

# Class formation, propertization of women, and bestiality

*In a pub in rural New Zealand two men, one old and one young, come together to discuss world affairs, to have a drink and swap insults. They start by discussing an article, or a batch of articles, that one of them, usually the younger, has selected. During their conversation they also access other articles, the younger man via his smart phone and the older one via his venerable laptop, which also holds his database of geopolitical literature, and if rumour is to be believed, more besides. In addition there is a ghostly editor who also inserts references, often making snide remarks about the old man and correcting his lapses of memory.*

Today's article is:

- G.W. Bowersock, "**The Bible and the Perils of 'Evolution'**," *New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/10/27/bible-perils-evolution/>
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"Hi Sage, what are you having?"

The old man looked up at the young man towering over him and replied, "Hi Marty. Wairau Hills Arika Pinot Noir 2013 is Bill's red of the day so I'm sampling that."<sup>1</sup>

"No decisions yet, then?"

"Like marriage, wine is not where you make hasty decisions. So the sampling will continue, thanks"

Mart returned shortly with his drink – a concoction of various colours – with the Sage's glass of Pinot Noir".

"How's that new Scandinavian girlfriend of yours?"

"She's good."

"Oh, that's bad."

'Sage, you've got the makings of a dirty old man."

"I'm working on it. I've managed the old part but the 'good, clean dirt' as Henry Miller once described it, is a bit more elusive."

"She's Swedish, and great fun."

"Swedish? You be careful. You know what happened to Julian Assange."

“Well, she’s got the body to be a honeypot trap, but I don’t suppose the CIA would be that interested in me. Besides, I haven’t seen her for a few days. She’s been away and I’ve been off hunting with Grant.”

“Grant with the three pig dogs and the big knife?”

“That’s the one.”

“Right, then you’re just the person to help me out with this review I’ve been reading. ‘The Bible and the Perils of ‘Evolution’.<sup>2</sup>

“Sounds gripping.”

“It has its moments. Now talking of your strange sexual proclivities.....”

“We’re not.”

“We are now. Bestiality is what I want to know about.”

“Bestiality? What’s that got to do with pig hunting.”

“I’d have thought that sticking a big knife into an innocent pig held down by three excited dogs is deeply symbolic of gang rape.”

“You’ve a lurid imagination!”

“Anyway, my inquiry is rather more practical, and quite *kosher*.”

“*Kosher* as in *halal*.”

“I suppose they have the same religious roots but kosher at least has gained a wider meaning of genuine and respectable.”

“Ok, so what’s it about?”

“The review is about various books but here he’s discussing one, the one by van Schaik and Michel on ‘An Evolutionary Reading of the Bible’. Here’s the key passage”, the Sage says as he rotates his laptop so that Marty can read it as well.

We are asked to believe that this text, as assembled from writings that spanned the first millennium BC and first century AD, reflects the long evolution of the human species from the epoch of hunter-gatherers 13,000 years ago through the many changes that more sedentary forms of life eventually imposed. According to van Schaik and Michel, these changes included the invention of property, the oppression of women, and sexual activity with animals, none of which appears to have characterized the hunter-gatherers.

“A little further down he elaborates on that:”

Van Schaik and Michel are firmly on the side of environmental, rather than cultural, causes for social evolution. They claim that a sedentary people had to establish property rights for its individuals (who had had none before), had to monitor the promiscuousness of its women (who had supposedly been shared among the hunter-gatherers), and had to ensure that the animals it was now raising after settling were not available for sexual intercourse.

“The business about agriculture and domestication of animals leading to property rights, and then property leading to the propertization of women is fairly straightforward”, the Sage continued, “but I’ve never seen bestiality brought into the picture before.”

Marty laughed. “I’m tempted to say that you must have led a sheltered life, but I know you haven’t. Beside, all this is new to me. Before we get onto bestiality, can you explain the connection between the other thing?”

“OK. We have primitive society and they survive by hunting wild animals and gathering fruits in season. So they are just seizing things from nature rather than moulding nature to their purpose.”

“And living in caves?”

“In some places, yes but elsewhere perhaps not. Must have depended on what was locally available. But the key point is that their control over nature is very limited, although there is a trend towards more mastery. I think some of them used fires to drive animals out for easier slaughter. Presumably there was some degree of social hierarchy – chiefs for fighting wars, for instance, or organising the hunt – but not much in the way of personal property.”

“And that would be because you can’t store hunted animals?”

“Exactly. There is very little opportunity for accumulation over time. But with the domestication of animals and the development of agriculture all that changes. A slow historical process no doubt but a radical change. And all this leads to the development of property. At first perhaps mainly collective but moving towards privatisation. Even today, or at least until fairly recently, there have been agriculture societies where the land has been owned in common but farmed by families – a bit like the Chinese system”.

“OK, I get that. And I can see how with the development of private property you get rich and poor, haves and have nots. But how does this lead women becoming property themselves?”

“In contrast to the free fucking – promiscuousness as Bowersock terms it? You’ll notice, by the way, that he only applies this term, which no doubt he regards as derogatory, only to the women, not to the men? If women had been shared amongst the men then presumably men were also shared amongst the women.”

“But some men must have had sex with more women than others”

“You’re thinking of your own conquests now Marty That irresistible sex appeal that brings them like moths to the light?”

“Sod off! You know what I mean.”

“Yes, of course you’re right. And some women would have had more men than others. But a man’s performance is limited – even yours – so unless you can store the women, by locking them up in a harem for instance then while the super stud is resting the unserved women will go off looking for other men even if they are less desirable.”

“A bit like you and me, eh Sage?” Marty grinned

“In your dreams Marty! Anyway, all this changes with private property because that in turn leads to the concept of inheritance.”

“You have private property but since you can’t take it with you, you want to leave it to your children?”

“There is an element of self-interested calculation here. If the children know they will inherit if they behave then they will honour you in your old age, and look after you.”

“As long as you don’t make King Lear’s mistake, handing over the reins too early.”

“Indeed, Marty. Or they might be tempted to bump you off to get their hands on the property as soon as possible. But generally speaking we have a functioning system of property accumulation by individuals being transformed into an inter-generational accumulation through inheritance. But for that to happen children had to become property – “this is my son, this is my daughter.”

“Ah, exclaimed Marty, “So the mothers had to become property as well!”

“Indeed. The only way you could attempt to guarantee lineage was to control and corral the mother. Perhaps physically – you shall not leave the house unless accompanied by a relative to keep an eye on you – as well as social and religious injunction.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery?”

‘Yep”

“OK, Sage, but where does bestiality fit in?”

“That’s a bit of a mystery isn’t it? Seems rather peripheral. Perhaps the authors get around to explaining that in their book, but I’m certainly not going to read it, and the reviewer, this Professor Bowersock, does not through much light on it. He has this rather prim and pointless comment:

Their emphasis on bestiality seems unwarranted, since gratification of this kind is not, and never has been, confined to farmers.

“Perhaps it’s rife at his university?”

“You never know. And Catherine the Great of Russia apparently used to pleasure herself, should I say gratify herself, with a horse, and she was no farmer.”

“These Russians!”

“She was German actually. Provide good monarchic breeding stock the Germans. That’s why the Brits bred Victoria with Albert.”

“Still don’t see the connection with bestiality”

“Well, here’s a guess. Bestiality is a consequence of domestication of animals.”

“I think you’re right there. Certainly the sow that Grant and I hunted the other day wasn’t the sort of girl you would chat up with a glass of bubbly. In fact I think one of the dogs will have to be put down. So yes, if you are going to fuck an animal then you better make sure it’s domesticated.”

“There speaks the voice of experience! But then we still have the question of why bestiality? Just because you can doesn’t mean that you will. Even in our depraved times bestiality must surely be very much a minority activity.”

“I don’t know. Looking at some of the faces at the bar – Bert for instance – has a distinctly porky look to him, and Sheila that works in the supermarket definitely looks like she has some horse in her.”

“Fortunately you haven’t looked in the mirror recently Marty. Anyway, we can envisage a situation with the development of private property, following on from the domestication of animals that bestiality becomes an issue. When we say ‘development of private property’ we really mean the unequal distribution of property. If one man can have more cattle, or more land than others, why not more wives?”

“For sex or for other reasons as well?”

“For status, and for wealth. Women can produce children who can work the land, and they can work the land themselves.”

“Not the upper classes though?”

“No, but further down the social scale. The point is that there are all sorts of incentives why the richer men would want multiple wives. King Solomon, according to the Bible, had 700 wives and 300 concubines.”

“So what about the poorer men?”

“There’s the rub. Given a roughly even distribution of sexes, in peacetime at least, then if for instance one man has four wives then this means that three men have no wives.”

“Got that. And then?”

“There are a number of possible options for sexual gratification. Masturbation, homosexuality, prostitution, and bestiality. Prostitutes cost money, so that would be a barrier for the really poor. “

“The others come free.”

“Yes. I’ve no idea how prevalent bestiality was but if the authors of the Bible were so het up about it that suggests it might have been widespread.”

“But Sage, were their objections to bestiality purely moral and religious, or were there some economic, social or political reasons as well.?”

“That’s perhaps why King Solomon had those 1000 women, so that he could infuse from them the wisdom to answer such thorny questions. Anyway, all this talk of sex has made me thirsty; time for another drink!”

“Same again?”

“Yes, thanks Marty, that Central Otago pinot noir. Don’t suppose they have much bestiality down there, not outdoors anyway; too hot in summer, too cold in winter.”

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## The GE adds

van Schaik and Michel returned to the fray in a riposte to Bowersock's review in the Letters section of the *New York Review*.<sup>3</sup> They confirmed the Sage's guess, derived it must be clear solely from cogitation rather than experience (though Marty's hunting experience supported it) that 'Bestiality is a consequence of domestication of animals' by stating:

Nomadic foragers will have had very limited opportunities for bestiality: wild animals are not usually that cooperative.

Bowersock again excoriated the authors for their lack of academic rigour:

....the big picture requires knowledge of the details from which that picture is constructed, as Fernand Braudel famously demonstrated. His example has served as a model for others ever since. But not for the two authors of the book I reviewed.

He defended his comments on bestiality by noting:

I may add that my remark on bestiality, to which they take exception, took its inspiration from pages in their book with the heading, "Fidelity in the Age of Bestiality."

And so authors, and reviewer, remained thoroughly beastly to the other.

14 April 2017

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Bowersock, G.W. "The Bible and the Perils of 'Evolution'." *New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/10/27/bible-perils-evolution/>

van Schaik, Carel, Kai Michel, and G.W. Bowersock. "Evolution & the Bible " *New York Review of Books [Letters]*, 22 December 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/12/22/evolution-and-the-bible/>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.winecentral.co.nz/collections/pinot-noir/products/wairau-hills-ariki-pinot-noir-2013>

<sup>2</sup> G.W. Bowersock, "The Bible and the Perils of 'Evolution'," *New York Review of Books*, 27 October 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/10/27/bible-perils-evolution/>

<sup>3</sup> Carel van Schaik, Kai Michel, and G.W. Bowersock, "Evolution & the Bible " *New York Review of Books [Letters]*, 22 December 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/12/22/evolution-and-the-bible/>