their view, it was not even necessary for begetting a child).

<sup>26</sup> B. Malinowski, *The family*..., pp. 181, 200.

<sup>27</sup> The claim was also endorsed, though in a different form, e.g. by J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, religion and mother right (das Mutterrecht)*, R. Manheim (transl.), Princeton 1861, 1967, who put forth a hypothesis of matriarchy (“hetaerism”) as a first phase in human history; L.H. Morgan, *Systems of consanguinity and affinity in the human family*, Washington D.C. 1870, and Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the family, private property and the state*, A. West (transl.), Australia 1884, 2004. The ignorance of paternity which Bachofen, Morgan and Engels meant when they wrote about primitive societies, was not grounded in a *conception* of paternity but was simply a certain fact resulting from (in their view) the historically earliest form of sexual relationship, i.e. “promiscuity”, meaning “group marriage” – “the form in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women belong to one another, and which leaves but little scope for jealousy” (Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 50).

<sup>28</sup> It was rejected, e.g. by the Finnish sociologist Westermarck; for a solid discussion of Malinowski’s theory and its critique see e.g. B. Pulman, *Malinowski and ignorance of physiological paternity*, “Revue française de sociologie” 2004/5, Vol. 45, pp. 121–142.

If “primitive man” really believed that they cannot be (physiological) fathers, they could not have been concerned with the problem of the “uncertainty of paternity”; the problem simply did not exist for them. Consequently, if they did not regard themselves as (physiological) fathers of their children, their “parental investment” would have been arguably smaller than assumed by AFEA. It does not necessarily mean that they would not have invested at all in their children, since they could have done so as a “side-effect” of their sexual attachment to the children’s mothers. But this investment would have been arguably smaller than assumed in AFEA. As a result, they would have displayed much weaker sexual jealousy than implied by AFEA. Their jealousy would above all serve the protection of their access to their sexual partners, not the elimination of the risk of misplaced (not in their own children) parental investment (and as such could have been experienced with equal strength also by women): a man cannot make any conscious efforts to increase his certainty of paternity if he does not know the very concept of paternity.

The view I sketched above is similar to the one defended by Russell, who contended that „the desire to make sure of paternity does not, of course, exist in those backward races which are ignorant of the fact that male has any part in generation. Among them, although masculine jealousy places certain limitations upon female license, women are on the whole much freer than in early patriarchal societies”<sup>29</sup>; and in similar vein:

The purely instinctive element in jealousy is not nearly so strong as most moderns imagine. The extreme strength of jealousy in patriarchal societies is due to the fear of falsification of descent. (...) The family is a pre-human institution, whose biological justification is that the help of the father during pregnancy and lactation tends to the survival of the young. But as we saw in the case of the Trobriand Islanders, and as we may safely infer in the case of the anthropoid apes, this help, under primitive conditions, is not given for quite the same reasons which actuate a father in a civilized community. The primitive father does not know that the child has any biological connection with himself; the child is the offspring of the female whom he loves. This fact he knows, since he has seen the child born, and it is this fact that produces the instinctive tie between him and the child. At this stage, he sees no biological importance in safeguarding his wife’s virtue, although no doubt he will feel instinctive jealousy if her infidelity is thrust upon his notice. At this stage, also, he has no sense of property in the child. The child is the property of his wife and his wife’s brother, but his own relation with the child is merely one of affection<sup>30</sup>.

Thus, if “primitive humanity” really behaved in this way, it would undermine the (already mentioned in section 1) claim of evolutionary psychologists that men’s sexual jealousy is especially strong – stronger than women’s, who tend to

<sup>29</sup> B. Russell, *Marriage and morals*, London 1929, p. 97; cf. also E. Fromm, *Miłość, pleć i matriarchat*, B. Radomska, G. Sowinski (transl.), Poznań 1999, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> B. Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 57.

exhibit above all emotional jealousy (stronger than men's)<sup>31</sup>. So far I have traced the implications of the assumption that our ancestors ignored physiological paternity from male perspective. What implications, however, does this conception have for the picture of our "primitive" female ancestors? Was she, as implied by AFEA, "coy", *univira*? Clearly not. If a woman can be less fearful of male jealousy, and is less guarded by men than implied by AFEA, then her sexual license is less risky. On this view, our female ancestors enjoyed much freedom, and the ideal of female chastity and strict sexual morality (with respect to women) appeared much later – with the onset of Neolithic revolution; as Bertrand Russell wrote: "the discovery of fatherhood led to the subjection of women as the only means of securing their virtue – a subjection first physical and then mental, which reached its height in the Victorian age"<sup>32</sup>.

## 6. FURTHER REMARKS ON THE PATRIARCHAL PICTURE

In my discussion of the patriarchal picture of sex differences, I was focused mainly on the dimension of promiscuity/chastity and the strength of the desire of power over the opposite sex. At the end of this paper, however, I would like to make several remarks on the remaining two dimensions: that of a desire for power (as such) and aggression. As was mentioned, the patriarchal picture implies that men display these two tendencies to a substantially higher degree than women. Is this thesis sound? Men may indeed be more desirous of power as such (of social status) because women more favour men with power than men women with

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth mentioning that the claim about sex differences with regard to jealousy was also criticized from a different angle by K.N. Levy and K.M. Kelly, *Sex differences in jealousy: A contribution from attachment theory*, "Psychological Science" 2010, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 168–173, who argued that people (irrespective of sex) with a specific kind of insecure attachment which is called "dismissive-avoidant" (caused by inconsistent/insensitive parents), and who, as a result, treat autonomy as the highest value and are more focused on sexual aspects of relationships (which are, in their case, usually short-term, low investment, and exploitative), are more likely to be jealous of sexual infidelity (rather than of emotional bond). Their sexual jealousy, is, as Levy and Kelly elegantly and aptly put it, "a defensive projection of negative information about the self". By contrast, people (irrespective of their sex) with secure attachment are more likely to be jealous of emotional bond. The fact that men may be more likely than women to feel sexual jealousy is, according to this theory, not a result of different biological make-up, but of that fact that men may more often have this kind of insecure attachment. But Levy and Kelly themselves admit that their theory better explains within-sex differences in the types of jealousy than the inter-sex ones.

<sup>32</sup> B. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 12. One may note that even patriarchal institutions can be seen as an argument for the non-patriarchal view of women: "There can be no doubt from such evidence [concerning the various ways in which men strove to control female sexuality – W.Z.] that the *expectation* of female 'promiscuity' has had a profound effect on human cultural institutions" (S.B. Hrdy, *The woman....*, pp. 176–177).

power. It is also a well known fact that boys and men are more focused in conversation on hierarchy, their own “ego”, their own individual interests, whereas girls and women are more focused on connection, the benefit of the group. Accordingly, boys are more distanced towards others than girls – less emphatic (this claim, if developed, could support “difference/essentialist feminism”, implying that women possess a number of predispositions underlying what Carol Gilligan called “ethic of care”). But the differences may be overestimated within the patriarchal picture. Furthermore, it may be questioned whether the drive for power (as such) should be interpreted as a “secondary” drive, serving “ultimately” reproductive purposes (how could its presence in female nature be explained, given that women’s power/social status does not play any important role in men’s choice of their sexual partners?). Perhaps it would be more apt to treat the drive for power as a separate instinct, as did many philosophers (e.g. Hobbes, Nietzsche or Russell). As for the level of aggression, even though it is hard to deny that women manifest less physical violence than men, it does not have to mean that they are overall substantially less aggressive – they exhibit (arguably to a higher degree than men) various forms of social manipulation called “relational aggression”: glaring, gossiping, spreading rumors, ostracizing, giving silent treatment, sending unpleasant notes behind rivals’ backs<sup>33</sup>.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The paper argued for the claim that the patriarchal view of sex differences is not supported by the evolutionary theory. The AFEA (antifeminist evolutionary argument) which has been sometimes invoked to support this view is incorrect. My critique of this argument consisted of three objections: that AFEA is not internally coherent, that its conclusions (the patriarchal view of sex differences) are not only contradictory with commonsensical observations but also (to some extent at least) with the “sexual strategies theory” (developed by evolutionary psychologists), that the assumption of AFEA about men’s relatively high parental investment in ancestral environments may be questioned (this objection is made within the so called evolutionary feminism).

Two important points need to be made here. Firstly, the argumentation presented in this paper shows that there is no tension between feminism and evolu-

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. R. Simmons, *Odd girl out: The hidden culture of aggression in girls*, Orlando, FL 2002. This picture is supported also by the so-called “staying alive hypothesis” developed by Anne Campbell, which claims that since a female’s survival is more critical than a male’s for the survival of their offspring, females have developed a propensity to avoid engaging in risky/dangerous and overtly aggressive behaviour, but not to engaging in covertly aggressive behavior.

tionary theory, the tension arises only if one accepts AFEA, but, as I have argued, this argument is implausible. Secondly, my critical analysis is coherent in its negative side: all the objections are directed at AFEA. However, it is not coherent on the positive side. On the one hand, the first and the second objection lead to the picture of differences between men and women which preserves, although in a much reduced form, the elements of the patriarchal picture: it assumes the existence of some differences between men and women in their dispositions towards sex and power. But even though the tension between evolutionism and feminism does not disappear entirely, it becomes weak. On the other hand, the third objection leads to the overturn of the patriarchal picture; evolutionary feminism, supported by this objection, assumes that women may be as sexually liberated and resolute as men are. I shall refrain from endorsing any of the two different pictures supported by these objections: the picture which retains, although in a much reduced form, some elements of the patriarchal view (women as “by nature” sexually more restrained, more coy, and less aggressive than men) and the picture which presents a radically different view (women as “by nature” sexually liberated, assertive). Further evolutionary research is indispensable for deciding which of them is more convincing. It is still not entirely clear with what specific attitudes towards sex, power, and aggression men and women were endowed by natural selection, to what extent these attitudes can be modified by social and environmental factors, and whether all or even most of these attitudes are in fact a product of natural selection (and not a product of cultural evolution). What seems to be clear, however, is the falsity of the claim that evolutionary theory supports a (classically/radically) patriarchal picture of sex differences.

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