

Nicole Loraux' essay "What is a Goddess?" which places the feminine aspect of a Goddess in the context of her divine aspect and talks about how the divine overwhelms the feminine as a category is very interesting. Louise Zaidman's "Pandora's Daughters..." is a fine summary of the secondary and complementary but essential role which women played in the religion of the Greek cities. John Scheid's essay on "The Religious Roles of Roman Women" is also valuable.

The outstanding essay for me is "Creating a Myth of Matriarchy" by Stella Georgoudi. She argues that there is no historical support for the idea that there ever existed a Matriarchy, certainly not in the Mediterranean world, and that the myth of the Matriarchy was created by Jacob Bachofen and elaborated upon by various Marxist and Jungian philosophers, to be taken up by some modern feminists.

Hypatia of Alexandria is worth reading because of the legend which has grown around its subject.

In 415 Hypatia, a brilliant mathematician, astronomer, and Platonist philosopher, was murdered and dismembered by a Christian mob in the streets of Alexandria on the orders of Saint Cyril. Her death was the beginning of a legend that still lingers—a legend of a young and beautiful woman, a great Pagan philosopher influential in fighting against Christianity whose murder was an act against both the power of women and Paganism.

Surprisingly, this is the first serious historical biography of Hypatia. Dzielska looks at the legend first and briefly surveys the wide range of serious and fictional treatments of Hypatia which have gone into forming it; she then looks at the contemporary material, primarily letters from Hypatia's student Synesius to her, and puts her life into context.

A very interesting woman emerges—an elitist teacher with students only from the wealthy and well-connected families (including a number of Christians, at least two of whom were to become bishops),

practicing a form of Platonism which had nothing to do with the Pagan Goddesses and Gods. Hypatia was well-connected and influential in the city of Alexandria and more broadly, and allied herself with the civil authorities and a moderate faction in the Christian community against the intolerant and fanatical Cyril.

This worthy biography illuminates a corner of the chaotic period in which orthodox Christian hegemony was established in the West. And it's good to see that this legend is based somewhat on fact.

We can look forward to a great increase in the amount of material on the history of women in this era and others, as the realization of what has been left out of history continues to grow among suppressed groups. Unless we know what has happened before how can we change the world?

FEMINISM AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Susan Frank Parsons. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

by Eva C. Karpinski

The theologian Susan Frank Parsons explores in her book the relationship of feminism, both secular and Christian, to Christian ethics, making us aware of the diversity of positions within these two traditions. Yet she rejects as too facile the assumption of their apparent incompatibility, of the conflict between the secular *versus* religious outlook, and especially of the patriarchal bias of Christianity. Instead, she sets out to examine common concerns shared by feminists and Christian ethicists, to demonstrate mutual benefits of the possible collaboration and dialogue between both groups which have been similarly engaged in the critique and challenge of the traditional moral project.

The book is logically organized around three general paradigms of moral thought, from which the author derives three common themes suggesting the areas in which feminism and Christian ethics can work together. Since most of her points are worked out in triads, her argument may occasionally seem to suffer from excessive structuring (one wonders if the author's obsessive reliance on triads has anything to do with her theological background). The three paradigms elaborated in the first part of the book are identified as liberalism, social constructionism, and naturalism. They correspond roughly to the tensions among individualism, structuralism, and biology that, according to Parsons, characterize moral reasoning within both feminism and Christian ethics. The discussion of each of these paradigms is followed by an extensive critique of its central tenets.

The liberal paradigm, illustrated by the work of such feminists as Simone de Beauvoir or Janet Radcliffe Richards, is based on Enlightenment assumptions including rationalism, moralism, and individualism. Among feminist theologians who have made use of this paradigm, Parsons concentrates on the early writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty Russell. The strength of these theological appropriations of the liberal paradigm consists in the possibility of cultural critique, a belief in a common humanity as the basis for a moral code to live by, and the recognition of individual autonomy.

By contrast, the social constructionist paradigm, which Parsons derives from the work of Harriet Martineau, focuses on oppressive institutions that shape women's lives. This approach assumes that the social precedes the individual and determines moral knowledge, behaviour, and decisions. The critique of patriarchy and dedication to social change that characterize this paradigm can be seen in Juliet Mitchell's early work, as well as in the work of Rosalind Coward and bell hooks, or such feminist theologians as Dorothee Sölle,

who reflects on the practice and conditions of life of the excluded.

Finally, the naturalist paradigm expresses a belief that moral behaviour has its "natural basis" linked with embodiment. Parsons traces some elements of this paradigm in the writings of Margaret Fuller, Emma Goldman, and Virginia Woolf. Making general statements about "woman's nature," this paradigm is steeped in controversy. It can be turned against women's interests, as for example in Aristotle, or it can be used to women's advantage, as in Mary Daly's celebration of distinctly "female" morality. Parsons presents the views of two theologians working from within the naturalist perspective, Lisa Sowle Cahill and Carter Heyward.

An interesting feature of Parsons' book is her use of literary narratives at the beginning of each chapter devoted to a critique of particular paradigms. Thus Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" allows Parsons to problematize the issue of difference as a major weakness of liberalism. The imagery of *The Wizard of Oz* is used to criticize social constructionism's anti-humanist replacement of the human subject by discourse. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* shows the dangers of naturalism in the fundamentalist context.

Throughout her discussion of these paradigms, Parsons evaluates their approach to three basic feminist concerns: the quest for an appropriate universalism; the search for a non-patriarchal redemptive community; and the hope for a new humanism. All three are discussed separately in the second part of the book as three possible directions for the feminist project informed by Christian ethics.

If the glossolalia of discourses can be seen as one of the problems of living in a pluralistic world, Parson's book insists on the necessity of looking for common grounds of understanding and the need for translation and communication. As she says, "conversation between moral frameworks is essential." The dialogic model she adopts for presenting the con-

flicting claims of different ethical paradigms makes her book exemplary of the process of forging alliances by means of constructive criticism.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR: THE MAKING OF AN INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

Toril Moi. Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

by Deborah Heller

In a famous passage in *A Room of One's Own*, after narrating how she was barred from the library at "Oxbridge," Virginia Woolf ruminates on "how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and . . . how it is worse perhaps to be locked in." While Woolf's anger at her exclusion from the bastions of cultural authority contributed to her reflections, in stressing the dangers of being locked in she was surely on to something real. The outsider's position, which she was not at liberty to choose, nonetheless became one she would cherish.

Unlike Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir never thought to question the desirability of full inclusion in dominant cultural institutions. Born in 1908, twenty-six years after Woolf, Beauvoir was able to benefit from educational opportunities that would have been all but unthinkable for a woman just a few years earlier. The prestigious *agrégation* examination in Philosophy, for example, which Beauvoir passed in 1929, placing second only to Sartre, had been open to women only since 1924. In her excellent new study, Toril Moi reminds us that Beauvoir "belonged to the first generation of European women to be educated on a par with men," and that, as a result, "these women believed that they were being treated as equals in an egalitarian system." Such a belief was not, however, justified by their actual situation. At the time

Beauvoir began to study Philosophy at the Sorbonne, as a woman she would still have been barred from admission to the more prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*, where Sartre was a student. Beauvoir's real position in the educational and intellectual establishment remained marginal *solely* because of her gender, Moi emphasizes, but her success in crossing many previous barriers to women's higher education prevented her from recognizing this.

According to Beauvoir's own startling account, it was only when, at the age of almost forty, she began to think about writing her memoirs that she first reflected on what her femaleness had meant to her. The result was that she postponed the memoirs "in order to give all my attention to finding out about the condition of woman in its broadest terms. I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale to do some reading, and what I studied were the myths of femininity." Three years later she published *The Second Sex* (1949).

Beauvoir reading myths of femininity in the Bibliothèque Nationale may recall Woolf reading similar pseudo-science in the British Museum some thirty years earlier. "If truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum," Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), "where, I asked myself, picking up a notebook and a pencil, is truth?" Rather than engage the arguments of male authorities, Woolf dismisses them with ridicule. Though packaged as an academic lecture, *A Room of One's Own*, is more properly viewed as a subversive anti-lecture—chatty, personal, digressive, anecdotal. (She adopted a similarly subversive format some ten years later, in her more bitter feminist polemic *Three Guineas*, packaged as a personal letter.) Beauvoir, confronting many of the same stereotypes and prejudices as Woolf, undertakes instead to beat the professors at their own game. Drawing on literature, history, case studies, and her own (never explicitly acknowledged) experience, *The Second Sex* presents a vast compendium